Follow My Lead

by klancekorner

Summary

Becoming “hook-up buddies” with Lance Sanchez was just supposed to be a small, insignificant fraction of Keith’s life. But of course, things don’t work out that way at all.

aka a Friends w/ Benefits AU that nobody asked for where Lance wears sleeveless hoodies, plays basketball in abandoned parking lots, and follows his dreams, and Keith comes from a high class, reputable family who never let him have any dreams of his own. They go home with each other and don't expect it to matter until it totally does.

Keith POV and Lance POV

Notes

This is the most typical storyline ever, but I’ve been dying to write pretty much anything that involves Lance in a sleeveless hoody for so long and I also promised my roommate I would so, here goes...something. This whole fic is probably going to have, like, a decent amount of smut considering it’s a friends with benefits fic, so i’m sorry if you’re not into that! I’m just trying to broaden my horizons a little because all of my others fics were of fluff majority lol, trying something new this time around. Might be a disaster. Who knows
Ps I think that, since Keith is a professional in this fic, he is mullett-less. Reference this piece of artwork for what his hair looks like. The artist, on tumblr, is @emuyh-art!

http://emuyh-art.tumblr.com/post/157546182402/finally-a-backstory-to-why-i-gave-them-different

Thanks for reading <3
Keith has no idea what the fuck he’s doing.

He’s been walking for what feels like hours, and he has no idea where he is. The large mansions with fountains and columns that he associates with “home” are no longer visible, and Keith can tell that this isn’t a part of town he is used to at all. Small wooden houses line the narrow, cracked road. They are decorated with peeling paint and splintered chip board. Keith takes a deep breath and smells freshly cut grass, muddy puddles, drying cement; smells that seem so genuine and real compared to the artificial, blue lake water in a manmade ditch behind his house.

He can’t be that far from home. In reality, he’s only been walking for about two hours. However, the differences in his surroundings are astounding. How had he lived his whole life, a walking distance from this part of town, and never once seen it before? What is this place called, anyway?

Keith shakes his head. Doesn’t matter. All that matters is that he got out of that stupid mansion. At least for a bit. He had gotten into a huge argument with his parents about the same things they always fight about, and after four more arguments this week, Keith just needed to get the fuck away from them. It may seem quite juvenile, especially for a 22 year old, to run away from his parents house after they get into an argument, but it’s really the only act of rebellion that he can picture himself doing, and desperate times call for desperate measures.

Keith kicks a rock and the skidding noise echoes down the narrow street. A small part of him knows that this probably isn’t the safest time to be in an unknown part of town. It is about 2AM and most of the lights are off. People are sleeping, obviously, Keith thinks to himself, aggravated by how long it took him to make that connection.

He can practically hear his mother’s voice in his head saying, “Oh there you go again, running off and being so melodramatic. When are you going to realize that we just want what’s best for you?”

Keith kicks another rock. More echos. He sighs, stuffing his hands into his pocket. He silently wishes that he brought a flask, or a bottle of wine. Just to ease his nerves. Or get him wasted. Or anything other than what he is feeling right now, really.

It’s not entirely his parents fault. He knows that they care about him. It’s just sometimes really hard, especially after being passed around from foster home to foster home, to process any kind of paternal love. Especially when that paternal love is from adoptive parents who treat you like rapunzel and never let you leave the house.

Okay, maybe not that dramatic. But that’s how it sometimes feels.

Keith was adopted by the Haltan’s when he was eight. The Haltan’s had more money than Keith had ever known to exist in his entire life, and they treated him like a king. To say he grew up spoiled would be an understatement. He got things he didn’t even have to ask for. He was fed by a personal chef and never had to clean his room. He had a king bed at twelve years old and then an additional queen bed for sleepovers.

Coming from nothing made Keith starstruck, amazed and overwhelmed by his new life.

Coming from nothing also made him endlessly grateful, undeserving, and humble.

Everyone in his area went to the same lower school, middle school, high school, and college in their town. No other options and no exceptions. Many still live with their parents after graduation
because their future is here, in their parent’s businesses. Keith never fit in with the other rich kids. They always competed. They tried to one-up each other in third grade, bragging about their many boats and extra houses. Keith just wanted to play with legos, really. A luxury that he never had in foster care. And when they would turn their malicious eyes towards him and ask how many boats his parents have, he would just shrug and say “I don’t know”, which ended up costing him a lot of friends.

College was more of the same, but in college he ended up meeting Takashi Shirogane, who had always been rich but never sacrificed his character for it. He was kind, humble, intelligent, and curious about the world. He instilled a hope in Keith that maybe there are other people out there. People other than his foster care families. People other than his rich frenemies. Maybe there are people out there just for him.

Of course meeting Shiro and having a crush on him for two years also made him realize that he is, without a doubt, extremely gay. And that, of course, is not acceptable in his family and line of business. So naturally, he’s still in the closet. Only Shiro knows, and that’s the way it has been for years.

Keith pulls his jacket tighter around himself, crossing his arms and suppressing a shiver. He wishes that he changed into sweatpants before he left, because his work slacks are thin and futile against the cold night breeze. He hates these slacks. He hates his work. He hates that he didn’t change his shoes either. Because his glossy, Ferragamo loafers are giving him blisters and they were so expensive so how could they possibly be doing that?

Keith’s family owns a law firm. They aren’t lawyers, they literally own the law firm. It is a firm that has been in the family for five generations, passing down the President position to the next viable family member. In a few years, that family member will be Keith.

Keith doesn’t want to be president.

It is a fight they have all the time. It started in college, when Keith wanted to study engineering because he wants to design and build cars someday, but his dad simply would not allow it. After countless hours of fighting, threatening to leave, threatening to pull Keith out of school and not let him get an education, Keith finally agrees to study business management.

For the next four years, Keith lived with his parents and attended college classes. He hated every minute of them. He hated what he was learning. He brings it up to his parents countless times but they always say the same thing. “You know your place, this is what you are meant to do, whether you like it or not. It is what’s best for the business. I don’t want to have this conversation again.”

And now, as an administrative assistant to his father, Keith wants to blow his fucking brains out. He tells himself to leave every night. To buy a plane ticket and open a car garage on the other side of the country. Sometimes he even goes as far as packing and walking to his car.

But then he remembers where he came from.

Everything that he has had the privilege of becoming has been because of his parents.

The guilt eats him alive, every time, and he returns to his room.

He just wants to break one rule. One rule, just to get it out of his system. Something just has to give.
He walks for another twenty minutes and then pauses, hearing muffled music from somewhere in the distance. Intrigued, he walks a little faster, hearing the music getting closer and louder with each step. The narrow street opens up to a small plaza, which contains a very run-down parking lot surrounded by a gas station, a supermarket, a barber shop, and finally, a bar. Keith feels giddy with the thought of downing five shots of vodka, the desire already burning in his throat. Is that a sign of alcohol abuse? Probably.

He feels around in his pocket and takes out his wallet. He has four, one hundred dollar bills, which is nothing compared to what his parents carry. He shrugs. It’s enough to get wasted, so whatever.

He pauses about two feet outside of the bar, suddenly aware that this place looks strangely similar to bars in horror movies where the main character is usually abducted. He mulls over the idea of just going back home, getting some sleep and going to work tomorrow *not* hungover, but the idea sounds pretty unappealing. Almost as unappealing as getting abducted. So he takes a deep breath and walks in.

The bar is small. Smaller than his bedroom (which doesn’t say much because his bedroom is actually the size of an apartment), much smaller than the bars he goes to with his work friends, which are on rooftops and lined with glowing neon. There is no glowing neon in this bar. It is stripped down to its necessities; the bar itself, covered with empty sticky cups and spilled beer, and a few circle tables scattered around. There is a TV hanging from the ceiling that had to be from 1989, judging by its dull, cubelike form. Music is blasting loudly but the boisterous chatter coming from all of the people is even louder, and the lights are dimmed to a point that they might as well be off completely.

Keith wrinkles his nose at the sweaty, musky smell floating around in the humid air. He shakes it off and makes his way to the bar, sitting on a rickety bar stool and waiting for the bartender to see him.

When the bartender does see him, she is scowling at him. Keith doesn’t blame her, he probably looks like a stuffy asshole with his white button-up and tidy, gelled-back hair. She looks him up and down, chewing her gum obnoxiously before spitting, “What’re you drinkin’?”

“Two shots of vodka.” Keith orders, scratching some grime off the bar surface. “Actually, three.”

She nods, rolling her eyes slightly and turning around to pour the shots.

Keith folds his hands out in front of him, not entirely sure what to do with them. He glances around the bar curiously, trying to find anything that is familiar to him, but nothing is. Most of the people in this bar are middle aged men, laughing and shouting over each other as they try to tell, what Keith assumes, are crazy stories. The TV is playing a replay of the basketball match that happened earlier in the week. Keith only knows this because it is required for small talk when he greets his co-workers every morning.

The shots are suddenly in front of him and he downs them quickly, feeling the soothing burn swirling around in his stomach. He orders two more. Tequila, this time.

“*Damn,* I haven’t seen *you* around before.” An unfamiliar voice rumbles very close to Keith’s ear and he jumps a little, turning towards it. There is a boy around his age standing very close to him with a can of beer in his hand. Keith has to strain his neck to look up at his face because this boy is
tall, and he doesn’t even need ferragamo shoes to be. He has long, wiry limbs, dark skin, and from what Keith can see in the dim light, very blue eyes. Short brown hair sits atop his head, some strands stuck to his face with sweat.

Not bad, Keith thinks, allowing himself to indulge just a little as his eyes scan the boy up and down.

Unaware of Keith’s very thorough assessment, the boy speaks again. “What’s your name, guapo?” His voice is low and flirtatious.

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Who’s asking?”

A smirk appears on the boy’s face. Keith decides that it is, in fact, a very hot smirk. “Just an interested party.” The boy purrs, sitting in the bar stool next to Keith’s. “You’re not from here, are you?”

The shots are put in front of Keith and he takes one of them, feeling the effects of the alcohol buzzing in his brain. “No.” He rasps, throat burning. “What gave it away?”

Mystery boy laughs. It is a genuine grin that shows off his white teeth and small dimples in his cheeks. “I don’t know, it might’ve been the shoes that are shinier than my car, but who knows for sure.” He replies.

Keith smiles at that, impressed by this boy’s ability to be so forward. “So, an interested party, huh?” he asks, smirking and taking the other shot.

“Very interested.” Mystery boy replies slowly, tracking the movement.

Keith feels an unfamiliar fluttering in his stomach, but keeps his confident facade. “Oh yeah?” Tequila is pumping through his veins. “Is that so?”

Mystery boy stands up and takes a step closer to Keith, looking down at him with his head cocked to the side. His short brown hair is falling forward onto his forehead. Jesus, the longer Keith looks at him the hotter he gets.

One rule...just break one rule…

He is so far from home...nobody has to know...and it’s been so long since he’s hooked up with anyone. He deserve this, okay? No matter how irresponsible it is.

At least that’s what he tells himself when the next words tumble out of his mouth.

“You going to do anything about it?” He finally asks, voice low, watching as the boy’s eyes darken slightly.

“Hmmm…” Mystery boy hums, stepping even closer. Keith can smell deodorant and the smallest hint of sweat. “Thinkin’ about it...” The boy raises his hand to the back of Keith’s neck, cupping it gently. Keith takes a breath. His hands are so soft...

It’s like all of his surroundings fade away at that moment. The loud noises that once filled the bar are now muffled, faces blurred. It’s probably the four shots he took, but the only thing Keith can see clearly is this boy’s face-- his thin lips and high cheekbones and dark eyelashes.

The hand drops from the back of his neck. “Lets order another, round, shall we?” The boy asks. Keith can hear the underlying question and excitement bubbles in the pit of his stomach.
“Hmm. I don’t drink with strangers.” He teases. Mystery boy points to himself.

“Lance.” He says. “And you are?”

Keith bites back a smile. “Keith.”

“See? No longer strangers. Hey Nyma, let’s have a four more shots over here!” Lance says, banging the counter lightly. To that, the nasty bartender actually smiles.

“Anything for you, Lance.” She says.

* * *

Keith is wasted when he stumbles down the narrow street with Lance. He is wasted when they fall into a dark room, hands groping and touching each other hungrily. He isn’t any less wasted when they are attached at the lips in a sloppy, wet kiss that feels so, so good. When they somehow end up on a bed, the ceiling moves as Lance grinds into him and the walls spin as he feels Lance unzipping his $350 work slacks and shoving them off of his legs. He remembers hands, a mouth, a tongue, burning their way across his skin and leaving him gasping for air in the pitch black room. He remembers gripping soft bed sheets, moaning, desperate and loud. He remembers the feeling of cum, hot on his stomach, and a cold, wet towel wiping it away.

It all comes in flashes the next morning, as he wakes up to an empty bed, in an unknown house, with a throbbing headache and a dry mouth.

He shoots out of bed and glances at his phone, horrified to see that he is not one, not two, but three hours late to work. He is in his black briefs and nothing else, and there is still evidence that last night happened, in the form of dried cum covering a portion of them. He sighs frustratedly and runs his hand through his hair, glancing around frantically to try and figure out where he is.

The room he is in is painted a dark blue, with a few picture frames hanging on the wall across from him, and a wooden desk covered in medals and trophies. Keith is a little too frazzled to try and analyze who exactly Lance is and why the fuck he isn’t here, so he opts for pulling on his disgustingly uncomfortable work slacks, buttoning up his (now wrinkled) shirt that he found hanging from the ceiling fan, and slipping on his glossy black shoes.

He stops hesitantly at the closed door, not knowing what is going to be on the other side, and then something catches his eye. A small post-it note stuck to the doorknob.

In sloppy writing, it says:

*Hey man, nobody should be home when you wake up (except for my cat). Probably shouldn’t have left a stranger in my house but I figured you're way too rich to want to steal any of my shit anyway. Also, I had to go to work *

*Thanks for the fun night ;) *

3398776544 xx
Keith just stares at it. Is that a phone number? Did he just get a phone number? Is he seriously alone in a stranger's house right now? Oh my god his father is going to slaughter him.

He slowly walks out the door and down a short, creaky staircase. In a moment of morbid curiosity, he takes in his surroundings. This house, in it’s entirety, is probably as big as his kitchen.

But…it’s strangely nice.

Shaking himself out of his thoughts, he carelessly tosses the post-it note into his bag and walks out of the front door.

Probably better if he leaves all of this behind him.

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Keith takes an Uber home and after a four hour long lecture from his father about professionalism and how disappointed he is in Keith’s behavior, he trudges to his room where he can finally nurse his hangover and get some sleep. On his phone is a text from Shiro.

Shiro

*Your dad called me frantic this morning. Are you alive?*

Keith, for some reason, smiles at the message.

Keith

*Unfortunately*

Shiro

*Where’d you go?*

Keith

*Just...out*

Shiro
Uh oh. Ur not telling me, that means it was bad

Keith

Just a bar! Jeeesus

Shiro

Haha im kidding im kidding. So... still gone in the morning huh? Interesting...

Keith

I don't want to talk about it

Shiro

Fineee

Keith throws his phone across his bed and shuts his eyes. It only takes him a minute to fall asleep.

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Though Keith is far too old for his parents to ground him, it is becoming increasingly obvious that their intention is to do so. Over the next two weeks, they watch him like a hawk, always hovering and asking snappy questions if they see him leaving the house. Keith understands why they don’t trust him. If he behaves badly then it reflects badly on them, as well as the firm. But the frustration that comes with being watched all the time is much more overpowering than his sympathy, and it just makes him endlessly angry.

Work is more of a drag than usual. He doesn’t even understand how his co-workers have friends and lives outside of the firm, because they are so boring and can’t hold a conversation for shit. Keith tries to like them, he really does, but all they talk about is what color they are painting their bathroom and how Jeremy’s kid has a cold and maybe Keith is just too immature to talk about “adult things” but he kind of just wants to get hit by a truck.

Sometimes when he isn’t careful, his mind drifts aimlessly until he is picturing Lance's face again, blurry under the dim bar lights. He really was pretty. Probably one of the prettiest boys Keith will ever have the privilege of touching, and he barely even remembers it.

Keith has only really hooked up with four boys in his life, all of them were completely secret and happened only when Keith’s parents were out of town. One of them was a boy in his high school, and that was when he was still in denial about his sexuality, so they didn’t go that far. The other three happened in the same week—a very rough week for Keith because he told Shiro how he felt
and Shiro kindly rejected him. In an attempt to distract himself from his heartbreak he went out almost every night that weekend and took three guys home. To this day, Keith barely remembers what they look like.

But he remembers Lance well. Almost annoyingly well.

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It’s around 8PM when Keith calls Shiro and asks if he wants to get drinks and hang out. After answering about a thousand questions from his mother, he is finally able to go. He finds Shiro sitting at a small table in the back of the restaurant, waving happily at him to come over.

A rush of relief fills Keith at the sight of him. Maybe Keith never got to be with Shiro, but being his best friend is something that has always given him comfort, even in the absolute worst of times. He welcomes the comfortable feeling spreading through his chest as he sits down. Since college ended, Shiro has taken over his family business and the schedule hasn’t allowed for Keith to see him much anymore.

“I ordered you a rum and coke, that okay?”

“Of course, sorry I’m late.” Keith says, rolling his eyes. “I swear my mother treats me like I’m fourteen.”

“Yeah, you are probably going to have to work to earn her trust again.” Shiro says wisely, immediately slipping into Older Brother Mode ™

“What I did wasn’t even that bad!” Keith argues.

“Maybe not to normal people, but you know your parents, Keith. You left after a fight, stayed out all night, and then missed half a day of work with absolutely no warning…” Shiro raises an eyebrow at him.

Keith huffs out a frustrated sigh but it comes out as an embarrassed laugh. “Yeah, you have a point. But they shouldn’t feel the need to control everything I do either.”

Shiro holds his hands up in surrender. “I know, I know, not saying I agree. Just stating the facts.”

The waitress comes by and takes their orders. When she leaves, Shiro smirks knowingly at Keith. “So, who was the guy?”

Keith clears his throat a little awkwardly. “What guy.”

“The guy, Keith. The guy who made you miss work. The guy who kept you up all night. You know what guy.”

Keith shakes his head. “It was just a random hookup, I don’t remember anything about him.” He lies, stabbing at his salad a little too aggressively.

“Oh really?” Shiro asks, clearly unconvinced. “Nothing at all?”

“Nope.”

“Not even a hair color? A Name, maybe?”
“Just a faceless, nameless hookup.”

“Interesting.” Shiro sounds skeptical. An awkward silence fills the air and Keith knows that Shiro isn’t going to break the tension until Keith gives in.

“Lance.” Keith sighs. “His name was Lance. That’s all I know so don’t ask me anything else.”


Keith immediately changes the subject, feeling uncomfortable for a reason he can’t place. “How is work?”

Shiro shrugs. “I mean, you now. Same old.”

Keith nods. “Yeah, I know.”

Shiro ends up talking about how one of his coworkers actually made him fall asleep yesterday, and Keith wonders, in the back of his mind, if there is ever going to be more to life than this.
Two

Chapter Summary

lots of smut but i promise there is a plot too i promisseeeee

Chapter Notes

I went way overboard and wrote like four times more than I was planning to for this chapter. oops. beware of smut. thank you for reading!

At 10:30PM about a week later, he is alone in his office. It is a Monday night and the week is already not looking too promising.

Keith has one co-worker who usually stays later than he does. His name is Grant. But tonight, even Grant got his work done at a reasonable hour, and Keith is all alone.

There is something especially depressing about being in an office building late at night. All of the lights are off except yours. The halls are empty. You can hear the AC clicking on and off and the clock in the hallway ticking softly as the seconds go by. Keith, because of his status by blood, get’s the nicest office on the floor. Floor to ceiling windows, dark wood, stainless steel; he’s got it all. It really is a breathtaking piece of architecture, and the interior design is rather stunning, but Keith is finding it hard to give a shit because in front of him is a two foot tall stack of papers that he needs to sort through and revise by 7AM tomorrow morning.

It’s only Monday.

How the fuck is it only Monday?

He sighs and leans forward onto his desk, running his hands over his face. If he doesn’t get these papers sorted, his father will probably kill him. But his head is throbbing and he already feels exhausted from the long day. It was one of those days where nothing good happens, but nothing bad happens either. Just long, mind-numbing, and easily forgotten.

His head throbs harder as he spins around a few times in his chair, watching the dark colors of his office bur past him in dizzying circles. Once he is sufficiently dizzy, he quickly grabs a pen and tries to balance it on his nose. As expected, it falls. He laughs a little to himself.


He reaches into his bag, finally giving in and deciding to take an ibuprofen, and his fingers brush over a small piece of paper.

He pauses, letting the touch linger for a moment.

Is that…? He still has Lance’s number in here…? How has he not thrown it away yet...
Cautiously, he pulls out the slip of paper. Low and behold, there it is, in it’s sloppy, smeared, ballpoint pen-written glory. Keith stares at it for so long that the numbers start swimming across the paper, tangling and colliding with each other. He blinks. Jesus, he needs to sleep.

Or maybe...I mean, he wouldn’t mind getting off either, if sleep wasn’t available and that was the only other option...

Without letting his paranoia get the best of him, he opens his text messages and sends the word “hey” to the stranger's number, heart beating wildly in his chest.

He waits.

And waits and wats and waits.

Finally, five minutes of utter humiliation later, his phone buzzes. He jumps a little and looks down at it, eyes wide.

3398776544

Who is this?

Keith laughs nervously, realizing that Lance doesn’t have his number. How could he?

Keith

This is Keith...from the bar

The next reply comes much quicker.

3398776544

oh hey! seriously didn't think id ever hear from you again

Keith

why not?

3398776544

U mean besides the fact that you are completely out of my league?
Keith grins, a blush creeping up his neck. Another text follows soon after.

*I kinda left you alone and deathly hungover in my house on a wednesday morning. Didn’t think i left a good impression, u kno how it is*

Keith

Oh… I mean, it’s whatever.

Keith sends it and then reads over their conversation again. He’s never done this before. What does he say? Hey, come over here and suck my dick?

*Are u busy rn*

He settles on that instead, nerves twisting in his stomach.

3398776544

*Is this a booty call????*

Keith reads the message about twelve times, not knowing how to respond. Then he gets another one.

*Cuz if it is im so down*

He sighs with relief.

Keith

*I mean its more like a booty text...cuz like...i didnt literally call...*

3398776544

*wow that was the worst. send me ur address ill be right over*

Keith makes it a point not to save Lance’s number. This is a one time thing. He doesn’t even know the guy. Just needs a distraction.
He also makes it a point to send the address of his office building so fast that he almost accidentally forwards it to everyone in his contacts.

**Keith**

*Text when u r outside and ill buzz you in*

**3398776544**

*So fancy, mmk*

A little shocked by what he just did, Keith lets the reality of it sink in a little. Was that his first booty call ever? It totally was. Is this what being an accomplished businessman feels like?

He sifts through some of the papers, throwing out the ones that needed to be thrown out, throwing out the ones that probably shouldn't be thrown out, silently hoping that he gets fired (although he would never tell anyone that).

Lance texts about twenty minutes later saying that he is in the parking lot. Keith buzzes him in, spends thirty seconds pacing back and forth in his office nervously, and then finally settles for sitting in his desk chair and turning away from the door so he would be less anxious.

“You rang?” A vaguely familiar voice says from behind him, and Keith spins around in his chair to face the entrance of his office. “One night just wasn’t enough, was it?” Lance is leaning against the doorframe with a smirk on his face. He looks even better than Keith remembers, now that there is proper lighting overhead and, you know, he isn’t trashed.

Keith frowns a little, trying to keep some of his dignity in check. “Don’t flatter yourself. Just wanted to blow off some steam.” He gets an unconvinced snort in reply, coupled with a smug expression that makes heat flare in his cheeks.

Lance’s thin legs are covered by a pair of jeans that look a little worse for wear, littered with small rips and fading spots, but they somehow work for him. He is wearing a black, sleeveless hoodie that definitely used to just be a hoodie before someone ripped the sleeves off. His arms are crossed over his chest, making the smooth, wiry muscles along his shoulders and forearms pop rather attractively. His skin is still the same delicious golden brown, and on his head is a backwards snapback that has his hair sticking out at odd angles where it can poke out.

Keith takes a small, short breath.

“How are you even hot under fluorescent lights? That’s just not fair.” Lance drawls, walking into the office with a confident stride that Keith has never, in all his years of business management and corporate meetings, been able to master. He gets up off his desk to meet Lance halfway, nerves buzzing and arousal already burning with anticipation in the pit of his stomach.

“It’s the fancy office, I think.” He rolls his sleeves up. Lance tracks the movement with his eyes. “It makes everyone look more attractive than they actually are.” Keith scans Lance’s body with his eyes. Up...then down...then up again... “A few ugly people have actually proven it.”
A smile stretches across Lance’s face, slow and intriguing. “Doubtful.” He inches closer.

“No really.” Keith says, eyes darting down to Lance’s lips and back up to his eyes. When did he get so close? “I could be one of them, you’d never know. It’s the stainless steel, I(445,347),(506,390)’m telling you--” Lance closes the space between their mouths with a hungry kiss that Keith didn’t even realize he needed until it was happening. Lance’s lips are a little chapped, but so satisfying for some reason, and Keith can’t comprehend what he wants to do next before Lance is leading him across the office and pushing him up against the back wall, hands already working to untuck Keith’s shirt and unbutton his collar.

Keith’s hands are moving like the have a mind of their own, dragging up Lance’s toned back, then down to his ass, squeezing aggressively and pushing his their hips together. It has been so long since he’s wanted somebody this badly, and Lance is right there, right in front of him, an open expanse of skin and muscle just waiting to be touched. Plus, his ass somehow fits perfectly in Keith’s hands, which is oddly a turn-on that Keith wasn’t expecting.

Lances tongue darts out and swipes eagerly across Keith’s lips, asking for permission. Keith parts his lips and let out a small whimper when Lance licks into his mouth, hot and wet. Their tongues brush together for a while and Keith forgets to breathe, feeling lightheaded but not wanting to let go of the drag of Lance’s tongue against his. Lance, probably feeling the same dizziness, breaks the kiss for a second to breathe and moves down to Keith’s neck, nibbling at his ear and then sucking hard on the sensitive skin there. Keith can feel teeth grazing his skin and a quiet moan falls from his lips, surprising him. “Kissing you…” He starts, breath hitching when Lance bites down particularly hard. “Kissing you...is a lot better...sober.”

Lance pauses and Keith can feel him smiling against his neck. A soft, low laugh vibrates across his skin, then the lips are back on his neck again, hungry and rough.

Keith is feeling a little overwhelmed, both physically and mentally. It is mainly because in this moment he realizes that all of the times he has ever hooked up with someone in the past, he has been inebriated in some way shape or form. It is also because in this moment Lance is taking off his own shirt, and then Keith's, sliding his hands across Keith’s bare stomach and forcing the shirt off of his shoulders. Their bodies press back together and Lance makes a small, satisfied sound at the skin-on-skin contact. Keith is still trying to catch up, to catch his breath, as Lance rolls his hips forwards so that they press together. Keith gasps into Lance’s mouth, a little too loudly, surprised by the sensation. Lance is hard and Keith can feel him through his jeans. It sends his brain spiraling and suddenly he can’t think straight anymore. He grabs blindly at the button on Lance’s jeans, but Lance is already one step ahead of him, pulling his jeans off and kicking them away from his feet before diving back in, grabbing Keith’s lips with his again. Keith is suddenly overwhelmed with the urge to touch everything because Lance isn’t wearing anything but small, tight blue briefs and Keith’s hands want to explore every possible--

“No, let me--” Keith reaches forward, palming Lance through his briefs. “Let me get you first.” Lance gasps sharply at the contact. “Mmmk.” He hums, sounding a little surprised. Keith watches his eyes flutter shut, lashes brushing the tops of his cheekbones. He stares, quite openly, before remembering what he is doing. He scoops Lance up by his ass, taking a moment to appreciate the perfect fit once more, and moves forward to his desk, pushing off the papers in a hurried mess and setting Lance down on it. He moves to stand between Lance’s open legs and reaches into his briefs, laughing. “I’ve always wanted to do that.” He says in a low voice, admiring how hot Lance’s dick looks in his hand and he slowly strokes upwards.
Lance is breathing shakily, eyes shut, face flushed. “Mmff..” he makes a small noise and Keith drinks it up. “Do what…?”

“You know...push all the papers off of the desk like that.” Keith mumbles, refusing to break concentration.

“Oh my god are you ser--a-ahh fuck...” Keith quickens his pace and swipes his thumb over the tip, just how he likes to do it to himself, and Lance’s statement dissolves into a delicious moan that Keith suddenly remembers from the first time they hooked up. It sounds oddly familiar.

“Yeah I’m serious. Don’t tell me it’s not a fantasy of yours…” Keith continues, never slowing his pace. “Dark office...late at night...your boss comes in and bends you over the desk--”

“Fuck, Keith...”

Keith experimentally flicks his wrist in a different direction, swiping the wetness from the head of Lance’s cock and using it to move his hand faster. He revels in the noises falling from Lance’s lips, the curling of his toes, the tension in his shoulders. He’s never actually seen anyone this affected by his touch, and the sight of Lance slowly curling in on himself is making a burning heat shoot through his entire body. Lance squeezes his eyes shut and whispers for Keith to go faster.

“Mmmmf--uck..shit ohmygod..” Lance’s head falls onto Keith shoulder, face digging into his neck, back arching towards him. Keith hums with appreciation at Lances twitching hips, holding them down with one hand and pumping with the other. “Jesus, you are so fucking hot.” Keith mumbles. Lance is panting into his neck, hot breath puffing against his skin and sending shivers down his spine. Suddenly Lance’s hips jerk, the movement surprising Keith.

“M’gonna come, shit- -”

The warning is a little too late, because Lance comes all over Keith’s hand as he’s saying it, face falling slack in the hottest way Keith has ever seen on any human being, ever. “Fuck--” Lance whispers, chest rising and falling with labored breaths as he comes down from his high.

It’s all a little strange, because Keith totally called Lance so that he could get off. Lance is the only one who has gotten off now, and Keith is still hard in his pants, but he feels oddly content. Maybe it’s because that was probably in the top five hottest experiences of his life, watching Lance’s pretty face as he came. Maybe it’s because he got so distracted he forgot he was hard in the first place.

Either way, Lance doesn’t know what he is thinking about, because he tucks himself back into his briefs and the falls to his knees, already working on Keith’s zipper.

“Lance, you actually don’t have to--”

“God I want to.” Lance says, pulling Keith’s pants down and pressing his lips to the sensitive skin between Keith’s legs. “I really want to.”

“O-Oh, okay.”

I mean, Keith isn’t going to complain.

The moment Keith feels Lance’s mouth on him, he knows he isn’t going to last. In fact, he knows he is only going to last an embarrassingly short amount of time. The heat and the wetness and Lance’s tongue just knows exactly what to do and Keith tries to keep it together, he really does, but Lance definitely knows what he is doing. Every drag of his tongue has Keith’s knees buckling. Is
he moaning? He doesn’t even know. He feels like he’s watching it all happen from somewhere else. It’s too good. It’s all too good. Keith is white knuckling the edge of his desk and shaking with the sheer pleasure of it, moaning Lance’s name when he comes way too quickly. Lance swallows it all. Keith nearly has a heart attack.

Slowly, shakily, Lance stands up, wiping his mouth with his thumb and then sucking off the last of it. Keith is too blissed out to understand what is happening so Lance gently tucks him back into his briefs and chuckles breathlessly. “Fuck.” Is all he says.

Keith slowly releases his death grip on the edge of his desk and lets his eyes flutter open. Lance is staring back at him; pupils blown out, cheeks flushed red, and swollen lips. Keith is overwhelmed by how attractive it is and can’t really think of anything to say. “Your ass is the perfect size for my hands.” He ends up saying stupidly.

Lance bursts out laughing, the noise sending shivers down Keith’s spine. “Good to know.”

“That was really hot.” He states it like a fact, shaking his head like he’s still trying to process it. “I’m glad I called. Or texted, rather.”

“Yeah, it was. We should do it again sometime.”

Keith studies Lance’s face. He really, really shouldn’t make this a regular thing. “Maybe.”

Lance smirks. “You’re a tease.” He says slyly. “But maybe sounds good enough to me.”

They stare at each other for a few awkward moments. Keith doesn’t really know how to say goodbye to a booty call. Do they hug? Does he offer food? Perhaps a light snack? No, that seems weird.

Finally, Lance sighs, stretching and cracking his back in several different places. “Well, as much fun as this was, I’ve got work at six in the morning so, I better get going.” He points to the door and smiles. “Thanks again for the good time.”

“I...Yeah, sure. Thanks to you..I mean thank you too.”

Lance chuckles, a flirtatious grin that dazzles Keith a little too much. “Alright guapo, hit me up if you wanna ‘blow off some steam’ again. You have my number.”

“Yeah, okay.” Keith replies dumbly.

“See you around.”

“See ya.”

Just like that, Lance walks out into the hallway and disappears.

Keith flops back down at his desk, picking the mess of papers up from the floor. He no longer feels like there is an elephant sitting on his chest, and his muscles are significantly less tense than they were. He takes a long, calm breath and begins to tackle the monstrosity of a task on his desk, heart still thrumming with warmth.

It only takes him twenty minutes.

In a strange turn of events, he goes home happy.
A few days later, Keith is driving with his father to a networking event. It’s the third one he has been to this week, and he kind of wishes that he can tuck and roll out of the car, blissfully dying in the process. His father, however, probably would not approve of that death and would bring him back to life so he can die in a more reputable way.

Okay so he’s feeling a little bitter today. Just a little.

It’s just that these networking events are literally made to repel people like him. It’s a large ballroom filled with corporate men wearing pin striped suits and talking about investments and revenues and all the bullshit Keith had to learn about in college. Funnily enough, he hasn’t actually used any of that knowledge for his job. The only time any of that mattered was at events like these, so you can pretend to give a shit about whatever the hell the man with gray nose hair is talking about.

The one perk, of course, is the open bar. Whenever Keith comes to these events with his father, they have a long talk in the car about not “going overboard” and “embarrassing the family legacy.” But whenever Keith comes to these events alone, he has at least five glasses of wine.

At least.

It may seem unprofessional, but it is merely a precautionary measure that allows him to speak to people without barfing due to anxiety.

Social anxiety; yet another reason why Keith is not made for this line of work.

When they arrive, Keith sticks to his father’s side for the first hour or two. That way, he doesn’t have to make conversation, but rather, just listens to it. It’s a comfortable place to be, for the most part. His father is everything a business man should be; confident, charming, intelligent, and able to bullshit anything for a solid two hours without breaking a sweat. Keith admires him, he really does. He respects how hard his father works, how passionate he is, how strong he is.

But Keith isn’t any of those things.

Excusing himself to go to the bathroom, Keith slips seamlessly out of the conversation and makes his way to the exit, stopping momentarily at the bar for a glass of red wine.

The bartender today is different than the one who had been at the last three networking events. Keith always just assumed they used the same catering company every time, but this face is new to him. The guy behind the bar is rather large, towering over Keith (who has grown much taller since he was a teenager, than you very much) and taking up a decent amount of space with broad shoulders, thick arms, and a bit of a rounder midsection. He turns around to face Keith and smiles brightly, emphasizing his square jaw and round eyes. “What can I get for you, sir?”

“What are you?” Keith asks bluntly, being the social butterfly he always is. “Where’s the blonde guy?”

The boy raises an eyebrow, scratching his head. “Uh, Rolo? He doesn’t work today. I was just hired last week, so...I’m new.” He stacks a few glasses onto the counter. “You’re Keith, right? Rob’s son?”

Keith nods curtly, not surprised that he knows.
Rob’s son. That’s who he is. Or all he is, rather. He gets a kind smile in reply.

“My name is Hunk, nice to meet you, Sir.”

Cringing, Keith shakes his head. “Don’t call me that.”

Hunk nods quickly. “Right. What can I get for you?”

“Just a glass of red, please.”

Hunk nods again and turns around searching for the bottle a little frantically, eager to impress. Keith feels the absurd urge to make conversation. “So how much fun are you having right now?” He asks sarcastically. Hunk chuckles.

“Well, by the looks of it, more fun than a lot of the people here.”

Keith’s face cracks into a smile although he was very determined to continue looking miserable. “You mean, these people aren’t having a blast?” He jokes.

“I really don’t think they are, judging by how many drinks I’ve poured tonight.” Hunk laughs a little louder this time, then leans over the bar so that only Keith can hear him. “Watch out for the guy with the blue bowtie, he is about seven drinks in and extremely handsy.”

Keith giggles. “Yeah, okay. Will do.”

Hunk places the glass of wine in front of Keith. “Well, enjoy your night. Enjoy your wine. Come back from more if you want.” He smiles sympathetically at Keith. Keith sighs.

“I think I’m going to chug this and then go sit on the floor in the bathroom for the rest of the night.”

“Dude,” Hunk starts. “That sounds, 100%, like the most flawless plan in the world.”

Keith lifts the glass towards Hunk. “See you on the flip side.” He says, smiling, before downing it and walking out of the ballroom.

***

He wishes that he was joking about the whole bathroom floor thing, but he actually finds himself leaning against one of the stall doors, staring at himself in the mirror and counting to ten over and over again, just waiting for the time to pass. It’s a little pathetic. Okay, it’s really pathetic. But he doubts that anybody really misses ‘Rob’s Son’ anyway and he would much rather stay here where it smells like cheap air freshener and the AC actually works.

Unbuttoning the top button of his shirt, he takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. His face has gotten thin. Maybe he should start going to the gym again. Probably not though.

A brief flash of Lance’s toned, smooth arms enters his mind and he blinks. It’s gone in a second. Keith sighs. Lance probably goes to the gym. Not that he cares. Because he’s never seeing Lance again anyway.
The night drags by. Every minute gets slower. Keith slips out of the bathroom to get drinks, makes small-talk with Hunk, and then slips back into the bathroom, undetected. Progressively, he can feel his nerves starting to loosen with the heavy effects of the alcohol, and when it’s almost time to go, he leaves the bathroom to rejoin his dad as if nothing had happened. His dad glances at him, smiling to acknowledge his existence, before returning to the conversation at hand.

Too easy.

***

When it’s finally the weekend, Keith decides that something needs to change. If he is going to do what he hates for the rest of his life, then he should at least have a couple of hours a week to do what he wants.

He calls Shiro on saturday morning.

“Hello?”

“I need you to do some exploring with me.” Keith says urgently.

“Uh...what?”

“I want to find a car garage to work at.”

A brief moment of silence passes. “A car garage?”

“Yeah. You know, where they fix cars?”

“Yeah.”

“I want to work at one.”

Shiro sighs. It’s small but Keith still hears it. “Are you planning on telling your parents?” He asks, already knowing the answer.

“No. Are you kidding? Anyway I’m 22 years old. I’m allowed to have a part time job. I don’t have to tell them.”

“You definitely don’t need any more money though.” Shiro sounds confused.

“Shiro, come on. How long have you known me? You know why I have to do this.”

Shiro sighs, for real this time. “Yeah, I know.”

“So are you in or out?”

“Of course I’m in.”

“Cool. I’ll be at your place in five. Also, bring breakfast because I haven’t eaten in like twelve hours.”

“Wha--”
"Bye!" Keith hangs up excitedly and grabs his stuff, jogging out the door before his parents can ask his where he is going.

When he gets to Shiro’s house, Shiro is standing at the edge of his driveway in his usual lilac button down and grey slacks. Keith ignores the small tug at his heart that still happens sometimes when Shiro looks particularly good. In one hand, he is holding a muffin. In the other, a cup of coffee. A confused, but mostly tired look, rests on his face. Keith grins at him as he enters the car. “You got me a muffin!”

“You said you haven’t eaten in twelve hours.” Shiro says, confused.

“Thanks, Shiro.” Stuffing the muffin in his mouth and taking a big bite, Keith puts the car in drive and they exit through the giant silver gates at the front of the complex.

“So, where are we headed?” Shiro asks.

Keith shrugs. “I found an address and put it in the GPS. I guess we’ll see what happens.”

“You’ve never been to this place before?”

“I did say exploring, didn’t I?”

Keith can feel Shiro’s eyes on him, examining him rather thoroughly. They don’t leave his face for about a minute, scrutinizing and obvious. He feels an embarrassed flush in his cheeks. “God, what?” He finally asks.

“You saw him again, didn’t you?”

He nearly slams onto the breaks, whipping his head around. “What?”

“That Luke guy--”

“You mean Lance?”

“You saw him again. I can tell. You look like you hate the world a fraction less than usual this weekend. Something had to have happened.”

Keith sighs, rolling his eyes. “For your information, I still hate the world.”

“Okay, but now you hate the world and you have a fuck buddy.”

“He’s not a fuck buddy.”

“Then what is he?”

“He’s not anything! I was tired and I texted him and we hooked up and he left. I don’t plan on seeing him ever again, it was just a moment of weakness.”

Shiro nods, sighing. “You are impossible.”


“Because something fun is finally happening to you and you aren’t letting yourself enjoy it, as usual. It’s like you thrive on being miserable.”

The words sting. It’s not like Keith hasn’t heard them before, but there is a small bite to them that
irritates him. “Look, you know I’m not looking for a relationship right now. It’s just not a good time, okay?”

“I never said anything about a relationship.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Whatever, Shiro.” The GPS informs them that their destination will be on the left.

“You enjoy hooking up with him. You think he’s attractive--”

“Yeah but he’s cocky as shit. I can’t date someone like that--”

“--so don’t date him! Just mess around. Have a good time. Don’t you think you deserve it? How long has it been since you’ve done anything for yourself?”

“You mean like, no strings attached?”

“Yeah. Just super casual sex.”

Keith stares intently at the road in front of him, not replying. A moment of thoughtful silence passes.

“I mean, obviously those are his intentions too, so…” Shiro adds helpfully.

Keith takes a sharp left, choosing not to reply to what Shiro said. “We’re here.” he says instead, eyes scanning over the first car garage on the list.

***

Keith is surprised when he steps out of the car and finds the surroundings familiar to him. He’s been here before. At some point in the past month, he’s definitely been here…

He takes in the small houses across the street. The chipped paint looks familiar. The narrow road, the cracked sidewalk.

“Where the hell are we?” Shiro supplies, rather uselessly. “I’ve never been in this part of town before, Keith. Maybe this isn’t a good idea.”

Keith raises a curious eyebrow. “I think… I think I have?” Then he remembers. He remembers stumbling drunkenly past that faded pink house. He remembers Lance laughing loudly and trying to jump over that rusted car. He vaguely recalls that lamp post, covered with stickers, and that broken fire hydrant…

“I think Lance lives somewhere around here.”

Shiro’s eyes widen a fraction. “Here?”

“Yeah..I mean I think so? I was so drunk but it looks familiar…” Keith shrugs. “Anyhow, I’m going to go try and get a job. You gonna come with me or not?”

Shiro still looks confused, but sighs, smiling. “Fineee.”
They walk into the small, gray main office that smells like motor oil and cigarettes. Keith, strangely, immediately feels more comfortable in his skin than he has in months. The man sitting behind the desk has bright orange hair and a handlebar mustache that looks slightly curled at the ends. He is in a dirty, collared shirt and has a rag tossed over his shoulder that is covered with black grease. He is glaring at the blurry type on the very old computer in front of him, trying to make out what it says through the dusty, foggy screen. When he sees Keith and Shiro, he raises an eyebrow, looking a little concerned.

“What on earth? Why have they sent you men over again? I told you I’ll pay when I’m ready!” He has a thick accent that catches Keith a little off guard. Keith shakes his head.

“What? No, we’re not here to collect money.”

The main furrows his brow. “Well then who are you?” There is a rusted name plate on the counter and Keith barely makes out the word ‘Coran’, which he assumes is this man’s name.

He clears his throat. “My name is Keith. I want to work here.”

Coran looks at him for a moment, eyes calculating. The he bursts out laughing. “Is that so, young man?”

Keith frowns, confused. “Yes.”

“We’re not currently hiring.” He deadpans.

“You don’t even have to pay me.” Keith replies, crossing his arms over his chest.

Coran looks mildly shocked by the statement and gives Keith a onceover, looking genuinely confused by his designer shoes and golden watch. “You wanna work here? What do you even know about cars?”

Keith falters a little. He’s never really had to prove himself to anyone. People always just worship him by association. “I mean, I’m self taught, but--”

Coran hums in slight disappointment.

“--but I know my stuff. I fix my own car all the time. I’ve been studying cars since I was a kid” Keith says, a little desperately.

“Have you ever worked in a garage before?”

“Well...no.”

“Have you ever even replaced a flat tire?”

Keith frowns. “What? Of course I have.” He says defensively. Shiro puts a calming hand on his shoulder.

“Sorry boy, you don’t look like the type to get your hands dirty.”

“But I am!” Keith growls, stepping forward. “I’ll prove it! Just give me one week here. One week, that’s it. I’ll prove it. None of your clients will leave angry, I swear by it.”

Coran looks at him skeptically. For the first time in a very long time, Keith feels self conscious under someone's gaze.
“One week?” Coran questions.

“Just one.” Keith pleads.

“How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

“One chance.” Keith can feel his confidence crumbling. He needs this.

Slowly, the judgmental look falls from Coran’s face and his features soften. He sighs defeatedly. “Okay, Keith. I’ll give you a chance.” He reaches over his desk and picks up a sheet from a stack of papers. “Go outside and fill this out. Bring it to me when you’re done. I’ll let you start here on Monday, 8AM.”

“Okay! Grea--ow!” Shiro elbows him in the side.

“What about work, Keith? Actual work? That you are getting paid for?” Shiro scolds.

Fuck. Right.

“Coran...is it possible for me to have, like... an evening shift?”

Coran looks at him like he has three heads, then shrugs, sighing in defeat. “Fine, we close at eight so try to at least get three hours in.”

Keith actually jumps with excitement, surprising himself. “Ah! Yes! Thank you!”

Shiro rolls his eyes, but he is chuckling underneath his breath. Keith grabs his hand, spilling out a string of “thankyou thankyou you won't regret this thank you” as he pulls Shiro outside into the bright sunlight. They sit on a faded, plastic bench in front of the garage and Keith begins to fill out the form.

“This is so exciting.” He says. “Isn’t this exciting?”

Shiro smiles, squinting into the sunlight. “Well, I guess you are finally taking charge of your own happiness.” He says. “Took you long enough.”

“Never let my parents find out.” Keith says hurriedly.

“Oh, of course not.”

Keith frantically scribbles his information onto the form, excitement bubbling in his chest. Just being next to disjointed car parts gives him so much satisfaction. His hands tingle. He wants to build something. To fix something.

“Keith?”

Keith jumps a little, shocked at the use of his name that didn’t come out of Shiro’s mouth. He looks up and sees none other than Lance, staring down at him with a very confused expression on his face. He is holding a couple grocery bags from the mini-mart that he saw down the street, so Keith assumes he is walking home after running some errands. His eyes are jumping from Keith, to Shiro, and then back again. All of a sudden, the confused expression on his face melts into one that is purely flirtatious. “Guess you liked my end of town more than you thought, huh?”

Keith is still attempting to process that it is, in fact, Lance standing in front of him. He is wearing basketball shorts, a white snapback, and a loose, blue tank top that shows way too much of his freaking delicious shoulders and oh god those collarbones --
“Keith?” Shiro’s voice snaps him out of his fantasy. “Who’s this?”

Lance is smirking down at him, blue eyes catching the light in kind of a breathtaking way.

Not that Keith cares.

“Oh, uh, Shiro, this is...my friend, Lance.” Keith says awkwardly, not really sure how to describe the whole ‘he’s had my dick in his mouth but I don’t even know his last name’ phenomenon. Shiro actually gives a shit about Keith as a human being, so he doesn’t give any embarrassingly obvious indication that he knows who Lance is. “Lance, this is my friend Shiro.”

Lance nods in Shiro’s direction. “Hey, nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, you too.”

“So,” he turns his attention back to Keith. “What are you doing all the way out here again?” There is a hint of teasing in his voice, like he has a feeling this might be about him. Keith feels mildly irritated.

“I’m applying to a job here.” He jabs his thumb in the direction of the garage. Lance’s face falls, confusion clouding his smug expression.

“Don’t you…” his eyes fall to where a solid gold watch rests on Keith’s wrist, “…already have a job?”

“Well...yeah.” Keith says. Shiro pats his shoulder.

“I’ll be back, going to use the bathroom.” Keith nods at him as he gets up and leaves. Lance keeps talking.

“Why the hell do you want to work here?” He asks, nose crinkling in disgust. It’s oddly adorable. Keith wants to lick his jaw.


“I really like cars.” His fingertips twitch, wanting to reach out and drag along that defined chest.

Lance raises an eyebrow. “Then drive one.” 

Keith rolls his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

Laughing, Lance plops down next to him comfortably as if they are best friends and this situation isn’t at all awkward.

There are a million things Lance could probably ask right now; like why Keith is fixing cars for no money, why he is applying to a job thirty minutes away from his house, why this garage and none of the others, and of course, why get a job when his family is already rich beyond belief and he shouldn't have to work a day in his life?

Instead, Lance just turns so that their shoulders press together and crowds into Keith personal space. But he smells like vanilla and sunscreen and deodorant and honestly Keith doesn’t mind at all.

“So let me get this straight.” Lance says lowly, looking Keith right in the eye. “You are going to come to this garage every day, and wear a muscle shirt, and work cranks and break a sweat and get covered in grease. Am I hearing this correctly?”
Keith feels the heat in his face but feigns confidence, a smirk tugging at his lips. If this is how Lance wants to play it, then he can play along too. “Mhmm.” He replies. Lance’s eyes slowly trace down his face, and then snap back up to his eyes again. He leans in a little closer. “Sometimes I might just skip the shirt altogether though.”

Lance huffs a laugh. Keith feels the heat of it on his face. “Tease.” he breathes, echoing the statement he made last time they hooked up. “That’s not fair.”

Keith shrugs, feigning nonchalance. He can feel the shit eating grin on his face. He doesn’t move away. Lance takes a deep breath.

“Guess I’ll have to stop by more often then.” He mumbles, voice rough. “Wouldn’t wanna miss that.”

There is something so hot about the way Lance talks about him. Keith has never seen himself as a sexy person, so why is flirting with Lance like this so damn easy? They couldn’t have spent more than ten hours together collectively since they met, but this back and forth teasing feels so incredibly natural.

Jesus christ Keith wants to touch him again.

Shiro’s voice breaks the spell. Both Lance and Keith startle when he shows up in front of them. “Keith, are you done with that form yet? We gotta go.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. I’ll go turn it in now.” He says frantically, gathering the papers in his hands and standing up. Lance stands up with him, stuffing his hands into his low-hanging pockets and raising an eyebrow at Keith. Keith glances at the sheen of sweat building on his upper lip under the beating sun. Hunger coils in the pit of his stomach.

“See you ‘round?” Lance asks, smiling crookedly.

“Yeah.” Keith says, although his brain is still telling him to move the fuck on already.

This is a bad idea. This is a bad idea. This is a bad idea.

Lance sends a two finger salute in Keith’s direction, winking, before spinning on his heel and heading down the narrow, cracked sidewalk. Keith shamelessly watches his ass.

Bad idea...bad idea...

As soon as Lance is out of sight, Shiro bursts out laughing. “Wooooooow.” he drags out. “You are so screwed.”

Keith scowls at him, blushing furiously. “What are you talking about?”

“You literally had your tongue hanging out for a second there.”

Keith sighs frustratedly. “Oh shut up.” He says, pushing Shiro to the side and walking into the office to return his forms. He can hear Shiro’s loud laugh even when the door shuts behind him.

Shiro doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

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Keith lasts approximately 9 hours and 34 minutes before texting Lance.

It’s not his fault. Lance is the one that provoked him. And besides, this is the last time. The absolute last time. He just needs to get it out of his system. That’s all.

He takes out his phone, heart fluttering nervously, and he doesn’t even know why.

Keith

Whatcha up to

He tucks his phone under the pillow, trying to forget about it. It vibrates a minute later.

Lance

Im actually planning on getting laid but my guy isn’t here yet

Keith stares at the words, something like disappointment settling in his stomach. He gets another text.

His name is Keith. He’s got black hair and a belt buckle thats probably worth more than my house. Maybe u know him

A surprised laugh bubbles out of Keith mouth and he muffles it with his hand.

Keith

Nah sorry i dont think i do

The response is immediate

Lance

Come over

Keith sighs, conflicted. He thinks about what Shiro said in the car, biting his lip worriedly.
Are his parents still awake? Can he leave without them getting suspicious…?

**Lance**

_I'm already thinking about you and I'm not going to last much longer, guapo_

F*ck it, he’s getting the fuck out of here.

Scrambling to put on some version of a nice outfit (he settles for tight black jeans and a burgundy lacoste polo), Keith throws all caution to the wind and races down the staircase, keys in one hand and his cellphone in the other. After slipping his shoes on and probably forgetting his wallet, Keith is in the car, texting Lance for his address and backing out of the driveway.

To many, he may seem like thirsty, desperate bitch. Which he totally is, he just doesn't really care at the moment because his phone lights up with another text.

**Lance**

_getting impatient…_

Heat pools between Keith’s legs.

_wanna be inside you…_

He’s gotta be going at least seventy miles per hour.

His phone vibrates a few more times but he doesn’t check it because his brain is already spilling over with fantasies and he can already feel himself getting hard and he doesn't need this distraction while driving okay?

He pulls into an impossibly narrow driveway squished between two tiny houses, one of them looking rather familiar from the last time Keith was here. Keith observes the light blue, faded and chipping paint of Lance’s house before knocking loudly, feeling the strain in his pants.

Lance opens the door eagerly, already shirtless and looking stunning in a pair of low riding blue jeans. The button is undone. There is a slight flush in his cheeks and his expression looks urgent.

The both breathe “hey” at the same time before they are attached at the lips, grabbing each other's faces and stumbling into the living room, just like they did when they were drunk. Except this time, Keith can feel everything.

He can feel Lance’s hands sliding roughly up his back, into his hair, tugging helplessly. He can feel himself being tackled onto the couch; shirt thrown to the side, pants at his ankles. It happens in a blur of movement but he feels every second of it. Lance is tugging his own pants off too, tossing
them behind him, and the minute Keith sees those tiny briefs again his hands are cupping Lance’s ass, a pathetic moan falling from his lips as Lance presses their hips together sloppily.

They spend what feels like forever just rutting against each other, gasping and moaning quietly into each other’s mouths. The smell of sunscreen still lingers on Lance’s skin and Keith literally can’t get enough. He never thought he liked that smell. He definitely likes that smell now. Not sure how it would smell without the sweet scent of Lance’s deodorant mixed with it, but that’s an argument for another time.

If they keep going, Keith knows he’s going to come eventually. They haven’t even taken off their briefs but Keith can already feel pleasure burning into his bloodstream, blurring the edges of his vision and making it impossible to think clearly. He doesn’t want it to end...not yet...

“L-lance…” he mumbles against the other boy’s lips, voice surprisingly rough. “Lube…”

Lance nods aggressively and reaches over Keith to the coffee table. Keith buries his face into the neck that is suddenly in front of him, inhaling deeply. Lance hums softly at the contact. Why there is already lube set out on the coffee table, Keith doesn’t know. Nor does he care, because Lance is flipping him around onto his stomach and sliding his black briefs off of his ass, squeezing it hungrily with his hands.

“Your ass…” Lance says, sounding more like he is talking to himself than anything. “Your ass is fucking amazing.”

There is a small stretch of time where Lance doesn’t touch him, and Keith can’t even feel the heat radiating off Lance’s body. He tries to turn his head and look up over his shoulder but can’t crane his neck far enough. “Lance?” He asks, sounding a little concerned.

Suddenly, without any warning, there is a finger easing its way into him, long and slender. Keith realizes in a moment of clarity that the lube is gone from the coffee table, and now all over Lance’s fingers.

Shit, it feels good. The initial pain fades and leave another feeling in it’s wake. Strange, but good. Keith’s brain is rapidly bouncing between ‘we’re moving too fast this is going too fast’ and ‘not fast enough not fast enough’ but all thoughts come to a halt when Lance curls his finger, ever so slightly, brushing over something that Keith can’t even--

“Fuck--” He chokes out, grinding down onto the couch, desperate for any kind of friction. Lance’s finger moves slow and calculated inside of him, weaving and dipping and brushing that same spot over and over and he has never felt anything like this before. Nobody has ever fingered him like this, so gentle and yet so fucking accurate. Precise. Expert.

“I think you’re ready for one more…” Lance purrs into his ear, slowly sliding a second finger in. A violent shiver runs through Keith’s body.

“Move…” Keith mumbles.

“Mmmm, what was that? Couldn’t hear you.” Lance teases.

“Move your hand Lance or I swear to god…”

Lance chuckles. It sounds borderline filthy, and he begins to pump his fingers in and out...in and out...

Keith gasps, pushing his ass up to meet Lance’s fingers with every movement. He can feel himself
starting to loosen and Lance’s fingers are hitting the right spot every fucking time and Keith really, really needs Lance inside of him before he--

“Fuck me, dammit.” He finds himself growling out loud, even though he was only planning on thinking it.

“You sure? Because I think you look stunning just like this.” Lance goads, a smile present in his voice.

“Lance --” He warns.

“All right alright. But only because your ass looks so fuckable like this.” Lance’s voice remains cool in the heat of the situation.

Keith takes a deep breath as Lance’s fingers leave him open and empty. He hears the cap of the lube pop open. Closing his eyes, he attempts to prepare himself for what's to come. This is sex after all, and the other times he did it, it wasn’t anything like this...he barely even remembers what it was like. And now he’s about to have sex with a stranger on a couch he’s never been on before in a town he doesn’t know the name of and maybe this isn’t such a good--

Lance pushes into him and an obscene sound works it’s way out of his mouth from somewhere deep within his throat.

Holy shit.

It aches a little at first but then evens out, ever so slowly, into a dull and throbbing pain that for some reason feels so fucking good. Keith is pushing his hips into the sofa again, feeling needy and quite powerless. He pushes his ass upwards which draws a low hiss from Lance.

“Oh my god, keith, you are so...this feels so fucking good…” Lance is rambling short, broken sentences into his ear, starting to thrust slowly. The friction is nothing like Keith has ever experienced before, and he can pathetically feel the intense heat building in his stomach, even with Lance barely moving.

“Ooohh fuck, oh man.” Lance’s arms are curling around his waist from behind him, bringing him closer with each thrust. His pace quickens. “A-ahh Keith, shit…”

Keith’s eyes fall shut. Lance’s hands flatten on his stomach, explore the skin there, brush over his nipples. He yelps a little, hips twitching at the added touch.

“Ah, so you like having your nipples touched…” Lance says breathlessly, thoughtfully, filing the information for later. Keith lets out a shaky laugh, but it is cut short by a particularly hard thrust, sending his hips jerking involuntarily and a sharp gasp to fall from his lips.

“Faster, Lance.” He groans through his teeth, eyes squeezing together as Lance speeds up even more. Each thrust gets harder, rougher, and slightly sloppier. Keith feels high. The pleasure is dizzying, and it only gets better. He doesn’t even realize that he is making loud noises until Lance puts a hand over his mouth, muffling a very loud moan from coming out.

“I-I...Mmmmf the n-neighbors, quiet down...” he tries and fails to explain, thrusting harder, falling forward onto Keith’s back. Keith’s legs shake. Lance changes his angle slightly and then hits just the right spot, making Keith whimper loudly and bury his face into the couch cushion. Lance’s hand is somehow, rather uncomfortably, still on his mouth and he swirls his tongue onto the center of his palm, biting down gently. Lance lets out an incredulous laugh that sounds very similar to a moan, and the sound of it pushes Keith even closer to the edge.
“Keith—you gotta touch yourself cuz I….m’not gonna last much longer…”

Keith is gasping for air at this point, the feeling of Lance thrusting into him suddenly too much for his body to handle. He barely has to stroke himself twice before he is coming all over the couch, a broken moan falling from his lips as he feels Lance come too, thighs quaking around him and a delicious noise muffled into the back on his neck.

The both lay in the aftermath for a minute, the tiny room filled with hot, heavy air and loud panting. Lance pulls out of Keith and flops down on top of him, bare stomach pressed to Keith’s lower back. Keith can feel Lance’s cheek resting somewhere near the crown of his head. The position should be awkward, but it’s actually rather comfortable, and Keith’s knees are too weak for him to move anyway.

That was…fucking incredible.

“Yeah, fuck yeah it was.” Lance says, and Keith falters for a moment because he didn’t even realize that he spoken out loud. Lance just keeps talking, voice slow and drunk. “That is the best sex I’ve had in a really, really long time, holy fuck.”

They lay for a couple more minutes to collect themselves. When Lance starts to lift off of Keith, the cold air that replaces him is unsettling and unwelcome.

Lance stands up in front of the couch and stretches, back popping a few times. Keith sits up shakily and looks at him. He takes a mental note that Lance has done this after every hookup so far. He briefly wonders why.

Lance’s body is a little patchy, flushed pink in his chest, his hips, his cheeks. Keith feels a stirring in his chest at the sight of it. The proof of what just happened. Lance’s skin is glowing with sweat. His hair is a tangled mess. His lips are bitten and pink. Damn, Keith could get used to this view.

It takes him a moment to realize that Lance is looking at him with a slightly concerned look on his face. Did he say something? Is he waiting for Keith to say something?

“Hello? Earth to Keith?”

“Wha…?” Shit, oops.

“Do you want a drink?”

For some reason, Keith doesn’t understand. “What do you mean?”

Lance raises an eyebrow, giggling. “What, you think I’m going to fuck you and then tell you to go home without giving you a lemonade or something? What kind of man do you take me for?”

“I don’t know. But I do like lemonade.”

Lance is pulling his briefs back up his long, long legs and reaching for a discarded shirt on the floor, probably the one that he was wearing before Keith arrived. He slips it over his head, messing up his hair a little. The shirt is clearly two sizes too big. It falls off of one shoulder and reveals a good portion of bronze skin.

“Great, I think I still have some. Follow me.” He beckons for Keith to follow him into the kitchen. Keith hurriedly puts on his briefs and decides to skip the shirt, heading in the direction that Lance was walking in. His hair is a freaking mess, he can feel it, but a part of him doesn’t care. Since this is completely no-strings-attached, he doesn’t have to worry about looking good for
anyone...impressing anyone...it’s actually kind of nice. It’s fun to not care. To not take everything so seriously.

Lance is already filling a glass with lemonade when Keith enters the kitchen. Keith looks around curiously. It’s a really cute little nook. There is just enough counter space to make an average meal. There is a small fridge, and old electric stove, and some faded, dark blue cabinets. Some cabinets are hanging open slightly. Keith guesses it’s because their locking mechanism is broken or worn down. There is a small island in the center of the room with some plastic stools around it.

Lance notices Keith’s explorative eyes and snorts. “If you are looking for my private chef, he’s on vacation.” he jokes, chuckling a little at himself.

“I bet he is.” Keith smirks.

“He makes the best kraft mac ‘n cheese though. He even mixes in the little shell pasta too for extra texture appeal.”

“Damn, I wish mine was that talented.”

Lance sighs dramatically. “Yeah, everyone does.” Then he laughs, handing the glass over to Keith. Keith takes a sip. It’s so sweet and artificial, but in a delicious way. He has been drinking unsweetened iced tea and freshly squeezed lime juice for so long he forgot what juice from an actual store tastes like. It’s so fucking good, holy hot damn. Where had this been all his life?

Lance is looking at him, an amused smile on his face. “What, do rich people not drink lemonade?”

“Not like this.” Keith purses his lips. “At least I haven’t in awhile.”

“That’s just sad, man.”

“Yeah…” Keith sees a large pair of shoes on the floor next to the island, far too large to be Lances. “Do you live with people?”

Lance nods. “Yeah, it helps with rent. Also they’re like, two of my best friends, so it’s always a good time.”

Keith feels a pang of jealousy in the pit of his stomach. Even in college, he never got to live with people his own age. He clears his throat. “Sounds fun.”

“Yeah, it is. Can be frustrating at time, ya know, sharing everything. But overall, it’s nice. You want anything to eat?”

Keith shakes his head. “I’m okay. I might actually head out soon.”

Lance nods, putting some bread on a plate and spreading peanut butter on one slice. “Yeah, its pretty late.” He glances at the clock. “Pidge’ll be home soon anyway, she hates when I bring people home.” He smushes the bread together and takes a giant bite, laughing into it. “It grosses her out.”

It doesn’t surprise Keith that Lance is someone who takes random people home pretty often. He definitely seems like that kind of guy. He definitely has the charm of that kind of guy and especially the skill.

Keith chuckles. “Guess I’ll get out of your hair, then.” He turns towards the door but Lance stops him, grabbing his wrist.
“Hey, I’m glad you came….you know, to my house, and all over my couch.” He winks. “It was fun.”

“Shit, should I clean that?”

“Nah don’t sweat it, I actually bought a new couch this morning, but I just wanted to take the old one for one more spin.” He grins. “We’re throwing it out tonight.”

“Oh, okay.”

Lance walks with him to the door, still chomping down on his sandwich. Keith gathers his things and steps out into the chilly night air. There aren’t any stars out tonight. He wonders how the hell he is going to wake up tomorrow.

Lance is leaning against the doorframe, a smug smile plastered on his face. “So, exactly how long before you text me again?” He asks, quirking his eyebrow.

The voice in the back of Keith’s head is screaming, THIS WAS THE LAST TIME. NO MORE. ABORT ABORT ABORT---

But Lance looks fucking exquisite in his oversized shirt and Fruit-of-the-Loom briefs, and maybe, just maybe, for once in his monotonous, money driven life, Keith just wants to have some fun.

“Don’t hold your breath.” He jokes, smiling.

Lance shakes his head, giggling. “Such a fucking tease...” he murmurs under his breath, before sending Keith a short wave goodbye and shutting the door.
Chapter Summary

A little bit of Lance POV in this one! And of course a very thirsty Keith.

Chapter Notes

Im still kind of setting up the story, the plot is going to develop a lot, I have a few ideas, but for now here is some more sexual tension between dorks.

Also disclaimer, i know nothing about basketball, or fixing cars.
Another disclaimer: I dont mean to be mocking business or the study of business in this fic, i have taken business classes and they are actually quite difficult and helpful. but for the sake of this fic and keiths bitter ass, i changed my views a little, no disrespect to those who study business!

thanks again for reading! <3

Lance laces up his shoes and opens the door as quietly as possible.

Leaving the house at 4AM every day really isn't ideal when you have two roommates who really like their sleep, but he does it anyway. It’s not that he doesn’t have a choice. His work doesn’t actually start until 8AM, and it’s really only a walking distance away. Realistically, he could roll out of bed at 7:55 and still make it to work on time; working the front desk at the local gym doesn’t really require hair and makeup.

But here he is; 4AM, fully dressed, and heading out the door.

He just really wants to play basketball.

To other people, it sounds useless. Probably like a waste of time, but it’s his favorite part of the day. It’s his favorite part of the world, really. When he was younger, playing basketball with his siblings was always the one thing they could all do, no matter how busy, or how old, or how unskilled. It was a pastime that their father had instilled in them since the say they could walk. Every saturday and sunday for almost his entire childhood, he would play basketball with his siblings on the small courts next to the local park. Everyone loved it, but nobody quite fell in love with it.

Nobody but Lance.

Lance doesn’t live with his family anymore, and it hurts him more than he would like to admit. Although he always fought with his siblings, and really got a kick out of disobeying his parents, they are family. And he really fucking misses them.
It was his choice to leave, though. His parents desperately wanted him to stay in California. He got into a prestigious University that was walking distance from his house. He was set up to have a degree in marketing and advertising. Everything was going to go perfectly.

But Lance can’t do “perfect”. He just can’t. He’s never been able to. And every time someone complimented his parents on having such a “successful” and “accomplished” son, something in his stomach twisted uncomfortably. Those were definitely compliments, so why did he feel like he was constantly cheating everyone around him?

It was because no matter how prestigious the university was, or how much scholarship money there was or how many compliments his family got, none of it was his decision. He was good at advertising but only tolerated it, he never agreed to be close to home, and he applied to that Ivy League school just to appease his parents.

In a very shocking turn of events for everyone in his life, Lance refused to go. When there was resistance, and ultimately anger, he just bit the bullet and left. It hurt like hell and it still does, but he doesn’t regret it. He really, really doesn’t.

It is almost six years later and Lance has barely seen his family, except for holidays and the occasional long weekend. They always drill him with questions about what he is doing, what his plans are, where he is living and how much money he is making. The meetings are always tense, and brief. Nobody wants to address the elephant in the room--that Lance left. He barely said goodbye and barely made time to argue. He just got up and left the only place he’d known with the only people he loved.

It may sound like something horrible to do, but Lance has always been a free spirit. He has always been someone who goes after what he wants, no matter what people say. If it feels right in his heart, he’s going to fucking go for it. On the flipside, however, if it feels wrong, he isn’t going to stand for it. He refuses to be a stuffy businessman in a suit who winds up at a dead end job that makes him want to put a bullet in his brain every time he wakes up in the morning. It is his life, ultimately, so why do something he won’t enjoy, even if it does make bank?

That’s not to say that it isn’t the most difficult thing ever. Lance refuses to take the money his parents offer him. He knows that they mean well, but it also makes him feel like they don’t trust he can make it on his own. The irony is that he actually comes from a very well-off family, but he’s never been more broke in his life. He can’t even afford a membership at the gym he works at, and he’s probably eaten saltine crackers for dinner three times this week. His parents have given up on convincing him to come home, but they haven’t given up on trying to help him. He knows he could really use that money, and it warms his heart that his parents have not resolved to shutting him out completely, but he feels like he has something to prove now. He can’t prove it if he still uses his family as a crutch along the way.

So here he is--living with two roommates, going to school part time, and working at the local gym.

The only important thing to Lance is that he came here with a dream; to play basketball. To play it for real-- like on a team, with people who love it as much as he does. The small, washed up town that he lives in may not seem glamorous to everyone. But the college here, although not Ivy League, has a division one basketball team where almost every team member goes on to play professionally. Lance applied relentlessly to get into the school, and is now pursuing a degree in sport journalism and entrepreneurship (while simultaneously drowning in debt). He is only attending classes part time so that he can keep some steady flow of income going. So far, he has about two years of credit completed.

One year after his high school graduation, he tried out for his college basketball team. He didn’t
make the cut.

The next year, he tried again, stronger and more skilled.

He still didn’t make the cut.

If he continues his education part time, then he has about three more years until he finishes his education. That is three years enrolled in the university. Three years to make it onto the team.

Most people would be discouraged.

Lance is ecstatic.

So every morning, rain or shine, Lance is in the parking lot outside the minimart practicing basketball. Over the years, he has made a makeshift hoop from a bucket and an old telephone pole. It is a small town and almost everyone, especially the cashier at the minimart, knows that the hunk of junk resting against the telephone pole is for Lance. Nobody touches it, and nobody throws it away.

Lance is happy. He is happy, and determined, and excited for his future.

But most importantly, Lance is free.

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The air is freezing cold and immediately wipes the sleep from Lance’s eyes. He tugs his jacket around himself a little more, shoving his hands deep into his pockets in an attempt to warm them. It’ll get less chilly as the dawn turns to morning, and especially as he starts moving. When he gets to the parking lot he picks up the basketball from the bucket and gets to work.

He does his research. He knows what drills to be practicing, what coaches are looking for, and what makes a good game. His education in sport journaling has also helped sharpen his knowledge on the subject. Each week, he creates a new drill plan for himself and works to master it flawlessly before midnight on Sunday. It’s a system that fell into place without him trying to make one. It just works. It’s just so fun.

Today he is doing lay-ups and crossbody dribbling. He moves swiftly, trying to keep his motions graceful and fast. He’s learned the hard way that brute and strength when playing only gets you so far, and it’s better to keep your movements light, and to stay on your toes.

Adrenaline pumps through his veins and warms him up. There is something so wonderful about playing in an empty lot, with nobody awake yet. He has never brought anyone here with him. It’s his special space—and he means that has a headspace and a literal space. Even Pidge and Hunk, who have been best friends with him for years, haven’t played here with him. Lance loses his breath as he sprints up to the hoop for the fifth time, twisting the ball behind him and throwing to against the headboard. It fall into the hoop without touching the outer rim. *Ten more times. Make it do that ten more times.*

After three hours of countless failures but also a decent number of successes, Lance flops down onto the cracked asphalt and stares up at the sky, heart thudding in his chest and sweat dripping from his eyelashes. His muscles used to ache whenever he worked out for this long, but now they
just throb with a dull pain that he actually finds pleasure in. It’s familiar and comfortable.

He is wearing his usual black, zip-up sleeveless hoodie but it was too cold this morning so he pout on a tight, under armour shirt underneath. Now, his skin is on fire and he regrets it, taking a mental note to ditch it tomorrow.

Taking a deep breath in, he is surprised when he doesn’t smell sweat, but cologne. A spicy, musky cologne that smells far too expensive to be on anything he owns. He furrows his brow, eyes still on the sky. That smell. What is that smell?

The small realization makes him chuckle softly to himself.

Keith.

This is the shirt he had worn in Keith’s office, probably. Lance doesn’t quite remember at first, but the more he breathes in, the more the smell jogs his memory.

Keith, in his office, with his thick black hair and piercing eyes.

He’s seen Keith a couple more times since they had sex. Most of it didn't really involve anything other than just more sex, not that Lance is complaining. They met for a second time in Keith’s office a couple days later, and then one more time at Lance’s house when he was feeling especially on edge and needed something to calm him down. Needless to say, Keith is a really good hookup.

Lance had really gone out on a limb when he approached Keith in the bar a couple weeks ago. He was a pretty drunk and, in a moment of complete insanity, actually thought that he’d have a chance at going home with one of the most attractive men he has seen, quite literally, in his entire life. Don’t be fooled, Lance has seen, and gone home with, tons of guys over the past six years. Tons. And he’s even dated a couple. But Keith was on another level of attractiveness. Lance was surprised he even got a word out of him at all.

Let’s ignore for the time being that when Lance first saw Keith, he was wearing a crisp, pressed white button down and tight black slacks that hugged him in all the right places. Let’s put aside the fact that Keith had on glossy, expensive shoes, a loosened, black, silk tie, and a thick silver watch on his wrist. Because with all of those obviously good looking style choices aside, Keith himself was still ridiculously gorgeous. His pale, creamy skin and sharp features could be seen easily from across the bar. He has this defined jawline and smooth neck that turns Lance’s brain to putty. His eyes are some unholy combination of black and dark purple, which is surprisingly one of the first things that Lance noticed, because usually the first thing he goes for is shoulder width or bicep size or something along those lines. His lips are full and soft, and every curve and corner on his face just screams “pretty boy”. Let’s not even get started on his body.

He looks vaguely asian, and Lance hasn’t really gotten the chance to ask where he is originally from. They haven't really made much time for conversation…

Lance sits up and looks down at his lanky legs and long fingers. He knows he is an attractive person. He has always been incredibly confident with his body and his sexuality. But damn, when boys like that exist, how can he possibly not feel inferior?

It’s a good thing that they are just fucking around, because Lance has a feeling that Keith would definitely not be a fan of who he is; a broke, part time college student with a somewhat foolish dream and about $45.67 in his bank account.

On the other hand, Lance probably wouldn't like who Keith is either; one of those pretentious
businessmen with the dead end job and an overflowing bank account. One of those stuffy businessmen that Lance has his spent his entire life trying not to be.

It’s definitely better that they only see each other to have a good time. There isn’t any pressure, any expectations, or any feelings. Lance has had so many casual flings that he can’t even count them, and this one has been the most fun. After all, he gets to touch and be touched by one of the hottest people he’s ever seen so, there really isn’t a downside.

***

After a long and busy day at work, Lance is excited to flop face down onto his bed and kick off his shoes. Unfortunately, he has a midterm tomorrow afternoon and still has about four chapters left to revise before he can go to bed. As he walks in, he sees his roommates, Pidge and Hunk, sitting at the small kitchen table.

“Lance! I made dinner.” Hunk says happily, pointing to the kitchen. Lance grins through his exhaustion.

“Oh man, sweet! You didn’t have to do that.”

Hunk shrugs. “It’s okay, I had time today. I don’t work until eight tonight anyway.”

Hunk, who is the largest and kindest boy that Lance has ever met, just recently got a new job bartending for a catering company. He describes it as “getting bougie rich people super wasted”, which sounds fun enough. Lance personally thinks that Hunk deserves much more out of life, and can’t wait for him to get his nursing degree so he can finally do something worthwhile that makes him happy. Hunk has been Lance’s saving grace ever since he moved to this town by himself. He found an ad online for someone who needed a roommate, and came to look at the place. When he told Hunk that he could only pay half of what he wanted until he got a job, Hunk just shrugged and said “Yeah okay, I trust you.” For seventeen year old Lance, hearing that somebody trusted him was as good as saying “I love you.” Thus began one of the best friendships Lance has ever had.

“You have another event tonight? Who is it for, the inventor of the door handle?” He asks sarcastically.

Hunk shrugs. “I don’t know, but he could be there. Who the hell knows with those things.”

Pidge, who has uncharacteristically remained silent for more than twenty five seconds, suddenly speaks. “Hunk, you should just gather up tons of dirt on those people and then pit them against each other. Oh my god that’d be hilarious.”

As usual, Pidge is being her crude and adorable self. She was already living here when Lance moved in. The first thing she said was, “are you the guy whose only paying half the rent?”, which scared the shit out of Lance because he didn't know you could be so tiny and yet so terrifying. She is strong willed, incredibly intelligent, and short. She is also still a student, except full time, studying computer engineering, and probably has more brains in her pinky toe than Lance does in his entire body.

Hunk sighs sadly. “Guys...come on, they’re okay people. Rich, but okay.”

Lance laughs. “Whatever you say. So, what’s for dinner big guy?”
Hunk is grinning again. “Oh, pork chops! I cooked them with herb butter this time so they might taste a little different. Mashed potatoes are in the red pot.”

Lance sighs fondly. “I love you.”

“I know” Hunk replies smugly.

“You should go eat before I take the last ones.” Pidge warns, which sends Lance running to the kitchen.

***

About an hour later, he is balancing a textbook on his knee and attempting to keep his eyes open. Management & Entrepreneurship is easily his least favorite class. His professor has told him multiple times that he needs to train himself to “think like a businessman”, but none of the material makes sense to him and he can’t seem to get above a B- on any of the exams. His eyes are fluttering shut, desperate for some sleep, when he hears his phone buzz from across the room.

Standing up to check it, he grabs it tiredly and then flops back down on his bed, opening his text messages.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Wanna meet up

Lance sighs for three reasons; One, of course he wants to, and the fact that Keith is initiating it makes it even better... Two, he doesn’t have time. And three, pure arousal, honestly. He can’t help it. He’s such a slut for vaguely asian guys in expensive suits...named Keith.

Lance

I want to but i cant tonight, srry

It takes Keith a long time to reply, so Lance just opens his textbook again and tries to push the lost opportunity out of his mind. After about five minutes, his phone buzzes again.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Oh okay

Lance raises an eyebrow at it. It’s such a simple answer, straight and to the point. It doesn’t ask for an explanation but for some reason, he feels the urge to give one.
Lance

*Ive got a lot of studying to do*

He regrets it the minute he sends it. It’s so stupid and unnecessary. A hookup doesn't want to hear about his academic struggles. Rolling his eyes at himself, he tosses his phone to the side and opens his notebook. Maybe notetaking would be easier.

Another buzz.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

*Oh. What are you studying*

A question?

Did Keith just ask him…

Lance

*Uh...just some business stuff.*

After contemplating for a bit, he adds,

*It really sucks*

Keith’s response is quick.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

*Oh yeah thats the worst. but easy. do you need any help*

Um.
He hesitates for a minute, burying his teeth into his lower lip. Inviting a fuckbuddy over to help with homework? Feels strange…

Lances phone buzzes again

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*I mean actual help, just so we’re clear that wasn’t an innuendo. I can suck ur dick after if you want tho*

Lance laughs. He doesn’t know what kind of game Keith is playing but he thinks he likes it.

**Lance**

*Okay sure*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*Mmk be there in ten min*

Lance smiles a little, satisfied with his decision. He hears the front door slam as Hunk leaves for work.

Laying back down onto his bed, he stares up at his ceiling fan and watches it turn slowly, exhaustion starting to creep up on him. He feels himself fighting to keep his eyes open and it’s just…been such a long…day…

In the distance, he can hear his name being called.

“Lance…Lance…. Lance --” a splash of cold water hits his face and his eyes fly open. He shoots upwards, sputtering. “God dammit, Pidge!” He says, not even having to look around to know who splashed him. This definitely isn't the first time Pidge has had to wake him up with cold water. She practically carries a cup whenever she walks into his room, out of habit.

It takes a minute for him to gather his bearings but as he situates himself on the edge of his bed he sees Pidge and Keith looking at him, one looking much more smug than the other.

Pidge is smirking. “Your tutor is here.”
Lance scowls. “He’s not my tutor.” He turns to Keith. “Hey man.”

“Hi.”

“Well, I’ll leave you to it, then. Oh and Lance, I’m pretty sure that sleeping won’t give you a passing grade.”

Lance rolls his eyes. “Thanks, Pidge.”

“No problem! Good luck.” With that, she leaves the room, and Lance is left alone with a very quiet Keith.

He takes a moment to just look at him--of course he does, he can’t let any moment with a guy that attractive go to waste. Keith looks the most casual that Lance has ever seen him, considering ninety percent of the time Keith is in a suit and the other ten percent consists of expensive black jeans and polos. But Keith is just wearing a black t-shirt and dark gray jogger, which hang off of him and bunch up in the most endearing way. His hair looks a little shaggier than usual, sticking up oddly on some of the ends because he was probably laying in bed before he came here. He offers Lance a shy smile, which, considering he was just riding Lance and screaming his name a couple days ago, seems a little uncharacteristic of him.

“Looks like you’ve been super productive.” He says sarcastically. Lance frowns.

“I can’t help it if I fall asleep. This shit is so boring.”

The situation is a little awkward. Keith moves to sit across from Lance on his bed, crossing his legs. Lance crosses his legs as well, and they face each other for a moment, subtly but not-so-subtly realizing that the last time they were on this bed they were both naked. Lance sees a small blush coloring Keith cheeks but there is still a confident expression on his face. “Yes.” He says, agreeing to Lance’s previous statement. “It’s *so* boring. Literally the worst. But it’s really easy.”

Despite having been in various compromising positions with the boy sitting across from him, he can’t help but feel most vulnerable now. “It’s not easy.” He mumbles.

“Sure it is.” Keith says, sounding a little cold. Lance can tell that he’s not really the comforting type. “It’s just common sense, but with fancy words.” Keith leans forward and grabs the textbook from Lance’s lap, scanning over it a little carelessly. “Like here, for example. ‘Market segmentation allows for factors such as demographics, phycology, product placement, positioning, and implementation to be taken into account in order for the product in question to have and maintain importance in the ever-growing market.’” Keith rolls his eyes slightly as he reads it, and then looks at Lance with a flat gaze. “Pretty much, knowing who your target market is makes your product more successful.”

Lance blinks at him. Is this the most words he has ever heard Keith speak in one sitting? It might be.

Focus, Lance.

“But how did you get there? All I heard was a bunch of words. I can’t translate it.”

“Cause you’re letting the words psyche you out. I did it all the time in school.” Keith frowns at the textbook, probably remembering something rather foul about his school experience. “But then when you actually read it, word for word, you realize it's all just a bunch of bullshit and they are just trying to make it sound more complicated than it actually is.”
Lance smirks. “Sounds like school was a blast for you.” He jokes. Keith’s face cracks into a smile, eyes still scanning the book.

“Oh yeah, the greatest.” He says sarcastically.

Lance holds his hand out. “Here, lemme try to translate something.” He says, wiggling his fingers so that Keith will give him the book. Once it’s in his hands he scans the tiny print, feeling a little nervous. He clears his throat lightly. “The positioning of a product is largely based off of company positions as well and price point logistics and the data results from researching financial and production gaps in the marketplace for new and emerging trends.”

Keith is nodding slowly when Lance looks up at him, eyes calculating as they flick across his face. Lance sighs frustratedly. “Is this about...like, where the product fits?”

Keith nods, encouraging him.

“Like, looking for new marketing opportunities based on what your competitors are doing slash not doing?”

A smile breaks across Keith’s pretty face. “You got it. Look at that. One semester worth of teaching in one night.”

“You’re a wizard.” Lance says, still a little in awe that he actually understood something out of his textbook.

“Not a wizard, just went to business school for four years. It makes you realize these things.”

“Let me try another one.”

“Go for it.”

As Lance reads another sentence from the book, he can feel the knot of nerves loosening in his stomach. Keith is just really easy to talk to, and he doesn’t know why. Sure, they’ve hung out a lot, but they’ve never really had a full conversation without some naked part of their bodies getting in the way. As he finishes his attempt at translating, he watches Keith nod enthusiastically again.

“See? Easy.”

“Amazing.”

Keith shrugs. “Not a big deal.”

“I wish I had know this all semester, I would be doing so much better. It was right in front of my face the whole time.” He runs his hands over his face. “Whatever, you live and you learn.”

Keith gives a short nod in agreement. “So, what exactly are you studying?”

Oh man, personal questions. Here we go. Keep it Vague™

“Entrepreneurship and sport journalism.” He says a little coolly. Keith hums.

“Interesting.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” He scans over the stock photo in his textbook of a woman in a pencil skirt inquisitively analyzing an apple. “What about you?”
“Oh, I studied business management.” His voice sounds a little emotionless.

“Yeah? How was that?”

Keith shrugs. “I only wanted to die about seventy percent of the time, so not entirely bad.”

A giggle bubbles out of Lance and turns into a full blown laugh when Keith smirks at him, a smug look on his face.

“Sounds promising.”

“My career is totally thriving.” Keith deadpans.

They both fall into a silence that isn’t comfortable, but isn’t really awkward either. Lance wants to ask why Keith studied business if he hates it, but it just doesn't feel like something he should do, given the circumstances. There is a promise of new conversation hanging in the air, but he doesn't take the bait. Keith sighs, long and loud. “So, can I suck your dick now?”

Lance smiles because it was only a matter of time before one of them broke down.

“Can you wait like, five minutes?”

Keith shakes his head aggressively. “Not really.”

“But...my exam…” Lance tries, but Keith is already falling onto his hands and crawling forward, crowding his space. Lance lets out a shaky breath and drops his textbook to the floor, suddenly not even caring.

Because really? How can he say no?

***

Keith leaves shortly after they finish, gathering his clothes from the floor and wishing Lance good luck on his exam. Lance just kinda nods blearily and says thank you for the help, not really clarifying if he meant the studying or the blowjob. Probably because he meant both. Keith gives him a small wave, lips still red and swollen, as he walks out the door. Lance just kind of sits for a moment, before picking his book up from the floor and continuing where he left off.

Somehow, hearing Keith's voice in his head when he reads the text makes it so much easier to understand.

***

Keith doesn't really know why he wanted to help Lance. It happened two days ago and he still couldn't really wrap his head around it. He didn't even know that Lance was still in school, and he wonders how he could have sex with someone three times and not know what they do for the other twenty two hours of their day. It's odd, and he's never done anything like it before.
But Keith really likes what they’ve got going. He went over there in sweatpants and still had an orgasm, how wild is that? If he had discovered casual flings any earlier maybe he would be a much happier person. Who knows?

Shiro managed to talk his boss into giving him the day off today, and is now sitting in one of the chairs in front of Keith’s desk, throwing a ball against the nearest wall and then catching it again.

“So how often do you see him?” He asks Keith, with a shit-eating grin on his face. Keith frowns.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

“Not today.”

“God dammit.”

“So? How often?”

Keith groans. “Why are you so into my sex life all of a sudden?”

Shiro shrugs. “This is so out of your comfort zone, I just like to watch you squirm.”

“What’s out of my comfort zone?”

“You know, casual sex.”

Keith blanches. “I’ve hooked up with people!”

“Yeah, but not for three weeks continuously, while sober.”

“Well, maybe I’ve just finally found my soulfuck.”

Shiro raises an eyebrow at him. “Your what?”

“You know, my soulmate, but just for fucking.” Keith states matter of factly.

Shiro looks at him, a shocked expression on his face, before bursting out laughing, clasping his arms over his stomach and doubling over in his chair. He puts his hands over his mouth to quiet himself down. “Soulfuck?” He repeats incredulously.

Keith scowls. “Like you could come up with something better!”

Shiro is still laughing. Keith scowls even further, blushing, and throws a packet of papers at his face. “Help me run these numbers, asshole.”

“Okay, okay fine.” Shiro says, still grinning. “It’s just adorable hearing you talk about someone like that.”

Keith flushes deeply, heart thudding in a way that only happens, or rather, happened, when Shiro complemented him. It’s so pathetic and he really needs to get it to stop doing that, but he can’t help it. He knows it’s been awhile since the whole crush thing but...Shiro should still at least try to be careful with what he says. He speaks very confidently and openly with Keith, but a small part of Keith’s head can’t help but feel that sometimes what he says pushes the boundaries a little and...it’s really not fair. Keith clears his throat. “It’s not adorable. I’m a sexual deviant.”

“Okay, Keith.” Shiro says gently. Mockingly. “Also, random question, but when do you start at the garage?”
“Tonight, thank god. I’m going to try and go right after work.”

There is a buzz at the intercom and Keith presses it. “Hello?”

His father’s secretary answers. “Keith, sir? There is a guest here for you.”

He cringes again at the use of ‘sir’. “A guest?”

“He says his name is Lance.”

Shiro and Keith look at each other, confused.

“But...it’s daytime?” Keith mouths. Shiro shrugs dramatically. “Uh, okay. Send him up.”

Low and behold, about a minute later, Lance walks into his office. He looks different than usual today. In the place of his sleeveless back hoodie he is wearing a light blue, soft cotton t-shirt and dark wash jeans. He is still sporting the same worn out, white snapback he usually does, but that is the only thing that Keith can place.

“Uh...Hi?” Keith says eloquently.

“Dude, this place looks much more impressive in the daylight!” Lance says, impressed. His eyes do their usual scan over Keith’s entire body, which Keith has noticed he does literally every time they meet. “Maybe you were right about that fancy office attraction theory.” He says flirtatiously, raising an eyebrow and stepping closer to Keith.

Shiro clears his throat loudly and Lance glances down at him. “Right, sorry. Hey, Shiro.” He says, suddenly losing a fraction of his confidence. “So, uh, Keith, Sorry to bother you…”

Keith is drinking up Lance’s appearance. He’s just so attracted to Lance that it’s hard for him to go more than a minute without touching him in some way, especially since he’s so used to just being able to. It’s not fair that it is broad daylight and Shiro is here and all the current situational factors don’t point towards office sex. He clears his throat, trying to gather his bearings as Lance’s eyes rival the blue of his t-shirt and his throat bobs attractively as he swallows.

God, he’s narrating this in his head like a bad porno.

It takes him a while to realize that Lance just said something to him. He cocks his head to the side. “What?” He asks dumbly.

Lance gives him a questioning look but the it melts into a grin, and a paper is being shoved into his face. “Look!”

Keith grabs the paper from Lance’s flailing hands and squints down at it. It looks...is this a college exam?

“Ninety two percent!” Lance whoops, throwing a fist into the air. “Suck it, Professor Ambrose! I can think like a businessman!”

Keith is lacking a lot of context for this victory, but grins nonetheless. “See? Told you it’s all bullshit.”

“Yes! You did! So I just came here to say thank you.” Lance says, eyes glinting. “This class gave me shit for so long.”

Keith shrugs, trying to get himself to stop smiling, but he can’t for some reason. “Well, not
anymore. You are officially an A minus bullshitter.” Lance laughs in response. Shiro catches Keith’s gaze and raises an eyebrow, which he ignores as he continues talking. “I’m starting at the garage today so maybe I’ll stop by.”

Lance smiles sweetly. “Cool.” He says.

“We can celebrate.”

“Yeah.”

Shiro looks back and forth between them, clearly judging.

“Well, I just wanted to update you on...” Lance shakes the paper above his head. "But I'm actually late for something so...I gotta go…”

Keith doesn’t mean to actually frown, but apparently he does, because Lance chuckles. “What, can’t wait a few more hours?” It’s lighthearted and teasing.

Keith nudges him away, pushing his shoulder lightly. “Get outta here.” He says. He can feel the smile forming on his face.

Lance winks as he turns towards the door. “See you tonight.”

Shiro groans and rolls his eyes once Lance is out of view. Keith throws another packet of papers at him.

***

Coran is underneath a car when Keith arrives at the garage. “Hello!” He hears the thick accent say. “How goes it?”

Keith looks around at the tools, the raised cars, and engine parts. Excitement buzzes through his veins. He’s actually doing this. He’s going to fix cars. “I’m good.” He says, dropping his stuff in a corner where it looks like all the workers drop their stuff.

Coran takes a deep breath as he rolls out from under the car, sitting up and looking at Keith. “Alright, boy. There isn’t anything too exciting going on today, sorry. But we do have a tire that needs to be replaced and an oil change in aisle three. It the red and silver cars just there.” He points to two cars a couple aisles down. “Those are the most pressing. Need to be done by closing tonight so, get those done first and then I can give you something else.” He points to the wall behind Keith. “All the hand tools you’ll need are behind you on that wall, and more specialized tools are against the back wall next to aisle two.” He looks Keith up and down. “You got all that?”

Keith nods eagerly, rolling his sleeves up and making his way to the third aisle. His fingertips are tingling, desperate to start. He kneels down and examines the tire that needs to be replaced, before taking a deep breath, and getting to work.

There are so many hours of research and practice that have led up to this. Keith used to spend countless hours on the computer, in the public library, just reading, and sketching, and building models. Engineering had always fascinated him. It still does. He tries to picture what his parents would say if they walked into this garage. He can see his mother's powdered nose wrinkling in
disgust. He can almost hear his father telling him to get out before he contracts a disease.

Oh well. He's here, and he's still alive. So fuck it.

Two hours pass within minutes. He finishes the first two tasks during the first half hour and Coran looks at him, a little shocked, before giving him something a little more complex to do. Keith rolls himself underneath a dull, gray car and starts tinkering with the parts, thrilled to see that he recognizes every component that he can touch. The smell of gasoline and motor oil fill his nose, and this is how he always imagined it would be like. It brings him a joy that he was never able to find anywhere else. Building things, fixing things, making things better, getting his hands dirty for a cause, this is what he loves. What he wants to do.

Before he knows it, Coran is tapping his knee saying, “I’m thrilled you’re enjoying yourself, but I gotta close up now.”

Keith pauses. There’s no way that was four hours. How has it already been four hours? “Oh, okay.” He gets up and dusts himself off. “Thanks, Coran.”

Coran nods “You surprised me today, nice job.”

Satisfaction warms Keith’s cheeks, “Thank you.”

“Now go get yourself cleaned up, you look like you just bathed in gasoline.”

Keith laughs. “Will do.”

***

After changing his shirt and uselessly trying to wash the motor oil smudged on his face, Keith saunters over to Lance’s house, which is actually only about a five minute walk. He doesn’t quite know if Lance was serious about him coming over tonight, but he figures neither of them would say no to a quickie before he heads home. He taps softly on the blue, faded front door when he arrives.

Lance opens the door, looking a little surprised. His hair is slightly damp and his face looks soft to the touch, freshly showered. “Keith! I didn’t think you’d actually come.”

Keith shrugs, stepping inside. He breathes in the very familiar smell of Lance’s deodorant, which he likes a little too much. He should ask what it is. Maybe he can get it for himself? “I was in the area.”

“Cool, cool.” Lance says, doing the Full Body Scan™ that he does every. Single. Time. “Damn, looking good.” He mutters appreciatively. “Car garage looks nice on you.” The smirk on his face has Keith both turned on and slightly impatient. He takes two steps towards Lance, mumbling something along the lines of “stop being annoying and just kiss me already” Just as he is about to properly pounce on him, he hears Pidge’s voice from the other room.

“Lance, it’s ready!”

Lance jumps excitedly, nose knocking painfully against Keith’s. Keith yelps and then scowls, covering his face with his hands. “Ow!”
“The Nintendo is ready ohmygod--!” Lance hands clap together and he dashes into the living room. Keith looks around awkwardly at the room around him that is now empty, then sighs a little frustratedly and follows Lance.

When he enters the room, Lance is planted on the floor with a controller in his hand. He looks up at Keith with large, eager eyes. “Look, Pidge found a Nintendo 64 at Goodwill yesterday and it works!” He shouts excitedly. “Wanna play me?”

Keith feels like he stands in awkward silence for way too long. Video games? When he’s this turned on? “I really, uh, only had a bit of time so...I might just head home--”

“Oh come on, Keith. Just one game. You’re going to lose anyway, so it won't take too long.”

“And I play the winner!” Pidge says.

“Deal!” Lance shouts excitedly.

Keith sighs, studying Lance’s (very pretty) face. Lance is wearing black sweats and a thin, gray, zip-up jacket, clearly with nothing underneath. It looks effortless in the best way. Keith bites his lip. “Can I at least have some incentive?”

“Uh, yeah, if you win then you'll be beating the number one mario kart player in the country.” Lance says dramatically, pointing to himself like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

Keith sends him a flat stare, unamused.

“Okay, fine, I’ll suck your dick too. But only because I’m the best fuckbuddy ever.”

It’s the first time that either of them have put a label on whatever is going on between them, and it sounds pretty fitting, so Keith doesn’t argue. He debates bringing up the word ‘soulfuck’ again but promptly decides that maybe he should keep that ingenious creation to himself.

With a smile, he plants himself on the floor next to Lance. “Pidge, a controller, please?”

Pidge snorts and rolls her eyes. “For the record, whatever’s going on here is probably gross.”

Lance chucks a pillow at her. “If you’re not playing, then no talking. Hey Keith, ready to get your ass beat?”

Keith blinks at him.

“In...in Mario kart. Keith. Jesus.” He adds, shaking his head and laughing. Keith feels himself blushing, and chuckles nervously. “Oh.”

Pidge groans. “I’m going to get some chips.” She says, hopping off the couch and walking out of the room.

Keith has been over a few times now and Pidge realized a while ago that there was something “going on” between him and Lance. She hasn’t asked any questions, but whenever Keith comes in through the front door she looks at him skeptically before starting a conversation.

“Man I wish Hunk was here.” Lance says. “He always takes chips to the next level. He melts cheese and crushes peppers and man...is it good. Sucks that he’s never here when you are, you never get to try his cooking.”

Keith hums, watching the screen load. Hunk. The elusive third roommate who is never home.
Why does that name sound so familiar to him?

The main menu loads and the music starts playing. The tune is heavy with nostalgia and Keith is instantly reminded of being six years old in his second foster home. All of the older kids played mario kart during the day and never let him near it, so at night he would sneak into the living room and play by himself, always making sure the volume was below three notches.

He shakes his head, brought back to the present by Lance’s voice. “Bowser? Oh my god you are so predictable.”

Keith scowls. “Don’t even try to deny that he is the coolest character.”

“Okay, maybe he’s cool, but I always go for the underdog. I just have a big heart like that.”

Keith scoffs. “Oh yeah? And who is the underdog?”

“Obviously Luigi.”

“You play with Luigi and you’re making fun of me?” He feels Lance smack his shoulder.

“Disrespecting the underdog? You oughta be ashamed of yourself.” He tuts and shakes his head.

“Don’t you dare pick rainbow road.”

“Of course I’m going to pick rainbow road, what kind of pussy do you take me for? We’re going all the way tonight, man.”

Keith pauses, turning to look at him.

“In the game, Keith. Jesus, your head must be drowning in the gutter.”

“I can’t help it! I just associate everything you say with sex.”

“Fair enough.” Lance says casually, shrugging. Keith doesn’t even have to look at him to see the smug smile on his face.

***

This is really, really fun.

For the record, Keith is only just realizing that he’s never really had many friends his own age. Shiro is older than him, and, quite frankly, one of the only friends he’s ever had. So playing video games with a boy who was born in the same year as him is a luxury that he never, ever had growing up.

He’s not quite calling Lance a friend. He barely knows anything about the guy, except for what he likes in bed, but...at least in this moment, he can pretend that’s what it is.

Lance is shouting at the TV and cursing in what Keith believes to be Spanish, but he’s talking so fast that it’s hard to tell. By the looks of it, Keith is going to win. Lance is losing his mind. Pidge is laughing hysterically on the couch behind them.

It turns out all those years of practice in the middle of the night paid off.
When Bowser crosses the finish line in first place, Lance lets out a shriek that makes Keith jump. “No! *Hija de puta* no no no! *How*?”

Keith is laughing along with Pidge now, clutching his stomach and trying to catch his breath. Lance is still cursing in Spanish as he tosses the controller in Pidge’s direction so she can play. She swats it away.

“I change my mind. That was a perfect way to end the night. I’ll just play you tomorrow.” She says, wiping tears from her eyes and hooping off of the couch.

Lance sighs, loudly and dramatically, as he stands up. Keith follows suit, standing up and stretching out his legs. A few beats of awkward silence pass where they just look at each other. Then Keith says. “Guess you owe me now.”

Lance scowls at him. “You think I’m going to suck your dick after you single handedly destroyed my dignity?”

“What? But that was the deal!” Keith defends, exasperated. “I won! Dignity be damned!”

Lance looks like he’s attempting an angry face but then dissolves into giggles. “Fine, fine. But it was my decision.”

“Whatever you say.” Keith says, scoffing as he rolls his eyes. Lance is already smiling slyly as he locks the door and drops to his knees.

“Oh. Right here?”

“Pidge’ll be gone for a bit…” Lance looks up at him, confidence shining in his eyes. “Besides, this won’t take long.” He winks.

Keith lets out a shaky sigh as Lance begins to mouth him through his pants. “God, I’ve been needing this all day.” Keith mumbles, tangling his fingers into Lance’s short hair.

“Mmm.” Lance hums. “Long day?” Jeans fall to his ankles. Lance’s mouth drags over the outline of Keith’s cock through his briefs.

“Yeah…” Keith breathes. “Yeah, really tiring…”

The last layer of fabric falls. “Well…glad I can make it better.” Lance’s tongue is on the tip, swirling lightly. Teasing.

“Yeah.” Keith gasps. “Yeah me too.”

***

Keith leaves Lance’s house with weak, wobbly legs and an extra bag of chips.
Four

Chapter Summary

Lance starts catching some subtle feels

Chapter Notes

i have so many important ideas for the plot, like outside of their relationship, but i just want to develop their relationship a little more before the story starts getting...more involved. especially with the other characters like pidge, hunk, coran, and allura. theyre coming i promise.

lance is a fucking dork.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“See that guy? He’s probably had a total of four shots of vodka. My guess is he’s trying to gather the courage to talk to that woman in the red pencil skirt.”

Keith is leaning against the makeshift bar at yet another networking event, turning his head slightly to try and subtly hear what the bartender is saying. It’s the same bartender that was at the last couple of events; the broad shouldered, kind-eyed, hefty guy with dark brown hair. Keith feels extremely guilty that he has already forgotten his name from the first time they met, and feels like it’s too late now to ask again without it being super rude.

“Four shots? That’s gotta be at least six mixed drinks.”

“Yeah, he’s been up here a few times.”

Keith, on average, usually goes to about two of these events every week. According to his father, that is the “perfect amount of exposure” for someone his age who is “getting into the industry.”

The new bartender is now at almost every event, probably because he is a recent hire and wants a lot of hours, so Keith talks with him most of the time instead of actually networking. It probably isn’t the most responsible thing to do, but this guy is actually super funny, really genuine, and really entertaining.

“Oh my god, look, he’s going over to her.” The bartender says excitedly.

“Oh my god, look, he’s going over to her.” The bartender says excitedly.

“Holy shit, you really think he’s going to do it?”

“I don’t know, man. Looks like it.”

They both watch in horror as the short, plump, balding man drunkenly trips over to the attractive woman, who couldn’t be older than twenty five, and starts fumbling over his words and stumbling around her in an attempt to charm her. Keith holds a hand up to his mouth, trying to suppress his laughter. “Oh my god he actually did it.”
“This poor man.”

“What an ass.” Keith chuckles.

“Yeah, I’m sure this isn’t one of his best moments.”

The woman splashes her red wine all over his face and walks away in a huff, leaving the man stunned and quite angry. They both groan in sympathy.

“What do you think he said to her?” Keith asks.

The bartender shrugs, returning his attention back to the handle of whiskey he was pouring. “I don’t know, but he told me he was going to lie about his dog dying to make himself seem vulnerable.”

“Oh wow. He told you that?”

“At about five drinks in, yeah.”

Keith laughs, and the bartender sends him a goofy grin. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see his father approaching the bar.

His father smiles kindly at the bartender. “I’ll take a glass of white, please.”

The bartender nods. “Coming right up, sir.” He turns around and busies himself with the request. Keith can feel his father looking at him.

“So, meet anyone new tonight?”

Keith points to the bartender. “This guy.” He says, jokingly. When his father levels him with an unamused face, he clears his throat. “Also, the marketing manager for IT Solutions. And a few lawyers from our partner firm.”

He gets a smile in reply. “Great. I’m proud of you. I know this isn’t your favorite thing to do.”

Keith feels guilt in the pit of his stomach. His father, really and truly, wants him to be happy. To be successful. It’s hard sometimes to see this side of him, but whenever it does come out, Keith can’t help but feel like he is cheating everyone who loves him. He attempts a smile back. ‘It’s not too bad.” He lies.

His father pats his shoulder and picks up the glass of wine, raising it up to Keith as a way of saying bye. Then he disappears back into the crowd.

When he turns around, the bartender is looking at him strangely. “You know, I’ve never really seen that man smile?” He says, in reference to Keith’s hard-ass father.

Keith feels warmth pooling in his cheeks. “He smiles, pretty sparingly though. But that’s how you know he means it.”

***

Stripping down to worn out jeans and a loose, black cotton tank top is probably Keith’s favorite
part of the day. Not only because it is heaven to get out of his constricting work suit, but because it means that he gets to go work at the car garage for the evening.

His parents haven’t started asking questions yet, but Keith can tell he has piqued their curiosity, and he can only go out for so many “dinners with Shiro” before they realize something is up. He leaves the house silently, shutting the door softly behind him and walking down the long, winding driveway to his car.

The drive is starting to get easier. It used to feel really long, but now he knows the area well. The narrow roads and cracked asphalt don’t quite put him off as much as they used to. He remembers the first time he ended up on that side of town—the first time he met Lance. Really, it was only about a month and a half ago. But for some reason, it feels like years.

Keith sighs. He hasn’t really seen Lance in a while. They’ve both been way too busy, which is a bit of a bummer, because Keith could really use a good…time. Like, he could really really use one. His right hand used to be great but now that he’s got a taste of what he can have with Lance, nothing feels quite as nice.

Out of curiosity, he shoots Lance a text asking if he is doing anything tonight. His phone buzzes almost immediately.

Lance

you should come over because i seriously miss ur mouth dude

Keith raises an eyebrow at his phone. Another buzz.

And i got this new lube that has like a cooling sensation or sumtin so obviously we need to try it

He laughs loudly in the empty car.

Keith

Aren’t those like super expensive

Lance

Yeah. oh that reminds me. ur buying the lube next time
Keith snorts.

**Keith**

*Gotcha. I’ll come over after work*

**Lance**

*Hell yes. Sweaty keith is the besttttt*

**Keith**

*you are so embarrassing*

**Lance**

*Whatever. Hurry up and finish working*

Keith rolls his eyes, chuckling to himself. Lance is really one of the most ridiculous people ever. He gets out of his car and greets Coran at the door, who looks excited to see him.

“I’ve got a lot on the schedule for you today!” He chirps. Keith grins.

“Bring it on.”

***

By the time his shift is over, he is exhausted, muscles aching all over and body covered in countless unknown toxic substances. He looks at himself in the dirty, peeling mirror of the garage port-a-potty and curses, trying to smooth down his frazzled hair and wipe his face. How the hell is he going to get laid looking like this?

“Hey Coran?” He asks, when he gets back to the office. “Do you have like...a stick of gum or
something?"

Coran raises an eyebrow at him. “Why yes, I do! Got big plans tonight?” He’s joking, but Keith just shrugs.

“Not huge, but I don’t want to smell like something died in my mouth.” He reaches out and snatches the small piece of gum from Coran’s hands. “Thanks.”

“Have fun with your not huge plans!” Coran calls behind him, and Keith can swear there is some kind of teasing in his voice.

***

Lance’s door is unlocked, which he told Keith it would be, and Keith pads into the living room tiredly, glancing around for any sign of the tall, lanky boy. He finds him in the kitchen, with a naked torso and loose, plaid pajama pants sitting low on his hips. He is stirring a cup of pudding and looking at it with disgust plain on his face, nose wrinkled and mouth turned downwards in a frown as he sniffs it. When he sees Keith, he startles a little, laughing breathlessly. “Oh shit, I didn’t hear you come in. Hey, man.” Full Body Scan™. “You look amazing” He says in a low voice.

Keith snorts incredulously, staring down at himself. “You can’t possibly be serious.”

“You don’t think you do?”

“I’m covered in dirt.”

“Yeah.” Lance says, looking confused. “Exactly.”

“It’s gross.” Keith says bluntly.

“What do you mean? It’s totally hot.”

“Do you have like, a weird thing for car mechanics?”

“I mean, probably.” Lance taps his finger to his chin. “Or maybe just guys who get their hands dirty.” He says thoughtfully, like he’s never thought about it.

“I think you have a handyman kink.” Keith teases.

Lance shrugs. “I’ve never thought about it. Although…” His eyes dart across Keith face briefly. “Actually come to think of it, I might.”

“Wait, really? I was joking.”

“I slept with the guy who came here to fix the toilet once…” Lance says, eyes widening in realization. “And the A/C guy!”

“Oh my god you have a problem.” Keith giggles. “An actual problem.”

“Oh my god I really do.”

“They’re just tightening some screws, how is that hot?”
Lance shrugs. Keith watches the muscles move in his bare shoulders. “I don’t know man, it gets me going though.”

Keith laughs, short and loud, covering his hands with his face. “I can’t handle this right now.”

“Shall we just get to it then?” Lance asks playfully, stepping in closer.

“Well I guess. I’m literally a walking embodiment of your biggest kink.”

“Oh don’t flatter yourself.” Lance jokes, voice lowering. One more step in. “The A/C guy was much taller.”

Keith blushes, slightly irritated by that. “Oh yeah?” He snaps.

Lance’s eyes darken. “Yeah...really strong too.” He lifts a hand to run his fingers along Keith’s jaw.

Keith swallows, flustered, but still scowling. “I’m sure he was.”

Lance leans forward, his lips only a breath away. “Made me come twice...” He whispers, a smug smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth.

A snarl leaves Keith’s mouth that he didn’t even know he was holding in. It surprises them both, but Lance only breathes out a laugh, the puff of air hitting Keith’s lips lightly. Keith’s face heats up even more, the proximity becoming dizzying. “Bet he doesn’t ride you like I do.” He says roughly, suddenly feeling oddly possessive.

Lance chuckles; a low, throaty sound that makes goosebumps rise all over Keith’s body. “Not a chance.” He whispers.

Their lips meet.

***

Lance is so turned on. It been way too long since Keith has been over, really, because the second he saw him with his smudged, dirty skin and shaggy hair it was like he couldn’t control himself. And when Keith’s face started screwing into an angry, pouty expression at the mention of Craig (the A/C guy), it went right to his dick. He didn’t realize that Keith was so easy to piss off, and he files the knowledge into the back of his mind for future use. Sexual use, of course.

Because now Keith is kissing him so roughly that he feels his lips might bruise, and normally he doesn’t like it too rough but for some reason it’s really hot when Keith does it. He tugs hard at Lance’s hair, making his head tilt back so he can attach himself harshly to his neck. Lance feels the moan ripping through his throat before it actually happens, and then before he can enjoy the sensation of Keith’s tongue below his jaw, their lips are pressed together again. Lance breathes away the dizzying feeling and wraps his arms around Keith’s waist, pressing their bodies together, He feels Keith’s tongue push into his mouth and...and-- wait a minute.

“Ahhhhhhyyyyyyyy!” Lance pushes Keith away roughly. “Ew, ew, no!”


“What is that?” Lance asks, disgusted.
“What is what? That’s my tongue, you dickwad!”

“No, that taste!”

Keith’s face falls into one of utter confusion. “Are you kiddi-- what taste?”

“You taste like spearmint!” Lance says accusingly.

Keith is panting, chest heaving as he stares at Lance with wild eyes. “What?”

“Did you just eat something minty?”

“I mean--I had, like, a stick of gum, ten minutes ago--”

“Noooo, oh no, Keith. I hate spearmint.” Lance whines, putting a hand on his stomach. “It makes me so sick.”

Keith is looking at him like he has three heads. “Excuse me?”

“Your tongue! It tastes like spearmint! Ughhh.” He shudders, leaning back against the counter.

Keith bristles. “Oh my god. Lance, can’t we talk about this later? I’m like, really hard right now.” He says impatiently. Lance looks at him and sees the flush coloring his cheeks, the strong arms crossed in front of his chest.

“I can’t kiss you. Literally, I’ll barf.” Lance replies sadly. “It’s been that way since I was a kid.”

Keith’s shocked expression holds for a few more moments before he sighs defeatedly. “Well, what do you want me to do about it?”

“There’s some expired pudding on the table.”

“Lance.”

“I don’t know! Just eat something else! There might be some leftover mac’n’cheese in the fridge.”

Keith shakes his head, muttering “I can’t fucking believe this” and something else about Coran and skipping the gum next time. He walks over to the fridge and opens it, scanning its contents with a frustrated look on his face. Lance tries to drink up how his pale, creamy skin looks bathed in the yellow refrigerator light--his sharp features softened and his raven-black hair shining with warmth.

He grabs something out of the fridge, which looks like the mac’n’cheese tupperware, and opens it.

“Ew, aren’t you going to heat it up?” Keith shoots him a death glare, dark eyes piercing. Lance holds his hands up in surrender. “Okay, okay, sorry.”

He searches the drawers for a fork and shovels the mac’n’cheese into his mouth, appearing angrier with every bite. His thick, dark eyebrows are scrunched together so hard that it looks painful. A few moments of somewhat tense silence go by. But after watching a noodle fall from Keith's mouth and onto the counter, Lance can’t hold it in anymore. With a fairly unattractive snort, he bursts into laughter. “I’m sorry--” he gasps in between giggles. “--you’re just so fucking ridiculous.”

Keith watches him, glowering. Finally, his angry expression melts, ever so slowly, and then he is snorting a laugh too, mouth still filled with mac’n’cheese. “Fuck you” he mumbles through a mouthful of noodles. “This is all your fault!”
Lance walks over to where Keith is standing, still laughing. “You're eating cold noodles just to make out with me.” He says. He means it to be teasing but his voice sounds oddly gentle when it comes out of his mouth.

Keith shrugs, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. It shouldn't be attractive but it is. There is some discomfort, clear on his face, and he chews and swallows.

“You probably could've just drank some lemonade but I’m loving your commitment to your decision.” Lance mocks, opening the fridge and pointing to the huge gallon of juice in plain sight. Keith grits his teeth.

“You’re the worst. Can we please make out now?”

Lance giggles, stepping forward. He lifts a hand to Keith’s lips, tugging at the bottom one gently with his thumb, watching them fall open slightly at his touch. He takes a moment to revel in how soft they are underneath his fingertips. For someone who looks like he’s never even heard of skincare in his life, Keith’s lips and cheeks are surprisingly smooth.

“I have to taste first.” Lance says, as he leans closer.

“Wha--taste? Taste what?”

“Your tongue. Come on, keep up, Keith.”

“That’s...really weird.”

“Open up.”

“This is super gross, Lance.”

“Wide open, like this! Ahhhh.” Lance open his mouth and Keith swats his head.

“No way in hell I’m doing that.”

“Well, guess we can’t make out then.”

Keith shrugs. “It’s okay, you can still suck my dick.”

“Not if I dont give consent.” Lance says, looking away and crossing his arms dramatically.

“Conse--are you kidding me?” Keith sputters. Lance cracks one eye open and looks at Keith, giving him a shit eating grin. “Oh my god, fine.” He sighs, exasperated. Then, looking incredibly uncomfortable with a deep flush on his face, he pokes the tip of his tongue out of his closed lips. He rolls his eyes and Lance giggles at his expression, feeling somewhat powerful in the situation.

He leans forward and cups Keith’s face in his hands, tilting his head a notch as he gets closer, face hovering just a breath away. An impatient groan rumbles in Keith's throat and Lance finally darts his tongue out, swiping it across the top of Keith’s lightly and chucking when Keith jumps a little.

“Nah, you taste fine now.” Lance says, smiling. “Taste like Keith again.”

Keith's face softens. “Oh.” He says, eyebrows turned upwards in surprise. Surprised by what, Lance doesn't know. But it's a gentle expression that Lance has very rarely seen on Keith's typically grumpy face. “Okay, that's good...I guess.”

“So we can make out now.” Lance replies. “You have been approved.”
“Thank god. Please never make me do that again.”

Lance smirks. “Please. I didn't make you do anything.”

Keith's soft expression is long gone now, mouth pressed in a thin line and eyes burning holes into Lance’s head. “Can we please kiss now?”

“Hell yeah.” Lance grabs his wrist and they start walking towards his room. “I think Pidge is coming home soon so we're going to have to be quiet.”

Keith snorts. “I'm never loud.”

“Are you kidding me? I'm surprised nobody has called the police yet, with all your screaming.”

“I don't scream!” Keith snaps back. Lance shuts the door and they both fall into the bed. In seconds, Lance is on top of Keith, licking a stripe up his neck. Keith mumbles something like “finally” but Lance barely hears because whenever he gets this close to Keith he really doesn't think properly. Keith is just an unholy mix of paradoxes; he is covered in dirt but smells like expensive soap, he has a bitter personality but tastes sweet, and he is rough around the edges but somehow feels so soft. It makes Lance dizzy. He laps his tongue underneath Keith's ear and revels in the squirming it causes.

“I'm not that loud.” Keith mumbles, still on the topic. Lance chuckles against his neck. “You are. It's okay, it's really hot.” He raises himself by his arms, hands on either side of Keith's head, and smirks down at him. “Like, really hot.”

Keith is blushing, pulling a concerned face and refusing to meet Lance’s eyes. That's...actually really cute. “Really?” He asks.

“Oh, fuck off.”

They spend a somewhat awkward moment just looking at each other. It's something that they never really give themselves any time to do, Lance realizes. Then Keith lets out a breath. “Okay this is fun and all but I really want you to fuck me.”

Lance laughs, reaching down and slipping his hand underneath Keith's waistband. Keith's back arches slightly off the bed, a sigh of relief falling from his lips.

“So impatient.” Lance teases.

“Oh, fuck off.”

“Gonna be honest, man. Didn't feel much of that cooling sensation.”
They are sprawled out on Lance’s bed, legs tangled and chests heaving, staring at the ceiling. Lance’s head is buzzing from his very recent orgasm and he giggles a little when Keith breaks the silence. “Yeah I didn't feel it either. Too bad. That shit was expensive.”

Keith frowns. “I mean, maybe I felt it a little…”

“Nah.”

“Yeah, not really.”

“Still felt great though. And it was completely free of spearmint.”

Keith groans, covering his face with his hands as Lance laughs. “You suck.” He says.

Lance turns his body to face Keith. “Your dick? Or just in general?”

Keith shakes his head, smiling and still facing the ceiling. Lance takes note that his eyelashes are longer than he's seen on any of the guys he's slept with. They curl a little and bunch up just like the hair on his head.

A very unnecessary and rather inconvenient discovery that makes him feel a little too warm.

“What are you looking at?” Keith asks, a little cautiously. He doesn't move to look at Lance, he just says it into the open air, eyes still scanning the ceiling tiles.

“Nothing.” Lance lies. “Just thinking about food. Wanna order a pizza or something?”

Keith sighs. “Kinda full from the mac’n’cheese if I'm being honest.”

“But that was like three bites!” Lance exclaims.

Keith shrugs. “Probably gave me food poisoning though.” His lips quirk upwards into a smile.

“Yeah it was really old.”

“So what's the spearmint story, then?” Keith asks, finally turning to Lance so that they are face to face.

Lance laughs. “It's really stupid.”

“Let's hear it.”

He clears his throat. “Well, I was...seven, I think? On family vacation. We were in Jamaica. And it was really fun, like, we had a super good time, but in the airport back home our plane got delayed for like, nine hours. I was feeling sick, and I didn't know why. Turns out it was because I had some funky chicken at lunch. Anyway, we sat in our gate with absolutely no A/C and just fried for hours. I ended up throwing up like three times. My sister had this pack of spearmint gum and I would eat some every time I barfed to get rid of the gross taste. But now whenever I taste it I just associate it with vomiting.”

Keith's nose wrinkles in disgust. “Sounds like a nightmare.”

“It seriously sucked.” Lance chuckles.

“But spearmint is my favorite mint.”
“Seriously? Even more than peppermint?”

“Peppermint is gross.”

“Blasphemy.”

Keith scoffs, changing the subject. “You know, maybe we can lightly chill the lube for next time.”

“Lightly chill the lube?”

Keith shrugs. “Yeah, you know, like how people chill champagne and stuff?”

Lance can feel the smile spreading across his face and doesn’t even bother trying to control it.

“Chilled champagne? Sounds like a rich person thing.” He teases.

“I mean...it makes it taste better.”

“I haven’t had any alcohol worth more than seven dollars in years.”

Keith laughs bitterly. “I can bring some over next time.”

The repeated words ‘next time’ leave a surprising, steady flutter in Lance’s stomach that unsettles him. “Okay, sure.” He says.

At the slight change in mood, Keith gets up, groaning and cracking his neck in the attractive way he always does after sex. Lance stands up too, stretching out his back and listening to it crack. It’s the best way loosen his muscles after a good fuck, so he does it all the time. He doesn’t miss how Keith’s eyes track the movement, flitting over the length of his body before returning to the floor. “Shit, it’s really late.” He mumbles, glancing at his expensive watch.

“Got important plans tomorrow?” Lance asks.

“Somewhat. Gotta go into work early tomorrow. Do all the shit I didn’t get done today before my dad finds out.”

A million questions linger on Lance’s tongue—all things that he really shouldn’t care about, but really wants to know. He wonders about Keith’s family, his job, what his house is like. Everything about Keith screams ‘stuffy business man’ which kept Lance away for so long. After spending all this time with him, Lance isn’t so sure his initial assumption was correct at all. How does Keith manage to be so different from every other businessman he’s met?

Instead of asking his multitude of questions, Lance remembers his place. “Yeah, I’ve gotta be up early too.” He says, eyeing the worn out basketball in the corner of his room. “Really early.”

Keith studies his expression for a moment. “Guess we should call it a night then?”

“Yeah, okay.”

Keith gathers his clothes and they make their way to the door. Lance laughs as Keith trips trying to put his pants back on. When they reach the front of the house, Keith is sloppily dressed, and sends Lance a small wave before ducking into his car and backing out of the driveway.

The expensive cologne lingers on Lance’s bedsheets.
Keith doesn’t know where the fuck Lance gets his deodorant but he needs a bottle of it immediately, because it smells so incredibly good. He can feel the scent clinging to his hair, the collar of his shirt, the hem of his pants. He breathes it in the entire ride home, feeling a little deranged at the pleasure he gets from it.

Chapter End Notes

i have no idea why anybody would find me interesting outside of this website but ive gotten a lot of requests for my tumblr so it is @dimplesandcurlsss. Most of it is klance with small bouts of me crying about Harry styles and missing 1D (the first bat-shit crazy fandom to introduce me to fan fiction) so message me on there or whatever! id love to hear from you. we can freak out about klance together
Five

Chapter Summary

Keith has issues.

Chapter Notes

okay people i know it may seem like i don't have a life because i literally just posted a chapter, but the truth is i have a job that suCKS (the inspiration for Keith's character) and i just sit at a desk all day doing nothing so I just write this lol. gives me a lot of time to write and im really liking this story?

I didn't tag Sheith in this fic because there is no Sheith. No Sheith happens! Its just an unrequited crush on Keith's end but absolutely nothing romantic or sexual happens between them. Also, in this fic, Keith is 22 and not a minor anyway.

One more thing! I know that in some cases keith (or Lance) may seem like a lil bitch but i wanted to create them with some serious character flaws that they'll have to work through as the story goes on so..dont hate them yet lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith considers himself a pretty level headed person, but he hasn’t always been that way. When he was younger, his temper almost always got the best of him. His foster families definitely did not know how to deal with his anger issues, and fed into them more than anything. By third grade he was already getting into fist fights and by sixth grade he had resorted to throwing furniture. His temperamental nature was definitely not viewed kindly by his current family, and they had him taking anger management classes (as well as table manner classes, although he would never tell anyone that) every weekend for about two years.

That is why now, after several months of deep breathing exercises and sometimes punching walls, Keith does in fact consider himself a very level headed person.

That is, of course, until something makes him mad.

“I’m dating someone.”

Keith nearly spits out his drink as Shiro says it. They are at a small cafe getting breakfast before work and Shiro is nervously playing with his croissant, not meeting Keith’s eyes. Keith takes a big gulp of his black coffee and tries for a different reaction. “Excuse me?” Nice, Keith.

Shiro has a faint blush on his cheeks and Keith hears the voice in his head screaming about how adorable it is before he can stop it. He usually does stop it in time, but apparently not today. The older man clears his throat, looking more uncomfortable than Keith has seen him in years. “I’ve been dating someone.” He repeats. “A girl named Allura.”
“Allura?” Keith doesn’t mean to sound snippy but it sure as hell comes out that way. “Who is that? Do I know her?”

“No. I met her at a networking event a couple months ago. She works at a partnering firm. We’ve been going out for...about two months now...” Shiro says sadly. “I just didn’t...know how to tell you.”

“Two months ?”

“She is really sweet, and quite beautiful. Very tough though...reminds me of you sometimes.”

Keith can physically feel something inside of him breaking at the words. “Me ?” He says, sounding lost. And then. “Months?”

“Yeah.” Shiro sighs. “It been a few months now.”

Keith looks down at his half-eaten bagel, feeling the familiar sensation of angry tears burning behind his eyes. He blinks them away. He’s not going to cry in front of Shiro.

Not again.

“Keith.” Shiro says, voice gentle. Apologetic. “Please try to understand, I never wanted to keep it from you. I just wasn’t sure how…” His voice trails off. A pang of frustration tugs at Keith’s chest.

“You...” He can feel the lump beginning to form in his throat, which for him, doesn’t really always mean crying. It can really mean anything. Frustration can take on just about any form when he is involved. “You didn’t tell me?”

Shiro looks defeated, but bristles a little at the comment. “Keith, come on...you know why I didn’t.”

Just like that, something in Keith’s heart just snaps. The lump in his throat decides what form it wants to take. Frustration makes it’s way to his face with an angry frown, and Keith grits his teeth, already regretting the words he is about to say. “Are you kidding me ?” He spits, standing up and glaring down at Shiro. “You spend months teasing me about a guy I’m sleeping with and all the while you’re fucking around with some girl and leaving me in the dark?”

Shiro looks like he expected this, but frowns anyway. “Keith--”

“I don’t give a shit if you thought you were doing the right thing.” Keith says, raising his voice. Some people in the coffee shop are starting to look. “You knew this would hurt me! Deep down, you knew . But you did it anyway. That’s not the right thing , Shiro. That’s cowardly .”

“Keith, please--”

Keith can feel the irrational anger rising in his chest, but fuck breathing techniques, because the heartbreak caused from years of rejection just seems to be showing up now, like reopening a wound. It burns like acid in his chest. “So what made you finally decide to tell me now, huh? Things are probably getting serious. I bet they are. You love her, don’t you?” His voice cracks at the word ‘love’ and Shiro looks mortified.

“People are staring.” He says, anger seeping into his tone as well.

“You thought it was okay to tell me now because I’ve got somebody to distract me? You think you
did the *kind* thing, making sure I was fucking somebody before you broke the news? It falls like poison from Keith’s lips.

Shiro looks angry now, standing up and leaning forward, hands braced on the table. “I thought you’d moved on, Keith.” He snaps. “You can’t blame me for how you feel!”

Keith flares his nostrils, and angry snarl twisting onto his face. “I have moved on!” He growls. This time the tears are filling his eyes and he knows he can’t blink them away.

Because has he? Has he really?

Shiro’s face softens. “Jesus Christ, Keith…”

“Just leave me alone.” He mutters through his clenched jaw, crumpling his napkin and chucking it onto the table.

“Keith, look, I’m sure if you meet her--”

“Don’t even bother.” He snaps, throat burning as the first few tears fall. “I’ve gone this long without meeting her, haven’t I?” It sounds bitter. He doesn’t care. “I’m done with you, Shiro.”

He watches Shiro’s face crumble, from angry to shocked to heartbroken, and his chest clenches but the hollow feeling left from years of unrequited love just makes it equally as satisfying.

He storms out of the cafe and swears to himself that he will never, ever, feel this way about anyone again.

***

“Hello?” Lance’s voice sounds very confused, and a little cautious, as he answers the phone.

“Where are you?” Keith asks, attempting and failing to sound casual. The words come out urgent and angry.

“Um... Keith? I mean it's 8AM on a Monday. I’m at work, dude.”

“Where do you work.”

The line is silent for a bit, just soft static filling Keith's ear. Then Lance says. “Why?”

It kind of hits Keith at that moment that this may not be a good idea, but the anger is still pounding in his brain, making his head spin, and he has never really been one to ignore his impulses.

“Had a really bad morning.”

“Already? But it's only eight.” Lance teases, completely unaware of Keith's current state of distress. Keith can practically hear his smirk.

“Yeah.” Keith replies, not really sure if he wants to put lance through this. He is an innocent party, after all. “Is there any way I could come see you?”

“Uh…” Lance sounds truly conflicted. “I mean...I guess I could take my lunch break now?” He
says unconvincingly.

“Great. Where are you?”

Lance chuckles a little incredulously. “I’m at the Life Fitness on fifth.”

“Okay see you.”

“Uh, okay.”

Keith hangs up and get in his car, ignoring the heavy thudding in his chest and the persistent tears filling his eyes.

No way in hell he’s going to work today.

***

Lance is standing behind the front desk wearing a dark gray sleeveless hoodie that zips up in the front. He’s got his dirty, white Snapback on backwards and a tuft of his hair sticks out of the hole above his forehead. When he looks up from his computer and sees Keith he raises an eyebrow, a slight smile playing on his lips.

“Hello sir, can I see you card please?”

Keith leans onto the counter, shooting him an unamused look. “Hi.” He says, not really feeling like bantering.

Lance must notice because he drops the act. “Hey Shay, I’m gonna take my hour now. You good here?”

The girl at the other end of the counter looks confused but gives Lance a thumbs up. He turns back to Keith. “Kay, just gotta go to the locker room and get my wallet.” He says.

Keith follows him to the locker room, glancing around at the gym, which is way too snazzy for the area it is in, and then looking forward at Lance, who’s navy blue joggers cut off just below his knees and reveal his defined calves and slim ankles.

The locker room is empty. After all, most people who work out in the morning are already showered and long gone, probably. Lance is humming a soft tune and opening a locker, shuffling the items around as he tries to find his wallet. Keith steps towards him, shutting the locker in between them. Lance looks at him questioningly.

“You look really good in this.” Keith says, slipping a finger underneath the hem of Lance’s shirt and rubbing it softly. It feels worn in the way that all of Lance’s clothes do, like he’s been wearing the same ones for years and doesn't want to ever throw them out. It's almost endearing. Almost.

A small blush dusts Lance’s cheeks. “This old thing? Nah.” He says, smiling playfully.

“You really do.” Keith takes another step in, their faces only an inch apart. The smell of Lance is already making him forget the open wound lingering in his chest. The blue eyes calming him down, the small freckles drawing him in.
He nudges closer.

*Forget.*

He brushes their lips together, just a breath of a touch.

*Please forget.*

He drags him arms up Lance’s body, tangling his fingers in his hair.

*Please.*

Lance lets out a nervous laugh against Keith’s lips, shaking his head and pulling away slightly.

“Keith, trust me I want to do this. Like, a lot. But I can't afford to lose my job...if we get caught I might--”

“Can we go somewhere else?” Keith asks, looking up at Lance with what he hopes is a convincing expression. Lance sighs.

“My place is a bit of a walk. But...I mean there's a utility closet.” He says, mostly joking.

Keith blinks. “Okay.”

“What?”

“Where is it?” Keith asks, already grabbing Lance’s hand and frantically searching the locker room.

“You wanna fuck in a utility closet?” Lance laughs, trailing behind him. “That’s too cliche, even for you.”

Keith finds it though, and really doesn't want to talk anymore. They burst through the door and Lance fumbles with his keys to lock it behind him, before Keith stumbles forward and slams him up against the wall.

Lance’s yelp in surprise was muffled by Keith’s lips, working hungry and fast against his. He breathes in the dizzying smell of Lances deodorant, and by the dampness in his hair and the warmth of his skin, Keith can tell that he just recently showered before work. His skin feels smooth and kissable and Keith doesn't waste any time before burying his face into his neck, licking and nibbling at the skin below his ear. Lance lets out a long, shaky exhale, hands falling onto Keith's hips and pulling him closer. Keith moves his lips up to Lance’s ear.

“This time you're the one who's going to have to be quiet.” He mumbles, sliding his hands up Lance’s shirt and lightly running his fingers over his nipples. Usually Keith doesn't do this until Lance is about to come, and it always sends him over the edge. This time, Keith just wants to do it now. Just wants Lance to get a taste of what's about to happen.

Lance hums a little brokenly and Keith's fingers keep flicking over the sensitive skin on his chest. “Oh yeah?” He breathes, tilting his head upwards to give give more exposure on his neck. “And why is that?”

“Cause today you're the one getting fucked.” Keith says lowly, grinding their hips together.

“Wait, what--ahh.” Lance gasps, back arching forward slightly. “I mean, I’m okay with that.”

“Good.” Keith says bluntly, already sliding Lances joggers down so that they pool at his ankles.
“D-Do you--” Lance’s voice shakes as Keith licks his hands and starts palming him slowly. “Do you have lube?”

Keith pauses, his hand stilling. “I might...in my car. Fuck. I completely forgot.” But when he looks up at Lance, the boy is sporting a shit-eating grin.

“Totally messing with you. I brought some from my locker.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “You have lube in your gym locker?”

“The life of a ho is very demanding, Keith.” Lance says dramatically. “But it is a life that I must lead.”

Keith snorts a laugh, rolling his eyes. The smile feels foreign on his lips after the morning he’s had. “Jesus, shut up.”

Lance giggles and Keith grabs the small bottle from his hands, dripping a little onto his palm before returning his hand to Lance’s dick. Lance lets out a low whine and grips Keith’s shoulders. “God, you’re so hot...” He mumbles as Keith leans forward to kiss his neck again, keeping his hand moving at a steady pace. Lance is almost fully hard now, and Keith is surprised by how quickly it happened. “So good at this...”

Keith hums at the compliment, briefly wondering how someone as sexy as Lance could possibly find him sexy at all. He pushes the thought out of his head. Insecurities and unrequited love have both already happened today and Keith has had enough of that shit. He bites down even harder on Lance’s neck, hearing a surprised gasp fall from his lips, and desperately tries to erase Shiro’s face from his memory, hurt and furious.

She reminds Shiro of Keith. He’s in love with a girl who reminds him of Keith. What about the actual Keith? Why isn't he enough?

He quickens the pace of his hand and Lance hips twitch, which Keith takes as a sign that he’s ready to move on. He lets go and Lance makes a pitiful sound at the loss of contact, but Keith ignores it, turning him around and bending him over a bin filled with basketballs. He strips his own pants off, not surprised to find himself already hard and bends over on top of Lance, grinding his hips against his ass hungrily. Forcefully. Lance’s head falls forward, shoulder muscles tensing attractively.

Shiro probably sleeps with her. He probably lays in bed with her at night. He probably whispers to her and runs his fingers through her hair, just like Keith has always dreamed he would do. He probably kisses her forehead and touches her teasingly--

They both moan as Keith grinds even harder, not bothering to be gentle. He hears Lance whisper a curse word in Spanish as he braces himself on the edge of the bin. The sensation is almost too good, especially for something as simple as skin-on-skin contact.

Keith has always liked Lance’s ass--it’s just so toned and flawless. Not to mention he can cup his hands over it perfectly. He backs up a little and runs his hands over it, the smooth skin and perfect fit going right to his dick. Lance chuckles breathily, like he knows what Keith is thinking. “Getting a little impatient here.” He says, voice strained.

Keith nods even though Lance can’t see him and rubs more lube onto his fingers. Slowly, he places one hand on Lance’s ass, squeezing greedily, while easing one finger in with the other. He watches Lance’s naked back slowly arch towards him, pushing his ass up onto Keith’s finger. Lance is
mugh tighter than Keith thought he would be, which leads Keith to believe that in most of his
sexual experiences, he’s on top. That just makes it even more appealing when Keith curls his finger
and Lance’s body jerks slightly.

“Shit. Keith. I-I’m really…” Keith curls his finger a bit harder this time and Lance swears in
Spanish again. “I’m really not going to last long…I don’t usually bottom…”

“I don’t mind.” Keith replies gruffly, building a rhythm with the movement of his finger. “Love
watching you come anyway.”

Lance tenses even more at that, a deep flush blooming on the back on his neck. Small, soft noises
fall from his lips and Keith quickens the pace of his finger. “Are you ready for another?” He asks.
Lance nods, muscles relaxing slightly. Keith doesn’t even hesitate before slowly pushing in a
second finger, allowing for Lance to adjust properly. He watches Lance’s body practically melt
towards him, a low sound coming from his throat that Keith has never heard before.

“Holy shit.” He says weakly. Keith watches a droplet of sweat travel from the back on Lance’s
neck to the front, out of sight. Is it hot in here? He didn't even realize he was sweating until he
looked down and saw droplets on his own chest.

He slowly pumps his fingers in and out, watching Lance writhe and crumble beneath him. It truly
is a sight to behold, but his brain is so clouded with frustration, so exhausted from being so
miserable, and he just wants this distraction so badly. He needs it.

Thinking a little less with his brain and a little more with his dick, he removes his finger and lines
himself up at Lance’s entrance. He hears Lance draw in a breath, preparing himself.

“You ready?” He asks, trying to at least be a halfway decent human being.

“Yeah.” Lance replies, sounding small.

Keith slowly pushes into him, the enveloping heat momentarily turning his brain off. Not one
thought crosses his mind expect the feeling of Lance all around him, tight and hot and so inviting.

“Fuck.” He curses, at the same time Lance says “Jesus.”

“Oh my god, Lance.” Keith says. “You have no idea…”

Lance turns his head so that Keith can see half of his face, flushed and glistening with sweat.
“What?” He asks.

“You have no idea how good you feel, shit …”

Lance huffs a laugh. “Could say the same thing to you.” He says, voice breaking slightly but still
comprehensible. “But you should really start moving before I come from just sitting here.”

Keith nods, beginning to thrust his hips slowly, in and out. Lance shakes his head slowly and lets it
fall forward. With the initial shock of the sensation starting to ebb slowly, Keith’s brain starts
running again, the pleasure and pain creating an intoxicating hotbed for thoughts to form.

He thinks about all of the times he stayed up in college, letting his unsure hands travel underneath
the sheets. He thinks about every hesitant touch, every stroke, so forbidden and so risky, because
his parents were downstairs and he wasn't thinking about a woman like the ‘normal guys’ in his
class did. He was thinking about Shiro. These memories were from years ago but now with the
pain swirling in his chest it feels like it was yesterday.
Lance moans loudly and it snaps him back to the present.

“Remember to be quiet.” Keith teases, words coming out a little choked. Lance sends him a piercing glare from over his shoulder.

“Go faster…” Lance mumbles. Keith obeys, gripping Lance’s hips and quickening his pace. Lance looks really fucking hot like this, but Keith makes the executive decision to not say that out loud. He doesn’t know why, exactly. Lance tells him he looks good all the time, so it’s really not a big deal, but something still stops him.

He tilts his hips slightly and changes his angle, trying to do what Lance usually does to him, and he knows that he’s done it right when Lance lets out a short “Ah-!” before slamming a hand over his mouth and muffling the rest.

There is a pleasure building in his stomach that he welcomes with open arms, thrusting harder into Lance and feeling the muscles clench in his stomach as he gets closer. Lance is shivering underneath him, and by the sounds he is making, Keith can tell that he is barely holding on. Truly, he isn’t going to last much longer either. His short reverie had been a distraction but the truth of the matter is simple, Lance’s ass feels really fucking good. Watching Lance’s smooth, bare back moving in front of him and seeing every single reaction to his touches is just making him crazy. Keith has never fucked anyone like this before, although he’s always fantasized about it. The dark closet, the threat of anybody walking in… fuck his hips jerk forward and he knows that any moment now, he’s going to--

He hears Lance begin to say something, probably something along the lines of a warning, but then Keith feels him clenching all around him and Lance is coming, shaking violently and letting out a choked sound that has Keith falling over the edge too. His legs shake and the edges of his vision blur as he falls forward, burying his face into the back of Lance’s neck and whimpering pathetically.

Keith takes a few heaving breaths, pulling out and wiping some of the sweat off of his forehead. Lance still has not turned around to look at him and, instead, is staring at the bin beneath him.


Keith laughs, standing up shakily. “Yeah...we should probably clean up.”

“Dude, I’m not going to be able to walk for like, three days.”

Keith just blinks at him. “Is it weird that I think that’s really hot?”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him, laughing a little breathlessly. “Sometimes I think you’re even more of a ho than I am.”

Keith grins. “Impossible.”

Lance bends over and starts searching for his clothes on the dark floor of the closet. “Can’t believe we just got away with that.” He says, sounding surprised. “Now whenever I pass this closet I’m going to think about you fucking me.”

For some reason, Keith feels himself blushing at that. “Well every time I sit at my desk I remember you sucking my dick so...Karma, I guess.”

Lance laughs, loudly and happily. His smile remains on his face as he talks. “That’s good to hear.”
Keith leans over and starts looking for his clothes. He can feel Lance’s eyes on him but chooses to ignore it for the time being.

Everything inside him is begging not to be alone. He doesn’t want to go sit alone in his office. He doesn’t want to sit alone in his room. He feels like he’s been lonely for so long and now it’s even more unbearable without his only friend to be there for him. His chest clenches as he slips his shirt back on and buttons his pants. Lance has work to do. And Lance isn’t even his friend. *Don’t bother him with your emotions.* Isn’t that the whole point of this? No emotions? Maybe this is all just a bad idea. Maybe this should be the last time that he does this.

He slowly returns back to reality to find Lance staring at him, eyes curious and thin eyebrows turned upwards into a concerned expression. “Are you...feeling better?” He asks cautiously. “At least from this morning?”

Honestly, Keith doesn’t know how to reply. “Uh.” He says eloquently, face falling when he can’t think of anything else to say. Why should Lance even care if he feels better? He got what he came to get, didn’t he?

Lance looks hesitant to speak, but speaks anyway. “Did...something happen this morning?”

Keith clears his throat, looking at the floor and picking up his tie. “Uh...yeah. It was shitty. But it’s over now, so...” He drapes the tie back onto his neck and begins to tie it again, refusing to meet Lance’s eyes.

“Oh. Okay. Well, that’s good I guess.”

“Yeah.”

The silence is heavy, filled with words that could be said but aren’t. Keith wants to stall, because he really doesn’t want to leave. He doesn’t think being alone with his thoughts is the best thing right now, but there’s no way he will find what he is looking for here. He should know his place in this relationship by now.

Then, as if Lance can read his mind, he says, “if you want to stick around for a bit, you can. Just hang by the desk or something. We can play tic-tac-toe and prank call fitness companies.” His eyes dart all over Keith’s face, searching for something. “Tic-tac-toe meaning the game, not something sexual.” His nervous babbling stops for a moment and his lips quirk upward in a smile. “I mean, if you like...don’t wanna deal with going back to the office when you’re in a shitty mood.”

“Oh.” Keith says, trying not to look as shocked as he sounds. “I mean...do you care?”

Lance shakes his head. “Nope, you can stick around. I just kind of sit around all day anyway.”

Keith tries not to read too much into what Lance is offering. This really shouldn’t be a friendship, but it sure feels like one. Keith hasn’t really had enough friends to know when you have reached that level with somebody, but Lance just offered to spend the day with him and, isn’t that something friends do? Or maybe acquaintances?

Probably seeing the confusion on Keith’s face, Lance laughs a little to himself. “I mean, you don’t have to. Don’t hurt yourself over it. It was just an offer.”

“No, no, I want to.” Keith says quickly. “Today was really bad and...yeah I mean the office doesn’t sound too great right now.”

Lance smiles at him, shrugging. “Okay cool.” Then he looks at the bin of basketballs. “We...have
some cleaning to do.”

“Yeah…”

***

Lance is really good with the customers. He’s charming, and knowledgeable, and just downright hilarious. A lot of people ask him questions about basketball, which Keith finds a little odd because of all the sports offered at the gym, they all really seem only interested in the one when talking to Lance. Keith studies the interactions, telling himself that he should probably learn from Lance if he’s ever going to make it in the business world. He never developed those social skills, and wonders how the fuck Lance managed to. It makes him jealous, and also very attracted to the boy.

Lance pulled a seat up to the desk and gave Keith some paperwork to make it look like he was a guest filling out a membership form. They spend the time in between customers just talking idly, chatting about things like the weather and cats vs dogs. It's all very trivial stuff, but Keith is thankful from the bottom of his heart for the distraction. Whenever there is a lull in conversation, or Lance is busy helping a customer, Keith's mind travels back to the morning. He isn't even quite sure what he's upset about any more, but it still leaves an awful taste in his mouth. It's probably jealousy, but it could also be guilt, sadness, betrayal. He's not sure. Maybe it's all of those things.

A particularly attractive man walks through the double doors and Keith sees Lance’s eyes scanning him up and down, almost immediately. When he comes forward and hands him his card, Lance leans onto the desk and starts flirting, smooth and practiced, smiling slyly and sending the man a wink as he walks away, flustered. Keith watches the spectacle with a mixture of admiration and something sour that he can't quite place, observing as Lance watches the man’s ass, walking away.


Lance giggles. “See? What'd I tell you!” He says happily, returning to the goofy Lance that Keith has come to know. “Did you see that guy? Easily a ten.”

“What? Ew. No he wasn't.”

Lane raises an eyebrow at him. “Are you insane? Well what was he then?”

“I don't know. A seven? His face looked a little smushed.”

“How? No it didn't! He had the perfect forehead to mouth ratio.” Lance says, gesturing to his own face.

“It's not science, Lance. It's just a matter of opinion.”

“You saying I have bad taste?” Lance jokes, scanning Keith up and down. “Because I think you're fine as hell, so that's more of an insult to you than anything.”

Maybe Keith smiles at that. Maybe. “Well yeah, but I'm not, like, a ‘ten’, or whatever.” He says, rolling his eyes.
Lance looks utterly shocked at this. “No. You're not. You're like a seventeen or some shit, dude.”

Keith raises an eyebrow slowly. “You're joking.” He deadpans, heat blooming across his cheeks.

“No, I'm not.” Lance says, looking confused. “Why would I joke about that?”

“I don't know.”

Lance shrugs, moving to straighten some stray papers on the counter. “Anyhow, I have a system. It's very strict. It determines someone's attractiveness rating on a 1-10 scale. Fuckable numbers are 7-10, typically.”

“What about a six with a really nice ass?”

“Hmm. Debatable. Depends on the length of his hair. And whether or not he has stubble.”

Keith snorts. “Are you serious?”

“I told you! It's a scientific system!” Lance defends, crossing his arms over his chest. “I take my hookups very seriously!”

“Okay, okay,” Keith says, laughing. “So what about the guy who just walked in?”

There is a man standing at the double doors talking to someone on the phone. Lance flits his eyes over and back in a second. “Six.”

“How did you do that so fast? You barely even saw him!”

“Didn’t need to. I can hear him. Sounds like he just sucked up about five balloons worth of helium.”

Keith literally can’t stop laughing at that. He hides his face in his hands so not to give Lance the satisfaction of being right. He hears Lance laughing and then feels his hand wrapping around his forearm, pulling his arms away from his face. “Hey, hey, look. Now that's a ten.”

Keith turns his head to look at the man walking into the gym. He is really attractive; tall and built with shaggy, curly brown hair and pale skin. He’s got a sharp jawline and full lips. Keith glances back at Lance, who looks absolutely floored, and raises an eyebrow. “You’re drooling.” He deadpans.

Lance glances back at him and frowns, not having time to reply before the man is standing at the desk, holding his card out for Lance to scan. Lance looks down at if for a moment, looking like he is thinking something through quite intensely. Then he snaps out of it, makes eye contact with the man, and gives him a brilliant smile. “Hey,” he starts, in his usual low, flirty voice. “Nice shirt. You play?”

The man is wearing a jersey for what Keith guesses to be basketball, but he doesn’t really know shit about sports. He feels an uncomfortable stirring in his chest and he doesn’t know why. Is Lance...going for it?

“Oh, yeah.” The man says, looking down at his shirt and then sending Lance a smile. “Trying to, anyway.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, started playing a couple months ago. You ever play?” He asks Lance, pocketing his
Something lights up in Lance’s eyes but then it’s gone in a flash. “I dabble.” He says confidently. “Or rather, have dabbled. For a couple of years now.”

The man looks impressed. “Yeah, you look like the type.”

Lance smirks. “Is that so?”

Another flirtatious side-smile “Yeah.”

Keith finds himself frowning a little, directing his attention to the empty membership form in front of him and doodling in the margin.

“Do you play here often?” Lance practically purrs it.

“I do.” The man replies, voice interested. “I’m Cody, by the way.” He extends his hand. Lance shakes it.

“Lance.” He says, pointing to himself the same charming way he did the night he met Keith.

“Well Lance, hopefully I can see you play sometime.” Cody says, which definitely sounds like it has an underlying meaning.

“Hit me up sometime when you’re playing and you can bet I’ll be there.” Lance says smoothly, taking Cody’s large hand in his delicate one and scrawling his number onto his palm with a sharpie.

Cody hums, staring down at the digits. “Cool.” Then he smiles and it’s pretty fucking gorgeous, which makes Keith a little mad. “Maybe I will.” He teases. “See ya around, Lance.” He walks towards the locker room.

Keith doesn’t realize his mouth is gaping open in shock until Lance looks at him and bursts out laughing. “Oh my god!” He almost squeals it like a little girl, eyes wide. “Wasn’t he hot?”

“Yeah, he really was.” Keith says, still in mild shock. “How the fuck did you do that?”

Lance shrugs. “I mean, it’s not like it’s hard.”

Keith frowns. “Yes it is. It’s almost impossible for me.”

“What do you mean? You did it before, at the bar.”

“Yeah, but you mostly led that discussion. I was just really drunk.”

Lance laughs. “Are you asking me for flirting advice?”

“I mean…” Keith looks down at his small doodle. It’s a lion with robotic paws. “I mean, advice probably wouldn’t hurt.” Then he sees Lance’s surprised expression and scowls. “What? Why are you so surprised?”

“I’m not! It’s just that you can get literally any guy you want. All you have to do is like…look at them and point to your dick, or something.” Lance says, stapling a packet of papers together and jotting something down in the corner of one of them.

“What the hell are you talking about?”
“Your face, Keith. Seriously. You could probably pull anyone. Even a straight guy.”

Keith recognizes it as a compliment, although it sounds like a different language when it hits his ears. He doesn’t know how to process it. “Well, that theory has been disproven, I think.” He says, hearing Shiro’s voice echoing in his head.

‘I thought you’d moved on! You can’t blame me for how you feel!’

“Well some straight guys are just way too stupid, anyway.” Lance says, a little crudely.

Keith sighs. “Still think I should learn though...just like...you never know who you’ll meet, ya know?”

Keith can’t really tell, but he could swear that Lance’s face falls for a millisecond before returning back to his smiling self. “Well, my flirting style won’t get you a soulmate, unfortunately. That’s not it’s purpose.”

Keds nods slowly. “Right…” He drags out. Then he sighs, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms. ‘I bet there’s a special brand of ‘soulmate flirting’ that I’ll just never master.” His voice comes out sadder than he wants it to, thinking of Shiro and whoever the lucky girl is who gets to fall asleep next to him every night. He barely even realizes that he said it until it’s out there, floating in the open.

Lance raises an eyebrow at him, looking thoroughly confused and a little shocked by the awkward turn this conversation has taken. “I mean…” He trails off a little, thinking. Keith watches his eyes as they cast downwards, eyelashes fanning against his smooth cheeks. He turns away from Keith and busies himself with the papers on the counter again. “I mean... I think that’s just called talking.”

***

Keith flops down on his bed and finally lets himself cry a little.

He hasn’t really cried in a while, save from the morning, anyway. It’s been years, probably. He didn’t even cry when Shiro had rejected him that first time; he just got really drunk instead. But now he’s home and college is over and he just feels like crying so he cries.

It’s not like ugly, heaving sobs or anything. He just hugs a pillow close to his chest and lets a few tears fall, lip quivering slightly and eyesight blurring. He knew that someday this was going to happen. He spent years preparing for the day that Shiro would find somebody. He just didn’t anticipate it being kept from him. He didn’t anticipate feeling so caught off guard, so foolish, so ambushed by it. He never took Shiro to be one that didn’t think before he spoke, but that’s what it felt like to him. Like an afterthought. And it really, really hurts.

He lets his eyes flutter shut, finally feeling the exhaustion start to take over.

‘I think that's just called talking.’

Such a simple concept. But...really beautiful.

Keith's mind starts to drift off.
Lance doesn't feel very good.

It started with his legs. They were more sore than usual yesterday. Then he started feeling a similar achiness in his lower back, neck, and shoulders, and now it's 4AM and he's vomiting for the third time and sweating like a lunatic. He's got a fever, no doubt about it, and the weakness in his limbs has him shivering with violent chills. He wants nothing more than to sleep but he just can't.

Groaning, he flops down onto the cold, unforgiving bathroom tile and stares at the ceiling. His vision is cloudy and his eyes are still swollen from being rudely awakened by this sudden bout of nausea. With a shaky hand, he lifts his phone to his face. 4:26AM. He groans again.

It's not really being sick that bothers him. It's the fact there is no way he is going to be able to play basketball in half an hour. It sounds like a given, obviously, that when you're sick you don't get to play high intensity sports in the freezing cold, but to someone like Lance, it's almost like a death sentence. People have always reprimanded him for being too extreme-- loving too much, screaming too loud, laughing to boisterously, and pushing himself too hard. But that's just who he is. There are many times when he recognizes this as a strength. Then again, there are times like these when he feels the guilt and self doubt eating him alive after only one day of not practicing, that he kind of wishes he didn't care as much.

It almost feels like it's out of his control. When he skips a workout, no matter how good his excuse it, it makes him feel like a failure. The feeling typically doesn't go away for weeks. Its one of his biggest personality flaws-- just how hard he is on himself. How much he wants to succeed.

He feels a pang of guilt when an image of his mother flashes through his mind; kind eyes and warm hands, tucking him into bed and cooking for him like she always used to do when he was ill. His heart aches for it, more than he would like to admit. But he can't call her. He shouldn't. They're angry at him. Nothing will ever be the same between them and it's his fault.

Turning over onto his side, his bony shoulder presses uncomfortably on the tiled floor. He's going to vomit again in about five minutes. He can feel it. He braces himself for the feeling to take hold.

What he isn’t expecting is a vibration sound, filling the silent air in the bathroom and lighting up his phone screen. He cracks his eyes open and looks down. The words ‘Keith (hot guy from bar)’ are bold and dark on the screen next to: ‘New Message.’

Lance sits up shakily, grabbing his phone. There’s no way Keith wants to have sex right now. What the hell does he want?

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Are you sick too
Lance looks at the words and it takes him a minute to register. His eyes widen.

**Lance**

*YOU GOT ME SICK??*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*wat??? no, you got ME sick you ass. i was feeling perfectly fine before!*

Lance groans.

**Lance**

*So was i???? Maybe it was some funky germ in that closet*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*Ew. are you barfing*

**Lance**

*Yeah. how sexy is that*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*I can barely contain my arousal.*
Lance laughs softly, almost able to actually see Keith’s sarcastic smirk.

*Im throwing up too.*

**Lance**

**Yummy**

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*Fuck off*

Lance barfs again, as predicted. After washing out his mouth, scrubbing his face and his hands, and burrowing himself underneath his soft covers, he types a reply.

**Lance**

*I’m in serious need of some advil*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*Just took some. You should, it really helps the fever*

**Lance**

*I dont have any. Pidge pops them like fuckin candy.*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**
You don't have advil? Dude u gotta. I can bring some in a couple of hours

Lance blinks at the message. Advil...does sound nice…

Lance

It's okay maybe Hunk can pick some up for me

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Okay. well let me know if he cant. I have like a gallon of it

Lance

Okayyy

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Gunna try and sleep this shit off

Lance

Same

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Seeya
Lance tosses his phone off of the bed and feels his eyes shut slowly, sending a large thanks to the heavens above when the tempting feeling of sleep starts to take over.

***

“Wow, you look like crap.” Hunk says sympathetically.

Lance trudges into the kitchen at noon, bleary eyed and exhausted. He flops down at the table and tugs the blanket around his shoulders closer to his chest. “Thanks.” He looks up at Hunk, who is dressed in his bartending uniform and slipping his shoes on. “Oh no...are you leaving?”

Hunk smiles sadly. “Sorry man, I wish i could stay and help you out. But the other guy cancelled and there was a free shift today. I could use the extra money.”

“You’re going to go serve alcohol to pretentious, entitled shitheads while I suffer? ” He asks dramatically, hiding his face in his blanket.

“Oh come on, Lance. They’re not all bad.” Hunk says softly. He sits at the table and leans down to tie his shoe. “In fact there’s this one guy who’s actually super cool. Seems like the kinda guy you’d fall madly in love with, to be honest.”

Lance snorts. “Yeah, right. Stuffy, stick-up-their-ass tightwads with more money than they know what to do with. Totally my type.” He says sarcastically, adding on some extra insults because he’s sick and didn’t get to work out this morning, alright?

“No really! He’s super chill. We just talk shit about everyone else there. His dad is kinda a big deal so I think he just goes there against his will.” Hunk laughs.

Lance’s mood does not improve. “Well, sure sounds like you like him more than I do.” He jokes dryly. Hunk rolls his eyes.

“Oh okay, you’re in a mood. But I’m telling you. He’s got ‘Lance’s Type’ written all over him.”

“Well I hope you two have a beautiful time together.”

“Oh, we will.”

“Good. Leave me here to die.”

“I’ll be back in a couple hours.” Hunk says, still managing to sound fond when Lance is being a complete monster. “Please don’t die.”

Lance’s face softens. He sighs, “I’ll try. Do we have advil?”

“Pidge took the last of it a couple days ago.”

“God dammit.”

“I can pick some up on the way home?”

“Nah it’s cool...I think I know where to get some.”
Hunk nods, patting Lance lightly on his head before walking out the door. “See ya, bud. Feel better”

“Bye.”

***

Lance didn’t realize that he practically died on the couch until he feels someone shaking him awake. “Lance... Lance ....”

He flutters his eyes open slowly, vision extremely blurry. In his sleepy, delirious state, he sees Keith’s face; dark eyes and thick brows contrasting beautifully with his unnaturally pale skin. Lance blinks again. “Hmmm?” His whole body feels like it’s on fire. “This is a...dream?” He asks, eyes scanning Keith’s face. Keith shakes his head.

“You really shouldn’t have gone this long without medicine.” His voice sounds strained and exhausted. “You’ve gotten really bad.”

Lance’s vision starts to clear and he see’s Keith’s face in more detail now. His eyes are puffier than usual and he’s got bags under them, dark and gray. There is an unnatural flush in his cheeks that just makes him look ill, and despite all of this, he is dressed to the nines, in a crisp, clean, Armani tuxedo and luxurious cologne. He looks...strangely angelic.

I must be dreaming , Lance thinks to himself. Or this is a blissful hallucination.

“Sit up.” Dream Keith says, gently grabbing at Lance’s shoulder. “Jesus, you’re burning up.”

“Mmhmm.” Lance mumbles. “Burning up for you , babe.” He attempts a charming grin. Dream Keith looks at him like he’s insane and then rolls his eyes.

“Figures you would flirt when you’re on the brink of hospitalization.”

“Why are you here, Dream Keith?” Lance asks, words slurring. “Real Keith is sick...Should be resting...”

Dream Keith (or actual Keith? Lance can’t tell) raises an eyebrow at him, looking lost. He holds out advil and a glass of water. Lance didn’t even see him get up to get the glass. Did he black out for a bit?

“I came by to drop off advil. I was out of the house anyway...” He glances down at his expensive outfit. “Had a thing. But I left early. Didn’t expect to get here and see you half dead on the couch, though.”

Lance takes the advil and sighs softly as the cold water soothes his burning throat. He doesn’t feel himself falling, but then his head hits the couch pillow again somehow. “You look nice.” He mumbles, not wanting to close his eyes because then Dream Keith might disappear.


Lance can feel sweat droplets running down the nape of his neck, coming from his hairline. His
shirt is soaked. He really is burning up, and not in the fun way either. “Yeah I feel pretty shitty.”

“I have to go now…” Dream Keith says. Or real Keith. Lance feels nauseous again. “Please try to take care of yourself. This is a stupid way to die.”

Lance nods sleepily, finally letting his eyes shut. “Yeah.”

“Advil is on the side table.”

“Mmm.”

A hesitant silence. Lance starts drifting. He doesn’t hear Keith say goodbye.

***

When he wakes up, the entire house is dark and his roommates are asleep. He glances over at the table and sees a large bottle of advil, with a glass of water sitting next to it.

He smiles a little to himself. Wasn’t a dream.

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry my notes at the beginning were so long.

__________

My tumblr: @dimplesandcurlssss
Six

Chapter Summary

Idk? They keep falling in love and have phone sex. I need a drink, this was stressful.

Chapter Notes

I dont really know what to say about this chapter. more averagely written smut because im trash. I just finished s3 and im just... *clutches heart* wheezing. please enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How do you think it works?”

“I dunno, man. I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“Do you think I put this part in my--?”

“What? Keith, no! Are you nuts?”

“Well that’s what it looks like it’s for!”

“That would literally kill you!”

“I’m just guessing I’m sorry!”

Keith and Lance are standing side by side in Keith’s office, back to the door. It’s a rainy day, with barely any light filtering in from the large windows. Lance had texted him earlier that morning with a ‘feeling better now, wanna fuck?’ , to which Keith replied ‘im at work.’ Apparently Lance took this as an invitation and showed up twenty minutes later with a cardboard box that, according to Lance, housed the “world’s greatest sex toy” which he had bought while black-out drunk a month ago. It mysteriously showed up at his doorstep about three weeks later than it was supposed to and after asking his roommates to fill him in on his drunken adventures, he booked it to Keith's office to show him.

Now that the box is open, they stand shoulder to shoulder staring down at the oddly shaped object on Keith's desk. Because Lance, in all his drunken glory, didn't realize that he never so much as glanced at any instructions.

“It kinda looks like a octopus.” Keith says, biting back a smile. Lance scowls at him.

“From what I remember--”

“Which is nothing.”

“--this was expensive! So we gotta figure it out.”
Keith can't stifle his laugh anymore and let's it out, earning himself a pretty nasty stare from Lance. “Come on, Lance. You're the expert, here. If this were a porno, how would this be used?”

“I'm going to guess that this--” he points to a rather awkwardly shaped end--”has something to do with an ass.”

“Wow. You should write a book.”

Lance ignores him and reaches out, clicking a small button at the bottom of the toy. It jumps off the table with a loud vibration and Lance startles, a small yelp falling from his lips. Keith laughs.

“Seriously? What did you expect it to do?”

“I don't know! But damn, this thing can vibrate. Look at this shit!”

“Vibrating octopus.”

“You are ruining any chance of this being sexy.”

The intercom buzzes and they both look over at it. “Mr. Kogane, there is someone at the front desk here to see you. Should I send him up?” His father’s secretary says through the speaker.

Keith turns the vibrating toy off of his desk and shoves it at Lance, clearing his throat awkwardly. He clicks the reply button.

“Uh, who is it?”

“Takashi Shirogane, sir.”

He jerks his hand back like it's been burned, an uncomfortable flush spreading through his cheeks. He scowls, pressing the button again. “No. Tell him I'm not here.”

“But sir he--”

“I'm not here, okay?”

“Shall I tell him you'll see him later?”

Keith feels the irritation in his chest again, subtle but very much there. “No.”

“...okay sir. I will send him away now.”

“Thank you.”

An awkward silence fills the office and Keith listens to his angry heartbeat, thudding in his ears. Of course Shiro would ignore him for a week and then attempt to show up at his office, probably with flowers or some other fake romantic shit, to try and get Keith to forgive him. I bet he'd argue that flowers are platonic, and cuddling is platonic, and everything they've ever done has just been platonic and---

“Hey...is everything...uh...?” Lance asks, sounding lost. His voice is soft and the unanswered question floats in the air for a minute before he asks, “Did I miss something?”

“No.” Keith turns away from him in an attempt to hide his twisted, scowling face. What he doesn't expect, however, is for Lance to circle around him and stand in front of his face, crossing his arms and raising an expectant eyebrow.
“You were just laughing a minute ago and now you look like you're about to murder someone. So either you have the most unfortunate temper known to man or someone did something really horrible to you.”

Keith sighs, finally looking up to meet Lance's eyes. They're a darker shade of blue today, startlingly vibrant in the dreary light filtering through the windows. “A little bit of both.” He says coolly. “Unfortunately for everybody.”

“I don't understand.” Lance says. “Isn't Shiro your friend?”

A pang of irritation tugs at Keith's chest. “Sure he is.” He replies bitterly.

“So what's the problem?” Lance asks, voice slightly accusatory.

“There is no problem.”

“Keith, come on.”

“It's really one of your business, okay Lance?” He snaps. Suddenly feeling exhausted.

“Damn, there's that temper again.”

“Asshole.” Keith mumbles, turning away from him for the second time. Then, realizing a little how irrational he is being, he takes a shaky breath. “Maybe you should leave. I'll text you later.”

Lance no longer looks frustrated, but concerned, eyebrows turned upwards slightly and mouth in a soft frown. “Oh...okay.” He doesn't sound convinced. When he gets to the door he turns to Keith again, an unsure look on his face. “Look, I know we have a lot of great sex and very little conversation but...I mean, if you're ever desperate, you know, for someone to talk to, I...” he swallows. “I mean, I'm around.”

Keith stares at him, searching for something mocking or teasing in his eyes but falling short. Lance is being completely serious, rubbing at the back of his neck and looking at Keith earnestly. It feels like the friendship barrier has finally been broken, because Keith is scanning his eyes over Lance's white snapback and tan skin and black sleeveless hoodie and he suddenly feels the urge to tell him. To just tell him everything. The words are stewing in his chest, burning and bubbling from being kept in for far too long, and Lance’s snarky blue eyes are kind. Open. The words claw up his throat, leaving a choked feeling in their wake.

“I think I was in love with him.” He blurts, stunned at himself when it tumbles out of his mouth. He says it hurriedly so that Lance can hear it before he walks out. Lance's eyes widen slightly and he shuts the door behind him, walking back into the office. He hoists himself up onto Keith's desk, long legs dangling. Keith watches him for a moment before sighing and sitting next to him. “I was madly in love with him, and he didn't want me at all.”

Lance is silent for a moment, just staring down at their feet. Then, he says, “When?”

“A couple of years ago, when I was still in college.” Keith clears his throat. “We were really close and he was one of the only people...I don't know. I got over it eventually, but I mean...well I guess I didn't? Because he told me last week that he's been dating someone new and I feel like I'm losing it.” The rawness of the confession hangs heavily in the room. Lance nods slowly, like he's trying to process what was said.

“I get it, man. Rejection stings.” He says sadly. “I’m sorry you had to go through that, especially with no one else around.”
Keith is a little shocked by the words, so thought-out and genuine. Nobody has ever...nobody has ever said anything like that to him before. “I...yeah. It was really rough.”

“I bet.” Lance says. “Doesn’t help that he’s really hot, either.”

A laugh bubbles out of Keith's mouth, surprised and amused. “Yeah that makes it a bit harder.”

“Well, as someone who get’s their heart broken roughly every other week, lemme give you some advice.” Lance says confidently, now smug because he made Keith laugh.

“Oh yeah? What's that?”

“Don’t,” he turns to finally look at Keith, “take it personally.”

Keith scowls, crossing his arms over his chest. “What the hell are you on about? There's no other way to take it. They literally just don't like you.”

“That's not true. See, I love my roommate Pidge with my whole heart. I'd probably jump in front of a train for her, or eat raw chicken, or, you know, die in general. I can't imagine my life without her.” He blushes a little at the oversharing but continues anyway. “Just because I don't want to kiss her or go on dates with her or sleep in bed with her every night doesn't mean I don't love her. And it has no reflection on who she is as a person either. It's just the way we feel.”

Keith's face softens, arms loosening around himself.

“Sometimes, the way we feel just doesn't line up. But it doesn't mean...like, it doesn't mean you're not enough, or something. So just don't take it so personally.”

Keith looks at the floor. “It hurts.”

“Hell yeah it does! Hurts like a bitch. But, you gotta know it's not your fault. Ya know? Cause that just adds insult to injury.”

Keith feels a very strange and unexpected surge of relief hit him square in the chest, nearly knocking the wind out of him. Lance...understands? He actually knows how to put feelings into words. He's been rejected. He's had his heart broken. And Keith...well, Keith isn't alone.

“All that being said,” Lance continues, voice lighter, “that girl better be a fucking firecracker for someone to reject your fine ass.”


“It's true! Don't let the rejects get you down. Some day some guy will be lucky to have your ass all to himself.”

Keith blushes despite himself. “Yeah?”

“Of course, man. Being rejected by one unfairly sexy man doesn't mean that you're damaged goods. And I'm sure Shiro still cares for you a stupid amount, honestly.”

Keith nods slowly, studying Lance’s face. “Yeah...yeah I guess you have a point.”

Lance grunts as he hops off of the desk. “Of course I do. I’m always right.” He crosses his arms over his unfairly broad chest and levels Keith with a satisfied smile. “So give yourself a week to cry into a tub of ice cream and then talk to him, alright?”
Keith definitely doesn't like the idea of facing Shiro, but finds himself nodding anyway. “Okay.”

“Cool.” He picks up the toy from the edge of the desk. “I'm gunna watch a tutorial, I think.” He says, looking down at the object inquisitively. “Once I figure out how this thing works, we’re totally taking it for a spin.”

Keith can't help the grin that breaks across his face. “Oh man, I'm already so hot and bothered.” He says sarcastically. “Vibrating octopus toys are my weakness.”

Lance points accusingly. “It'll be great! You'll see!”

“Don't you have somewhere to be?” Keith says, rolling his eyes and hopping off the desk.

“Technically, yes. But I was willing to give up a lunch break to fuck you.”

“Aw, how sweet. I'm flattered, truly.” Keith deadpans.

Lance sighs, long and exaggerated. “But I guess I have to go back now…”

“Guess so.”

“You!” Lance shouts. “Tease!”

Keith giggles. “God, get outta here.”

“Guess I'll just go jerk off in the bathroom.”

“Maybe you can text me and let me know what you're doing.”

Lance looks utterly shocked at that, face turning alarming shade of pink. It's quite a pleasant look for him. “You mean--”


Lance grins, pumping a fist into the air. “Hell yeah!” He shouts giddily, grabbing the toy and sprinting out of the office.

Keith laughs to himself and flops down into his desk chair, ignoring the small bit of warmth in his cheeks.

***

Corans face visibly brightens when Keith walks into the garage. “Keith, my boy! It's been a week! Are you feeling better?” He exclaims in his thick accent.

“Yeah, sorry. I was really sick.” Keith says, smiling. “You got my message though, right?”

“Oh of course. Didn't change the fact that I was booked solid without my right hand man!” A hand claps onto his shoulder and Keith feels his heart leap happily at the title.

“Well, I’m here now! Put me to work.”

Coran gestures for him to follow, walking towards a large minivan that has been hoisted upwards,
revealing the bottom. “This one here needs a lot of work, been busting my butt, quite frankly, to fix it. Maybe we could work on it together?”

“Sure, what seems to be the problem?” Keith asks, already excited at the idea of diving in with some tools.

Coran explains the current state of the vehicle, pointing out several different areas where the issues lie. As they get to work, Keith slowly realizes the somewhat awkward silence filling the garage. He’s never really had to make conversation with Coran because usually they are on opposite sides of the area. But now he feels like it would probably be better if he did.

“So Coran…” he starts, sounding a little uncomfortable. “How, uh, how long have you had this garage?”

Luckily for Keith, Coran loves talking, and when he starts it’s hard for there to be a lull in conversation.

“I’ve had this bad boy for about nine years! Used to live on the east side of town, believe it or not, right on the outskirts of all those ridiculous mansions!” Keith smiles a little to himself, tightening the bolt above him. “But then I visited a friend here and saw this space for sale. Never doubted myself for a second. Bought it, and now it’s the number one most used garage on the west side!”

“Oh, that's awesome.” Keith replies, meaning it. “Were you always passionate about cars?”

“Oh but of course. Such a satisfying feeling, fixing something with your bare hands, innit?”

“Yeah.” Keith grins. “Yeah I agree.”

“And that's why you're so good at it, boy!”

Keith warms, then clears his throat. “What made you…I mean...what made you want to live on this side of town?”

“Well, aside from this lovely business, this small town is just such fun. Everyone knows everyone. Secrets get around rather quickly, which can get sticky in some cases but, we’re like a family mostly.” Corans hand slips on one of the pipes and he mutters something under his breath, motor oil smearing on his face.

“Everyone knows everyone?” Keith echos. It's the same way in his small mansion complex but...for some reason it feels like Coran means it differently. “Does that mean...do you know Lance? He's a friend of mine.”

“Of course.” Coran replies. “ *Everyone* knows Lance. He makes quite the impression, that boy.”

There is a knowing tone in Corans voice that throws Keith off. He blinks, keeping his eyes trained on the car part in front of him. “I bet he does.”

“Works harder than I've ever seen anyone work. He's got dreams, that one. Wakes up at the crack of dawn to play and still manages to go to school and hold a job! Truly crazy.”

Keith's hands still, suddenly feeling bombarded with the new information. “Play what?”

Coran stops moving his hands now too. Keith feels him turning to look at him, but keeps his eyes trained forward. “You mean you don't know about the basketball?”
Keith frowns. “I...no, I don’t.”

Coran sighs, busying his hands again. “I don’t know the kid's backstory, really. But everyone in town knows how hard he works. Wakes up at four in the morning and practices basketball for three hours before going to work, and then a class or two in the evening. Every single day too!” Coran laughs a little incredulously. “Word around town says he's desperately trying to make the team at Aleta University. One of the best in the nation!”

Keith's hands still haven't moved. He hears Lance's voice in his head, low and flirtatious when he was talking to Cody. “I dabble.” He had said, when Cody asked him if he played.

Three hours every morning before the sun has risen is not dabbling.

“Oh...no, I had no idea.” Keith says stupidly.

“Yup. He's got the whole town inspired, that's for sure. We’re all rooting for him. The boys on team Altea are all quite good, but we’re a little biased. We like to think he works harder than they ever did. But hey, maybe that's just because he's one of our own.”

Keith feels incredibly overwhelmed by all of the sudden fondness in Coran’s voice, coupled by the fact that he's been sleeping with Lance for nearly two months and he had no fucking clue that this boy is constantly exhausted, hanging by the thinnest thread, and somehow still such a celebrity in his small town?

An unexpected admiration blooms in his chest that has his heart thudding a little faster than usual. Lance...is really something, isn't he? He always talks about how Keith is out of his league but damn...Keith is kind of starting to feel like he's got it all wrong.

He's definitely heard of Team Altea. They win nearly every game they play. One of the best college teams in the country. Most of them go on to play on well known, national teams. Keith pictures Lance on the court, a confident snarl on his face and an expensive uniform replacing his ratty old sleeveless hoodies. Now that he thinks about it, Lance's long, strong, lanky frame is practically made for the sport. How did he not notice before?

With a grunt, Coran hoists himself upwards, sliding out from under the van. “Wow! That went much quicker with your help.”

Keith slides out as well, standing up a little shakily and wiping his hands on his pants. “Yeah, that was fun.” He says, willing himself to move on from the conversation before he's tempted to ask any more questions. “Got another for me?”

Coran smiles at him. “Always!”

***

Lance

Brace yourself! I figured it out! I think it's for women though. But I mean, a hole is a hole right?
Keith bursts out laughing when he sees the message on his phone. He took a shower when he got home from work and now he’s sitting on his bed, still damp with a towel slung around his waist.

Keith

*I don't think it works that way, Lance*

Lance

*Guess there's only one way to find out*

Keith

*As exciting as that sounds, I'm not sure if I can come over tonight. Think I'm about to fall asleep*

Lance

*WHAT? But I spent all day watching highly informative porn to figure it out!*

Keith

*That must've been really tough for you*

Lance

*It was! Having a boner at work is no fun!*

This, for some unknown reason, decides to be the text that turns Keith on. It makes no sense, but apparently his brain has absolutely nothing to do with his dick because he feels the heat begin to gather at the pit of his stomach before he can do anything about it. He imagines Lance palming
himself beneath the desk, desperate for the feeling, biting back his moans and trying not to get caught…

Keith

Well I mean, you never did text me so...that's on you

Lance

Well...I'm texting you now...

Keith takes a small, eager breath.

Keith

Mhmm, that's true

The next reply comes after a bit of a pause.

Lance

And if you're not going to come here then maybe I'll just play with this toy myself...

Keith swallows. Is he really going to encourage this? Is he really going to let this happen?

Lance

Already started anyway
Keith

Yeah? What are you doing

Suddenly, completely unexpectedly, his phone rings. He stares at Lance's name on his screen, a little shocked, and clicks into the call hesitantly. He doesn't even say hello before Lance's voice is rumbling through the speaker, sending shivers down his spine. “You really wanna know?”

Keith swallows again, switching his phone to his dominant hand and reaching to brush his other one over the towel, heart beating rapidly in his chest. “Yeah.” He says quietly, keeping in mind his parents are in the next room over. “Yeah I do.”

He hears the low hum of the vibrating toy turn on and it makes heat burn across his face. Lance makes a small noise, then speaks again. “I'm already hard. Was thinking about you.”

Keith breathes out, beginning to palm himself lazily through the towel covering him. “Yeah? What about me?”

“Your mouth.... Want you to blow me.” The vibrating noise shifts. Lance inhales sharply. “Want to feel your tongue inside me.”

Keith bites his lip, the heat at the pit of his stomach suddenly moving further downwards. He slips his hand under the towel and rubs against his hardening length idly. “Bet you taste good.” He says, very surprised by it. He's never even...nobody has ever even done that to him before but god with the way Lance is talking he wants it holy shit he wants to so badly--

Lance makes another small noise, a gasp, and then continues. “God that would feel so good...you're always so good with your tongue...”

Keith is fully hard now, a lot faster than it usually takes, and strokes upwards with his hand, rough, like he always does. It's been awhile since he's touched himself and honestly, he's gotten much more used to Lance's hand than his own, but the sensation is still pleasant, making him shudder. “Love the feeling of your dick in my mouth.” He mumbles.

“Yes?” Lance asks, voice starting to waver ever so slightly. He hums. “Just thinking about it makes me wanna come.”

Keith's voice is low and gruff. “How's the vibrator...”

Sounding oddly shy and a little vulnerable, Lance says, “It's...already inside of me...couldn't wait.” A swallow. “Want it to be you.”

Keith lets out an embarrassing whimper at that, and Lance laughs a little breathlessly. “You've already started touching yourself, haven't you?”

Keith blushes. “Yeah.”

A low hum. “Always so eager...You know what I would do to you if you were here?”
Keith quickens the pace of his hand slightly. “What…”

Lance makes a sudden “Ah~” noise as the phone crackles, signifying that he’s changing his position “I’d hold your wrists down over your head so you can't touch me. I'd suck your dick while I finger myself open.” He says, voice much lower and significantly less steady than it was a minute ago. “you'd be desperate to touc me but I wouldn't let you.”

“Lance…” There is precome leaking from Keith's length now, making the friction even more intense. He lets his fingers play along his tip before tugging again, head falling back onto the pillow.

Lance moans on the other side of the line, voice breaking a little. “Jesus, Keith, this fucking toy…” he moans. “Haven't even started touching myself yet…”

“Holy shit…” Keith's hips twitch as he pictures Lance, naked on his bed, with a vibrator buried deep into his ass and his hands grabbing at the sheets, mumbling broken sentences into his pillow and trying not to come untouched and fuck his imagination his way too active for his own good.

“I’d ride you, too.” Lance says, seeming to remember the tale he was spinning before the arousal got the best of him. “I’d keep your wrists down and ride you until you were screaming my name. God , you--mmmf….” He takes a few ragged breaths and then tries again. “You look so good when you're about to come.”

“ Fuck , so do you.”

Lance moans, low and rumbling, it makes Keith's hips stutter. “Wish I could see you right now.” He mumbles, words beginning to become less coherent as he edges closer. “I, sh-shit…” another raspy breath. “I want to see you touch yourself, dick in your hand, u-under the sheets...hot ‘n sweaty…”

“Just got back from the garage too….” Keith lies. Well it's only a half lie. He's showered, but that doesn't turn Lance on as much, okay? And he really would do anything right now to hear Lance’s panting, broken whispers as he gets close. “Still gotta--nnngh...gotta wash off.”

As expected, Lance chokes out a sound that makes the building heat begin to press in Keith's abdomen, begging for a release. He pumps faster, feeling the familiar jump of the muscles in his stomach and the telltale movement of his back arching off the bed. Lance isn't talking anymore, just making delicious, devastatingly sexy noises as the vibration sound gets louder, panting filling Keith's ears and intelligible mumbling taking over all of his senses. His eyes flutter shut and suddenly everything around him is just Lance, beautiful sounds crackling over the phone, and his hand motions get sloppier and sloppier. Phone sex is definitely supposed to involve more talking, but honestly, just listening to the noises that Lance is making, just hearing the low thrumming vibration of that stupid toy, it’s just enough to--

“ Lance --” he chokes out. “I think I'm--”

“Thee too--”

Keith's orgasm hits him before Lance's does, with an unexpected strength that has him dropping the phone to his side and shaking as he gets cum all over his clean towel. Lance follows soon after, mumbling Keith's name in a way that could probably get Keith hard again within minutes. Keith holds the phone, hand shivering slightly, closer to his ear and listens to Lance’s broken panting as he calms himself down.
Neither of them speak for a minute. Then Lance giggles. “Holy shit man you have got to try this thing.”

Keith smiles. “Yeah, sounds like it was a good time.”

“I just came without touching myself.”

Keith lets out a shaky sigh. “That’s...really hot. Please don't get me hard again, I'm exhausted.”

Lance laughs loudly, breath still slightly uneven. “Okay okay sorry.”

“We should do this more often.”

“Totally. Didn't know you could talk dirty so well, man.” Lance says, sounding impressed.

Keith chuckles. “I watch enough porn to get the jist of it.”

“Well, I'm into it.” He can practically hear the smirk.

“Good.”

Lance sighs. “I gotta be up early tomorrow so, as much as I enjoy talking about porn with you…”

Keith's mind flashes to the conversation he had with Coran earlier in the day. “Oh, yeah. Okay.”

“I'll talk to you later?”

“Sure thing.”

A somewhat awkward pause.

“Alright...goodnight, Keith.”

Keith, for the third time that day, finds himself blushing because of Lance. “Goodnight.”

When the line on the other end clicks closed, Keith walks to the bathroom to wash off, splashing cold water on his face.

Maybe today is just a weird day.

***

“Hey! Where have you been? You missed so many golden moments!”

Keith is at a company picnic a few days later and sees the usual bartender, grinning widely at him with bright eyes when he spots him. He walks over to the bar and leans against it.

“Oh hey. Sorry, I was super sick. Tried going to the event last weekend but I felt way too shitty so I left early.”

The bartender sighs. “Oh man, there must have been something going around. My friend got really sick too. He couldn't move for days.”
“Oh yeah? Huh, maybe it was just something going around.” Keith wonders out loud, ditching the “strange closet virus” theory.

“Well, glad you're feeling better. Last few events have been boring without someone on the inside.” He smiles knowingly at Keith, which makes him laugh.

“So, what are these golden moments I've missed, then?”

The bartender holds up a finger and pours a flute of champagne for the woman a few feet away from Keith, smiling at her sweetly. Then looks back at Keith. “Oh man, okay, so see that group of guys in red suit jackets?”

“Yeah?”

“They're all into the same girl. They got into a huge argument last Saturday. I don't even think she likes any of them!”

“Oh boy, that's rough.” Keith replies, a smile tugging at his lips.

“Also, that really tall guy with the blonde hair? Totally sleeping with his boss. She was all over him all night and then I caught them making out in the bathroom.”

“What? Are you joking? Jesus I'm never getting sick again.”

The bartender chuckles. “Yeah, seriously, don't plan on it. Anyway, want anything to drink?”

“Sure, I'll have a glass of red.”

He busies himself preparing the drink and Keith scans the crowd, trying to find at least one interesting person to talk to. After falling short, he turns his attention back towards the bartender, picking up his glass and taking a long, large gulp of wine. “So, what do you actually want to do with your life?” Keith finds himself asking. “Because I have a feeling playing Gossip Girl with a bunch of snooty assholes isn't your life purpose.”

The bartender laughs loudly at that, handing a whiskey to someone before turning back to Keith. “I'm actually studying to be a nurse. Only a couple more years to go.”

“Oh yeah? That's awesome. I could see you doing that.” He gets a snort in reply.

“Yeah, imagine all the gossiping nurses do. Especially about the patients! I'd thrive in that environment.”

Keith shakes his head, smiling. “You sure would.”

He feels a hand on his shoulder and turns around to see his father, standing with a group of important looking men. “Hello, Keith.” His father says, all business. “There are a few people here that I want you to meet.” Keith shoots a 'please save me' glance at the bartender, who just shrugs sympathetically. Putting on a fake smile, he extends his hand in greeting like he has been taught to do for so many years.

“This is Joe, he’s the marketing manager at the bank in the city.”

Joe, a tall, wide man with graying hair and thick glasses, gives Keith a firm handshake. “Nice to meet you. Your father speaks very highly of you.”

“Nice to meet you, too.” Keith says.
“How long have you been in the business?” He asks Keith, busying himself with his pure gold cufflinks, which are completely unnecessary.

“How about two years now.” Keith answers. He knows that this was a conversation starter, and that he is supposed to say more, but he opts for that answer and doesn’t say anything else.

“Oh yeah? So you’re a fresh catch, I bet. My daughter is the same way, just out of college.”

Keith nods. “How interesting.”

“Maybe you two should meet! I feel like you’d really hit it off. Her name is Diane.”

Keith fights back the urge to scowl, blinking a few times. He spares a glance at his father, who is nodding encouragingly. “That...would be nice.” He lies.

“Of course! I can set up a date right away!” Joe says. “She will be thrilled.” As if it is a business transaction that has come to a close, Joe says, “thank you” and walks away, nose in his phone screen.

Keith rolls his eyes and his father ignores it, patting him on the back. “This could be good for you, meeting people your age.”

Keith frowns. “I can meet people my age without dating them.”

“Oh, but she’s very beautiful. You'll see! You won't regret it. Your mother and I have high hopes for this one.”

This isn’t the first time his parents have tried to find him a rich, responsible, good girl with impeccable table manners and a designer wardrobe. It has happened quite a few times, actually. But now that he is older, Keith knows that they are getting much more serious about it, and screaming “I’m GAY” doesn’t seem like the most responsible thing to do, so he just nods, face emotionless, and watches his father walk away.

“Damn.” The bartender’s voice breaks him out of his internal panic. “I wish getting a date was that easy for me.” It sounds a little sarcastic. Keith snorts.

“Yeah, it’s a dream come true.”

“Not nice girls?”

“No, they're nice.” Keith says, nervously playing with his thumbs. He feels the weight of the confession on his chest. This guy seems nice though, and understanding. He won’t tell people, right? He doesn’t seem like the type. “But, you know, they're girls.”

The bartender nods like it’s something he’s heard a thousand times before. “Yeah, I gotcha. Don’t worry, your secret’s safe with me.” He sends Keith a kind smile and Keith’s heart warms.

“Thanks.”

***

Lance is laying on his bed and staring at his phone.
It is his sister’s birthday today, which means that he should really call home, but every time he works up the nerve to it dies before he can hit send, so he just stares at the contact on his screen, pathetically. It has been at least a month since he’s last heard from anyone in his family and it was just his brother sending him a funny picture on facebook and saying “thought of you.”

With his hand shaking slightly, he finally dials the number and hits send, pressing the phone to his ear. His heartbeat is thudding in his eardrums and he curls his fingers into the soft material of his pillow, willing himself to calm down. His mother picks up the phone after three rings.

“Lance,” She sighs, sounding oddly relieved. “Hola, mijo.”

“Hola mama” Lance says, attempting to stop his voice from shaking. “Is Maria home? I, uh...wanted to say happy birthday.”

There is a long, awkward silence on the other end of the line. Then his mother, a little tiredly, says, “Maria went on vacation with her friends, she’s not here.”

“Vacation? Where?”

“New York City. She wanted to celebrate her birthday there. She was planning it for almost a year.” His mother explains it with a heavy tone, as if to imply that Lance would know that if he ever bothered to call.

“Oh…” Lance says. “Okay, I can call her cell, I guess.”

His mother hums, agreeing. “Try not to call too late, my guess is she’s going out tonight.”

“Going out?”

He can practically hear his mother’s sad smile. “Si, mijo, she’s not twelve anymore.”

“Yeah, I mean...I know. I’m...I know that.”

“How are you doing?” She asks cautiously, trying not to cross any lines.


A soft chuckle crackles across the line. “As you always do.” And then. “Take care of yourself.” It sounds more like a scolding than a well-wish. Lance frowns slightly.

“Yeah, okay. Uh...Well I’m going to call her then.”

“Okay, mijo.” A pause. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight mama.”

He hangs up with a hollow feeling in his chest. Sighing, he searches his contacts for his sister's number. When she answers, it is obvious that she is in a crowded place, music thumping behind her voice. “Hello?” She shouts over the sound. “Hello?” She laughs loudly at something a friend says, and it makes Lance’s heart lurch in his chest. It’s a laugh that he used to pull from her all the time with his crazy antics and lame jokes. He hasn’t heard it in years.

“Maria?” He asks shyly.

“Lance?” She sounds shocked. “Is that you?”
“Hi.”

“Oh my god, how are you? Are you dying?”

“What? No, I’m not dying, idiot.” Lance jokes lightly, falling into the same old banter that they used to carry on with for hours when they lived together. “A little birdy told me today is your birthday so, I thought I’d call. You seem busy, though.”

“Lance, I’m at a club!” She shrieks into his ear. “An actual club! Can you believe it?”

Sadness tugs at Lance’s chest. “No, I really can’t.” He says gently.

“Thank you, by the way! I’m freaking eighteen years old. What even!”

Lance chuckles a little at the disbelief in her voice. She still sounds like the same old Maria, with just as much attitude as ever. “Eighteen. You’re officially an adult.”

He hears Maria laugh incredulously at that and squeezes his eyes shut, fighting the burning behind them. Then she gasps. “Oh my god my friend just got onto the stage to sing karaoke! Holy shit--Melissa!” Lance blanches at the curse word. Last time he saw Maria she was far too young to even know any. “Hey Lance, I’m really glad you called but I have to go! Talk soon, okay?”

It’s an empty promise but he says it anyway. “Yeah, of course. Have fun.”

“Bye!” The line clicks shut.

He takes a shaky breath and lets the phone fall onto the floor. He hears it clatter but he doesn’t care, because his eyes are already filling with tears and he can’t really be bothered to do anything else right now other than cry.

He knows it’s not fair to be upset that his family has moved on so much without him there. After all, he has moved on a lot too, and it was ultimately his decision to cut them off. But a small part of him now, every single minute of every day, wishes he hadn’t. Maybe he would have been unhappy at his job but his family...he would’ve had his family.

Suddenly, feelings begin to pile on top of feelings and he wonders if any of this was even worth it. If he’s ever going to get onto that damn team. What if he’s not even improving? What if he’s just chasing something that isn’t there? Maybe this whole time, every day for the past six years, he’s just been wrong about everything.

He blinks and the first tears fall, hot and thick, trailing like bullets down his cheeks. They soak into the collar of his shirt and drip onto the pillow beneath his head. How does one even recover from making a 6 year long mistake? How does one get over that regret? Fix what has been broken? It is even possible anymore? The idea terrifies him and he curls in on himself a little more. Suddenly, the idea of waking up at four to play basketball tomorrow seems incredibly unappealing.

He just wants to go home.

But is home even there anymore?

“Lance…”

Lance startles, looking up and seeing Pidge and Hunk standing in front of his bed. Pidge is looking at him with wide, sad eyes. They both know what happened. Typically, when this happens, it happens on the same days every year. Birthdays, holidays, his parents wedding anniversary,
father’s day, mother’s day...It’s all the same. They both crawl onto his bed, sitting next to him. Hunk places a large hand on his shoulder, rubbing it comfortingly.

“We hate seeing you like this, man.” He says sadly. He hears Pidge hum in agreement, watching as a tear rolls off of the bridge of his nose and hits the pillow.

“I know you don’t want to hear this, but--”

“No. Guys, no . I’m not going to visit them. I can’t, okay? They don’t want me around anymore. I hurt them.”

“Well now you’re hurting.” Pidge says gently, as she does every time this happens. “They are family, Lance.”

“Maybe your mom was angry but, she isn’t anymore.” Hunk reasons. “She probably just misses you. So much.”

Lance doesn’t answer. He stares as the dark, soaked fabric expands with more tears hitting it.

“You can’t keep doing this to yourself.” Hunk adds.

I deserve it, Lance thinks. I deserve it I deserve it I deserve--

He lets out a sad whimper and Pidge flops down on top of him, pulling him into a hug. “Stop being so hard on yourself. You do enough of that every day already.” She mumbles into his shirt.

“Maria is eighteen.” Lance sobs. “Last time I saw her for more than a day, she was twelve. She didn’t even know what a club was! Now she is graduating high school!”

“You didn’t lose as much time as you think.” Hunk says. “There’s still time to fix things.”

“No, there isn’t.” Lance snaps, frustration dripping from his tone. Pidge and Hunk exchange a worried look and Lance ignores it, biting his lips and trying to make the tears stop. “There really isn’t.”

***

For some reason that Lance really doesn’t want to psychoanalyze right now, his first thought after crying with Pidge and Hunk, showering, and giving himself a halfhearted pep talk in the mirror, is to text Keith. He doesn’t really know why, because he isn’t really in any horny sort of mood and honestly, he just feels like sleeping. But, it’s been a couple days since he’s heard from him and--

Anyway, he doesn’t want to psychoanalyze.

He pulls out his phone and shoots Keith a text. The response is quick.

Keith (hot guy from bar)
Lance sighs. Because what *is* up? He sure as shit doesn’t know. He ends up not answering for about ten minutes, just reading the text over and over again and trying to come up with something reasonable to say. Finally, as he’s about to type something genius like ‘*not much*’, Keith sends another text.

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*Wanna come over?*

Lance flops back down onto his bed, phone in hand.

**Lance**

*I've never been to your place before*

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

*I'm...sorry? You don't have to*

**Lance**

*No, no I want to. What's the address*

Keith sends the address and Lance screenshots it. *Be there in twenty*, he replies, lazily leaving his bed and not even bothering to change. He glances down at his navy blue sweatpants and gray tank top.

Meh, Keith’s seen him in worse.
Lance should have worn better pants, because there is no way that this is a home.

He is standing in front of what is apparently Keith’s address, but the large white columns, fountain, glass doors and gate in front of it make it hard to believe that it’s not a museum.

Lance knew that Keith was rich but he didn’t realize...He truly never even thought about it enough to…

He shakes himself out of his embarrassing stare, snapping his jaw shut because it was hanging open. He had texted Keith that he was here about ten minutes ago but he can’t bring himself to actually go in. Jesus, he should’ve at least brushed his hair. What was he thinking?

He hears a door open and close and glances around, panicking. Who is that? What if they see him? Is he even allowed to be here? Holy shit he should book it out of here before the cops exclusively for rich people find him and toss him out on his impoverished ass. Are these pants even from a store? Or were they hand-me-downs? Oh my go--is that a hole?

“Um. Lance?”

Lance whips around and yelps at the sudden sound of someone saying his name, and sees Keith standing barefoot in his long driveway. He’s wearing a plaid pair of red pajama pants and a loose black t-shirt. The evening breeze is cold and there is a dim, yellow light coming from the elaborate lamp posts lining the pathway. It bathes Keith’s whole body in warmth, lining his dark hair like a halo and hitting all of the high points of his face. He is looking at Lance with his hands stuffed in his pockets and an eyebrow raised, a playful smirk lingering on his lips. “Came out to make sure you didn’t get lost.”

“Keith,” Lance breathes, placing a hand on his chest. “Thank god it’s you. Holy shit man. Where the fuck are we?”

Keith’s eyebrow stays raised. “This is my house.” He says, completely confused.

“ This-- ” Lance gestures wildly at the area around them, “--is your house?”

Keith looks like he’s trying to hold back a smile. “Yeah.”

“Where you live?”

“Yes.”

“Like, daily?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh my-- I need a minute.” Lance says, putting his face in his hands. Keith finally laughs, a deep and raspy sound that covers Lance’s arms with goosebumps.

“Want a tour?” He asks playfully.

“Um, yes?” Lance squeaks. Keith gestures for Lance to follow him.

“Come on, if we get to the pond in time there might still be frogs out.”

“Pond?”
He can hear Keith’s smile. “Pond.”

***

It takes literally an hour and a half to get through the whole house. Lance barely speaks the entire time. He just walks blindly behind Keith and watches his face as he explains each room, talking about funny memories he’s had with his parents in them and pointing out all the fancy features. Apparently touch-screen light switches are a thing. Who knew?

Lance is floored. He can tell that Keith has never done this before, shown anyone around his house, because every now and then there is a lull in his descriptions and he looks lost in thought, like he’s trying to think of something to say about the room. Lance doesn’t understand, if this was his house, everybody would know about it, and if they didn’t, he would make sure that they did. It doesn’t make sense to him why Keith would keep something like this to himself, why he wouldn’t use it as an edge while picking up guys, why he never told anyone about it.

They are finally walking up the spiral staircase to what Keith says is his room, and Lance giggles wildly when he sees it, running towards the large, fluffy bed and belly flopping onto it. The puffy comforter and huge pillow almost engulf him, and he, quite literally, nearly suffocates in luxury. Keith is cackling somewhere behind him and he feels another weight dip down on the bed. Suddenly Keith is on top of him, hands on either side of his head, grinning crookedly and looking down at him. “You’re ridiculous.” He says, biting his lip.

“Your house is ridiculous. These sheets probably cost more than my entire living room.”

“I don’t think so…”

“Keith. Come on. They aren’t even sheets. They’re clouds.” Keith laughs again and maybe Lance admits a little bit of defeat because okay, fine, he really likes Keith’s laugh. But people platonically think that about their friends all the time so really, it’s not a big deal.

Keith slowly relaxes his arms until he falls completely forward, chest colliding with Lance’s accompanied by a small “oof.” Lance chuckles a little breathlessly and lifts his arms, running them along Keith’s back and landing on his ass. He squeezes, a little gentler than usual, and Keith makes a tiny, humming noise.

“Don’t think I gave you permission to do that.” He says, voice muffled into Lance’s collarbone. Lance does it again and feels the laugh rumble against him as Keith shakes his head. “Okay, fine, but if I get hard it’s your fault.”

“Same goes for you.” Lance replies easily. He shrugs and squeezes again, a little rougher this time, pushing Keith’s hips against the top of his thigh. Without really thinking about it, he slots his leg between Keith’s and squeezes again, pushing down harder, and feels keith shudder slightly as his crotch drags against Lance’s thigh. Lance has to strain his ears to hear, but Keith let’s out a bit of a shaky breath, and it goes right to his dick. He repeats the motion a few more times, now moving his leg up to rub against Keith with every push, and he can feel Keith getting hard through his soft, plaid pants. A quiet, short moan falls from Keith’s lips and he nuzzles his face into Lance’s neck, like he’s embarrassed. Lance can feel the short, hot breaths against his neck as Keith starts moving on his own, rutting his hips against Lance’s thigh and curling his fingers into the bed sheets surrounding Lance’s head. Lance is already hard without Keith getting anywhere near his dick, and
he wasn’t quite expecting this to happen but it’s not like he minds. Keith is humming brokenly into his neck and grinding down harder, and Lance is aching to be touched but he refrains from changing what is happening here because Keith is literally using him - using his body to get off and for some reason it’s the hottest thing ever and Lance really wants to see him fall apart, to feel him getting close and to watch him come.

Keith doesn’t seem to be thinking nearly as hard about any of this, he just seems focused on the task at hand, and when Lance bends his knee slightly so that his thigh pushes harder against Keith’s crotch, Keith jerks slightly and opens his mouth against Lance’s neck, letting a soft “O-oh” fall from his lips. Such a simple change in position has Keith shivering, making more soft noises into the skin on Lance’s neck.

Lance let’s his eyes flutter shut, the feeling of Keith’s nose and lips just below his ear is making him feel a little dizzy, especially when they are making those sounds. His hands drift down to Keith’s ass and encourage him along, helping keep the rhythm and increase the friction. Keith’s small sounds are less small now, vibrating deep into his neck and echoing in the large room. Lance has to bite back a moan of his own, because this is honestly one of the hottest experiences ever and there's no way he's tainting those beautiful noises with his less-than appealing ones. Suddenly Keith’s hips jerk and he shivers once, twice, choking a moan into Lance’s neck and gathering the sheets in his fists. Lance watches the whole thing happen, refusing to blink until it’s over, and then Keith's body fall onto him again, the full weight of it, slack and exhausted. He can feel Keith’s heart beating against his chest, fast and hard, still reeling from his orgasm. Keith is taking long, steadying breaths into his neck, and Lance shivers from the sensation of it, very suddenly realizing how hard he is.

He has the inexplicable urge to brush Keith’s dark hair out of his face and see his blissed out expression, but he allows his fingers to twitch and keeps his hands to himself.

When Keith speaks, it’s not what Lance was expecting. “I-I’m--uh.” He clears his throat. “Sorry about that.” He sounds incredibly self conscious, refusing to lift his head off of Lance’s chest and meet his eyes.

“Wha-- Sorry? About what?”

“I don’t know, the fact that I just came in my pants like a middle schooler? The fact that I dry humped your leg? I don’t know. That was weird, right?”

“I mean, I didn’t think so.” Lance says.

“You came here to get off and I literally just used you like a sex doll, jesus, my life is a mess.” Keith finally lifts his head to look at Lance and shit, Lance really isn’t prepared for the red, bitten lips or the flushed cheeks that he is faced with. He swallows.

“Really. It wasn’t weird. It was like, incredibly sexy.”

Keith’s eyebrows shoot upwards, shocked. “Seriously?”

“Yes, Keith. Seriously. God, it’s like you don’t even know how hot you are.”

Keith blinks at him, still looking shocked. “I…” Something in his gaze snaps and he looks away. “Want me to get you, now?” He asks, changing the subject.

Lance nods frantically. “Yes please.”
“Is this a movie theater?” Lance’s voice echos from somewhere in the house and Keith laughs a little to himself. Lance found the movie room. He was bound to eventually.

He walks in the direction of Lance’s voice and sees him staring wide-eyed at the open double doors, where inside there is a large projection screen and eight large, puffy, reclining chairs. “Yeah, it’s technically called the Movie Room, but…”

Lance grabs his hands and tugs him inside, the door shutting behind them. Darkness envelops them and Keith reaches out, searching for the light switch. His palm presses against something warm and firm, which vibrates as he hears Lance laugh. “Do you spend a lot of time in here?” Lance asks from somewhere in front of Keith, genuinely curious.

Keith stumbles backwards blindly until he falls into a seat, and leans back in it. “I used to when I was younger.” He says. “My dad has the best collection of movies. We have the same taste.”

“Yeah?” He can hear Lance getting closer and suddenly there is a weight on the chair next to him, spreading itself out clumsily and moving until finally the movement stops. Keith feels Lance’s legs tangled with his. He feels the front of Lance’s shoulder pressed against the front of his, both of their bodies presumably turned towards each other, although Keith can’t see anything. He can feel warm puffs of Lance’s breath against his lips. He swallows. “Out of all the chairs, you had to sit here?” He asks, pretending to be irritated. Lance chuckles.

“Here I am.” He says proudly.

“This thing isn’t big enough for both of us.”

“This town ain’t big enough fer the two of us!” Lance mimics back in a very poorly executed southern accent.

Keith blushes, thankful that the dark hides it. “You’re an idiot.”

Lance laughs. “Dude you’re totally right. Oh my god, I just had a thought. Did you used to jerk off in here?”

“No, Lance.”

“Because how sweet would that be? Porn on the big screen and these reclining chairs? Oh man- -”

“Lance--”

“--probably wouldve been the most pampered masturbation session ever.”

“I can’t believe you.” Keith says, chuckling.

“Oh come on, don’t tell me you’ve never thought about it.”

“I’ve never thought about it,”


“Sorry.” Keith replies, shrugging.

It’s silent for a moment and Keith lets his eyes close, breathing in the calming smell of Lance’s cheap deodorant, like he always does. “What deodorant do you wear?” He finally asks.
Lance snorts. “Yeah, sorry it’s not Armani, but it’s all I can afford and it does the job.”

“No, I…” Keith frowns slightly. “I really like it.”

“My deodorant?”

“Yeah. It smells good. Like...like how stores smell when they’ve got all the fake christmas trees out. You know, except better, obviously. Cause like...you’re not a fake tree.”

“Fake Christmas trees?”

“Yeah! Like in December when you go to the mall to buy gifts and the whole place just smells like christmas trees and fountain water and gingerbread.” Keith talks excitedly, finally putting a name to the smell that’s been clinging to all his clothes for the past two months. “You know what I mean?”

He can’t see Lance’s reaction, but Lance doesn’t respond for a bit. Then he says, “I mean...it’s just the generic brand...from the mini-mart. But you can keep spinning sweet, sweet poetry to me if you’d like.” There is a grin in his voice.

Keith scowls, face flushing. “Oh, fuck off.” It pulls a loud laugh from Lance.

“Speaking of fucking off, I should probably go soon…” Lance says, sounding a little reluctant. “I’ve got an...early morning.”

Keith bites back the urge to ask all about it, to ask Lance to stay a little longer, maybe just tonight, because his parents aren’t home and this house can get so incredibly lonely. “Yeah, I gotcha.” He says instead. “I’ll walk you out.”

He hears the small smirk in Lance’s voice. “Good, cause there’s no way in hell I’m finding my way out of here alone.”

Chapter End Notes

My tumblr: dimplesandcurlss
Seven

Chapter Summary

i mean they are so in love its painful someone help them

Chapter Notes

This chapter ended up being so long! I have to split it into two. So here is the first part, and the second part will probably pick up right where this one ends and continue. Some angst, feelings, honestly i forget if there is smut because i've been adding to this chapter for like a week? also, i wrote parts of this on my iphone while drugged up on Nyquil on a plane so sorry if there are typos! ANYHOW thanks so much for reading, love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith wakes up to the sound of many voices emanating from the kitchen downstairs, one of them belonging to his father. He looks at the clock. It's 10AM on a Saturday. Why the hell are there a bunch of strange men in his house? Usually professional meetings don't occur on Saturday mornings.

Irritated and still rather exhausted, Keith makes the executive decision to shower and brush his teeth before going downstairs, instead of just lazing around in his sweats like he usually does. He puts on a pair of black jeans and a red shirt and braces himself for social interaction. He really would rather not but...he wants breakfast.

He only has to take two steps down the stairs before he regrets showing his face, because not only is Shiro sitting in his living room but so is the rest of his Shiro’s family, plus about six other men he’s never seen before, and a girl who looks around his age.

He stares from the bannister, praying to god he wasn’t seen so he can just go back to bed and hide forever. But his father's voice booms through the echoing, marble halls. “Keith! Morning. Come here, son.”

Fuck fuck fuck fuck---

He locks eyes with Shiro and his breath hitches. He really isn’t prepared for this at all and Lance said he could have a week to cry into a tub of ice cream but he hasn’t even done that yet and now Shiro is here and so is his family and this isn’t at all a good combination of people--

“Son?” His father says, sounding a little concerned.

Keith clears his throat. “I, uh.” Charming, Keith. “Hi everybody, nice to see you all, I’ll be right down.” He says in the most confident voice he can muster, before climbing into his room and falling face first on his bed, willing his heartbeat to calm down.
Fuck, Shiro looks good. Like he always does. Like he always will, every minute of every day of the rest of Keith’s sad, pathetic life. His strong jaw and kind eyes and broad shoulders are just so captivating, the thin scar along his nose making Keith itch to reach over and run his fingers across it. He looks like comfort. There is something so familiar about his face, so familiar about the way it makes Keith’s heart melt. This sad, pining, despairing feeling is just...so familiar.

Why has Keith let himself feel this way for so long?

Sighing shakily, he lifts himself off of his bed. Maybe he’ll never stop loving Shiro. Maybe years from now Shiro will get married and Keith will shed a few tears. Maybe there will always be a part of his heart that never quite healed; that never quite got over it. But he’s got to stop tearing himself apart because of it. He has got to stop this heartache, it’s ruining his life.

Swallowing down a few tears, he splashes some cold water on his face and takes a few deep breaths. He glances up at himself in the mirror, feeling a little bit like he’s one of those stressed-out main characters in an angsty movie. He smirks a little at the thought. For some reason, that sounds like something Lance would say if he were here right now.

“Keith?” Shiro’s voice rings through the room, gentle and cautious. “You in here?”

Keith takes yet another deep breath, walking into his room and shutting the bathroom door behind him. He sees Shiro standing next to his bed, looking pretty fucking stunning in a black button down and gray slacks. He crosses his arms over his chest, willing himself to speak. To say anything, really, but nothing comes out. It’s a good thing Shiro has his shit together and speaks up first.

“I’m so, so sorry for what I did to you, Keith.” He says, voice shaking. Keith immediately uncrosses his arms and they fall to his sides, slightly put-off. He’s never heard Shiro talk like this, so devoid of confidence and conviction. An uneasy warmth curls in his chest. Shiro swallows and continues. “I should have told you. The second I started seeing her I should have told you. But I just remembered how crushed you were in college and…I’m not even sure if you remember but...”

Keith desperately tries to calm down his nerves. “What?” He asks, frowning.

“You called me...the night I rejected you. You were really, really drunk, and you said some pretty intense things and I kept trying to tell myself to get over it but you were...so hurt.”

Keith stills, heart practically stopping. “What are you talking about?”

“You called me the night after you asked me out, and you were saying all of these horrible things. Like you’d never forgive me and you hated me, and you hoped I would die alone and miserable.” Shiro’s lips quirk upwards, showing the smallest hint of a smile. “I mean, I knew you well, even at the time. I knew it was your temper talking, mostly, but...I’m not an idiot. I knew there was something else too.” He clears his throat. “Then you told me you loved me and, well, it was the first time anyone had ever said that to me. Because asking someone out isn’t exactly the same as loving them so I just...got really frightened.” Shiro’s voice is still wavering slightly and Keith can feel tears burning behind his eyes. “I thought that everything was fine after that, and time passed and everything was okay and we never spoke of it again, but then I started dating Allura and I somehow just remembered it all and I didn’t know. I just couldn’t find the courage to say anything to you. I couldn’t face another heartbroken phone call like that, because hearing you so upset hurt me just as much. And I’m sorry, because you deserved to know.”

Keith holds his breath, trying really hard to not let the tears in his eyes fall. He...he really said all of that to Shiro?
“Because of course I loved you too, Keith. I just didn’t...I don’t think it was in the same way. I still do. You know I do.”

The tears are falling now because Keith’s small, crippled heart can only handle so much. He opens his mouth to speak but Shiro cuts him off.

“I miss you. You’re my best friend. The past two weeks may have sucked a lot for you, Keith, but they’ve sucked a hell of a lot for me too. Within one day we went from talking all the time to not talking at all. I mean, I know I crossed a line, but jeez Keith it hurt me too.”

Keith frowns a little, cheeks burning, tears still falling slowly from his eyes. “See? You say things like that all the time! You always say this vaguely romantic shit and you don’t know--you don’t even consider that maybe--” He shakes his head frustratedly. Shiro’s face drops.

“I-I’m sorry, Keith.” He says, stepping in closer. “I didn’t realize...but now I know, okay? I won’t say things like that anymore. I never wanted to lead you on like this...You just need to know that I care about you, and I don’t know how else to tell you.”

Keith just lets the tears flow now, fighting their way out of him like they’ve been wanting to do for days. He curls his arms tighter around himself and feels Shiro’s strong arms engulfing him, warm and steadying. He grabs at the stiff fabric on Shiro’s back, letting the tears soak into his chest. With every tear that falls he feels relief, lifting the weight off of his shoulders and finally alleviating the strong hold on his heart.

All this time, Shiro has been scared, too.

He hears Lance’s voice in his head, soft and fond when he was talking about Pidge. ‘Sometimes the way we feel just doesn’t line up. But it doesn’t mean you’re not enough.’

He has been so angry for so long, and for what? Nobody you love should make you feel the way he has been feeling. Shiro always had a knack for bringing out this side of him that he hates, simply because of how much he loved him. But...loving someone isn’t supposed to turn you into a monster. At least, not if it’s the right person.

“I’m sorry.” Keith mumbles into Shiro’s shirt. “I’m sorry for saying all of those horrible things. I don’t...I don’t want you to be miserable.”

“I know.” Shiro says softly. And a part of Keith’s heart aches, like it always does when he’s around Shiro, but he is finally starting to feel like maybe this ache is more bearable than he thought. He’s finally starting to feel like maybe this ache can just be a dull pain he experiences from time to time, instead of an intense, shooting, burning pain that controls his entire life.

And when Shiro lets go, Keith can finally, finally feel himself starting to let go too.

***

It turns out there is an actual reason for all of those people being in Keith’s living room. The reason, unfortunately, is not Keith’s favorite. After washing his face and waiting a little for the puffiness in his eyes to decrease, he joins Shiro and the rest of the guests downstairs. His dad pulls him aside in the kitchen the moment his feet touch the lower level.
“Where have you been?” He asks urgently.

“Sorry, I was talking with Shiro.” He sighs. “What’s half of the world doing in our living room, anyway?”

“Okay, well, after you met Joe at the company picnic a couple days ago, I went out for a couple drinks with him and it turns out that he knows Shiro’s family!” His father smiles giddily, all anger dissipating from him voice. Keith waits for him to continue. “Obviously I know that you and Shiro are very dear friends so, what better opportunity to meet Diane than a brunch party with people you are comfortable with? Plus a few others, of course.”

Keith feels like bashing his head into a wall while simultaneously laying in moving traffic. This is a set-up for a date. His father has sweet intentions, especially by inviting Shiro to make this less awkward for Keith, but even still. “Diane is here?” He asks.

“Oh, don’t be so nervous! I know she’s very pretty but I’m sure if you be yourself she’ll like you just fine! She’s incredibly kind.”

“Dad, I don’t think I wan--”

“I’m going to get some coffee with the rest of the men to give you two some alone time. How does that sound?”

“Uh.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll have fun.”

Keith, feeling yet again like he is having a one-sided conversation with his father, just nods. His father grins. “Great! I’ll go tell them!”

***

This is awkward.

This is really, incredibly, devastatingly awkward.

Keith is sitting on the couch next to a girl his age who is supposedly Diane. His father was right, she is very pretty. She has short dark hair, almost as dark as his, with pale skin, long lashes, rosy cheeks, and flushed lips. She’s wearing a Versace dress and swarovski jewelry, with just enough makeup to look naturally beautiful. She smells like daisies, which is probably something he would like if he wasn’t comparing it to the musky, delicious smell of Lance’s deodorant. Not that he should really be thinking about Lance at all right now, but--

“So what number is this for you?” She finally speaks, crossing her arms over her chest and raising an eyebrow. She has the slightest bit of a smirk on her face and Keith raises an eyebrow, confused.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean how many set-ups have you had this week? Because this is my third.”

Keith gapes. “Third?”
“Yeah, you haven’t had that many? I mean I’ve probably been doing two every week for the past two months.”

“No, I...Well I mean I’ve had some in the past, but this is my first in a while.”

She snorts. “Wow, how flattering. I guess it’s a bigger priority to marry off a daughter than a son.”

Keith smiles sadly. “Although that is twisted, it’s also possible.”

She returns his smile with a similar one. “My date yesterday had his own private jet.”

“Sounds sexy.”

“I literally would’ve killed myself before flying anywhere with him. He was a pompous asshole.”

Keith laughs, thankful that the ice has been broken. “Seems like it.”

“I couldn’t even get through four seconds of talking about myself before he interrupted me to talk about his hot-tub with a built-in massage seat.”

“So am I just the lucky date that’s made you snap or do you treat everyone this luxuriously?” Keith deadpans.

She sighs, sitting up straighter. “I know you’re not like them. I always see you at networking events and wonder what your deal is. You just talk to the bartender and keep to yourself.”

She looks down at her fingers, picking at her nails a little nervously. “Everybody at those events are way too obsessed with themselves to keep quiet so, I figured you must be different.”

Keith shrugs. “I’m probably still an asshole.”

She grins. “Well, at least you admit it. That makes you a better man than all of them.” She looks away and clears her throat awkwardly. “In my opinion, at least.”

Oddly flattered, Keith feels his face flush. “Well...thanks. I guess.”

Her pretty, pink lips quirk upwards in a gentle smile. “Don’t worry. I’m not going to force you to fall in love with me.”

Keith chuckles. “That’s a bit of a relief.”

“But we’ll probably have to go on a few more dates to shut our parents up.”

“Oh, totally.”

“I don’t mind, though. I can imagine you’re good company.”

There is something suggestive in her voice that makes Keith pause. He really should tell her he’s not straight. But he doesn’t know anything about her. If the word gets out to her contacts, or her family, that he’s gay then his whole family's reputation could be ruined.

But he doesn’t want to lead her on, either.

“I’m...uh...” He searches her eyes desperately, begging for her to take a hint so he doesn't have to say anything out loud. She raises an eyebrow at him.

“You’re what?”
“Look, you really are beautiful.” He starts, cringing at how cliche it sounds. “And you’re also very
down to earth which I really like.”

Her face falls a little. “But…?”

“But I’m…” He’s never actually said it out loud. Shiro figured it out on his own. Lance got the
idea. Nobody has ever made him say it. She’s still waiting, looking more and more nervous with
each second that passes by. He bites the bullet and goes for it. “I’m gay.”

“Excuse me?”

“I like boys.” He swallows. “So…”

Her eyebrows are at her hairline, eyes wide with shock. “Is this some new, creative way that nice
boys reject girls now?”

“No, no, it’s actually true.” Keith says nervously. “Like...I have been for a while. Nobody knows,
okay? Not even my parents. Please don’t say anything. I just figured you deserved to know…” He
bites at his lip nervously. “Because I’ve been led on before and I know how much it hurts.”

Diane’s face in unreadable for a moment. Then it falls into what looks like acceptance, her mouth
turned slightly downwards. “Oh.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“No it’s...I mean, I’m just surprised.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean that’s gotta be rough, right? Especially with all the...dates…”

“Yeah I...I’m not really sure what I’m gonna do.”

She nods slowly. “Well...you don’t have to worry about me saying anything.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I won’t.”

Keith sighs, long and heavy. “Thank you so much.”

“But you have to tell our parents that this date didn’t go well.” She says. “Or else they’re just going
to think we’re getting married.”

“Yeah, I know.”

The doorknob jiggles and they both turn around to face it, hearing the deep, boisterous voices of
the men returning with coffee.

“You ready?” She asks, sounding exhausted.

“Do I have a choice?” Keith answers, earning himself an unamused chuckle.

***
Lance reads over the email about a hundred times. On his screen, in big red letters, it says:

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS, STUDENTS!! BASKETBALL TRYOUTS FOR TEAM ALTEA START ONE MONTH FROM TODAY.**

He scans over it again and again and again, anxiety and excitement gnawing away at his stomach. “Hunk! Pidge!” He shouts. “Get in here before I blow a fuse and die!”

Moments later, Hunk and Pidge are at his side, staring down at the screen with him. They both make an “oooooh” sound when they read the email, resting their chins on Lance’s shoulders.

“One month? Do you think that’s enough time?” Hunk asks worriedly.

“What do you mean, Hunk?” Pidge snaps. “He’s been practicing like crazy! Of course he’s ready!”

“I mean I know it’s been a year and everything but still one month is so soon!”

“But he’s been sticking to a very strict schedule to make he covers every skill set so there shouldn’t be anything that he isn’t--”

Lance holds up a hand to silence them. “Guys, guys, relax.” He says softly. “I still have a month, and tryouts go for about two weeks so I could wait a little longer If I wanted to.”

“Do you need any help practicing anything?”

“I could make a hoop with my arms.” Hunk adds. “If it’s ever raining or something.”

“I could play the part of your quick, tiny, witty opponent!”

Lance laughs. “Guys, really, I think it’ll be okay. I’ve been doing a lot of things differently this year so…” He trails off, angry at how unsure he feels.

“You’re gonna **crush it**, Lance!” Pidge exclaims, shaking Lance’s shoulder encouragingly. “You’ve improved a lot since last year!”

“Yeah, really dude, in all seriousness. You have.”

“I really hope so.” Lance says, staring at the email “I really, **really** hope so.”

Hunk sighs, reading Lance’s worried expression. “Let’s...have dinner! Do you guys wanna go out tonight? I got a lot of tip money yesterday so maybe we can go somewhere nice.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “Oh yeah? Who’s giving you tip money? Your rich, **lover** boy?”

Hunk frowns. “He’s not my lover boy.” He says, rolling his eyes. “And I’ll have you know that yes, in fact, he tips very well.” He crosses his arms over his chest and looks away.

Lance snorts. “Whatever.”

Pidge smiles, interested. “Wait, what’s going on?”
“Hunk here’s got a man-crush on this rich boy who goes to all of the...you know, rich people events.” He says, waving a hand dismissively.

“Oh please, it’s not a man crush. He’s just a cool dude! And I think Lance would really be into him. Maybe I should get his number for you.”

“Please, no.” Lance says flatly. “That’s the last thing I need right now.”

Hunk shrugs. “Suit yourself, but he’s attractive. And hilarious. It only takes him like two glasses of wine to get plastered, then he just rants about cufflinks and glossy shoes. You guys would have the most amazing conversations.”

“Sounds dreamy.” Lance says sarcastically.

“He is! God you’re impossible.”


“Whatever you say, Lance.”

***

Practicing this morning has been really tough, and Lance refuses to admit it’s because he’s nervous.

The air is especially cold, biting at his nose and freezing his eyelashes together. He can see every breath coming out of his mouth, dense and foggy. It’s been an hour and he hasn’t made one damn shot. His arms feel tired and his legs are shaky. Two more hours. He just has to make it two more hours.

But every time he goes to make a shot, he loses his balance. Something is off. He doesn’t quite know what it is but…

He keeps thinking about that phone call. About his sister and his mom and all of the other people that he shut out of his life for this stupid, stupid idea that he can accomplish anything. He can’t seem to shake off the hopeless feeling because yes, he has a slight chance but in reality does he? He was rejected two years in a row. It’s so competitive and maybe all of this was so dumb and why did he think he could do this? Why did he sacrifice everyone he ever loved for this foolish, stupid fucking dream.

He sprints to make a shot again but tumbles out of form, losing his balance and skidding across the rough asphalt. He hisses in pain as he feels the sharp, rocky surface tearing at the skin along the entire right side of his body, even landing a few scrapes on his cheek. He sighs shakily, feeling the sting intensify as the shock wears away.

Ouch. Thank god nobody was around to see that wipeout.

He can’t really find the will to get up so he just stays on the ground, letting the cold air envelop him as he catches his breath. God, what a mess. He’s always been upset about his family, but it’s never affected his playing. His love for the sport always seemed to trump everything else. But now that he’s laying on the cracked, dirty ground and feeling the small droplets of blood dotting his scrapes all he really wants is a hug from his mother. Deep down, beneath all of the meaningless
lies he tells himself every day, there is the brutal truth. Team Altea doesn’t want him. And now, neither does his family.

Taking a bit of a choked breath, he stands up, picking up the ball as he does so. He faces the cracked, beat-up bucket and swallows, preparing himself.

*Two more hours.*

***

“What happened to your face?” Keith asks, fingertips brushing gently over the giant mess of scrapes on Lance’s cheekbone. Lance stills, feeling vulnerable under the touch. Keith presses down a little and he hisses quietly. The bruised area around the scrape is still tender.

After a very stressful practice and an even more stressful day at work, Lance bails on class and shows up at Keith’s office with little warning. He just really wants to relieve some tension and maybe he wants Keith’s company too, but he tells himself it’s mostly because of the sex. Keith had been a little surprised to see him, and when he saw the open scrapes on Lance’s arm and face, surrounded by the light bruising (which appeared gradually throughout the day), he completely left what he was doing at his desk and approached Lance, concern plain in his eyes. It renders Lance a little defenseless, because he wasn’t even expecting Keith to notice, let alone say anything. So now that Keith is looking up at him with round, dark eyes and a worried expression on his face, Lance isn’t really sure how to respond.

He wraps his fingers around Keith’s wrist, slowly tugging it away from his cheek. “Oh, it’s nothing.” He lies. “It doesn’t even hurt.”

Keith raises an eyebrow at him, unconvinced. “It’s all over your arm too.” He says softly. “Did you fall out of a moving car or something?”

“How on earth is that your first guess? You’re so weird.”

“That’s what it looks like!” Keith argues, frowning.

“No, I didn’t, Keith.”

“Well then what happened?”

“It doesn’t matter. It’ll heal.”

“Did you get into an accident?”

“No, Keith.”

“Did somebody hurt you?”

“What? No! Jesus, Keith, you’re getting all ‘protective father’ on me.” Keith’s frown deepens. Lance shrugs dismissively. “It’s just a few scrapes.”

“You should at least bandage them. Do you even know how to take care of yourself? They could get infected.” He walked over to his desk and starts searching his drawers, presumably for bandages, as he talks. Lance can see the frustration building in his shoulders, making his stance
stiff and uncomfortable. Is Keith...actually getting mad about this?

“Highly unlikely, considering they're just tiny scrapes.” He mumbles.

“They're not tiny!” Keith snaps, eyebrows pulling together. Lance bites back the urge to giggle. Keith is actually mad. It’s so fucking adorable.

Standing up a little straighter and snuffing the thought as quickly as it came, Lance clears his throat a little awkwardly. “They're incredibly tiny. I can barely even see them.”

“Oh, shut up Lance. Just admit it hurts.” Keith retorts, finally finding a bandage and slamming the drawer shut with a little too much force. Lance forces down his smile.

“I don’t feel a thing.” He says, as Keith marches up to him, an angry scowl painted across his face. Once he is close enough to Lance, he starts fiddling with the wrapper in his hand, trying to open the bandage. Lance can see the angry, flat line of his mouth and the frustrated crease between his brows. He keeps talking. “Of course, it may just be because I’m so powerful and manly that I’m relatively invincible. That, or I’ve just hurt myself so many times that it doesn’t bother me anymore—ow fuck!”

Keith, apparently a lot angrier with Lance’s teasing, finally unwraps the bandage and slaps it onto Lance’s injured cheek, causing pain to flare in the right side of his face. “Jesus fuck, Keith! What the hell?”

“Oh, Hi Lance. Damn, that looks like it hurts. What happened?” Keith asks casually. Then he smirks.

“You are evil!” Lance shrieks at him, clutching his cheek. “I’ve been sleeping with an evil person!”

“Oh, does it hurt? But it’s so small! I can barely see it!” Keith mimics back at him, waving his hands around wildly and raising an eyebrow.

“Okay fine! You heathen! It hurts!” Lance shouts back.

“So tell me what happened!” Keith pokes his chest accusingly.

“I just fell this morning while working out! Okay? Can we please drop this now?”

A strange look passes over Keith’s face, and he doesn’t respond immediately. Lance huffs frustratedly and crosses his arms over his chest, cheek still throbbing.

“While you were playing basketball?” Keith finally asks, tone cautious.

Lance stills. “Wh..what?” Keith blinks at him, waiting for an answer. “How do you know about that?”

“Coran told me.” Keith says, suddenly sounding very nervous. “While I was working at the garage last week.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “You were talking about me?”

A small blush dusts Keith’s cheeks and he frowns a little. “I mean, not at first.” He says defensively. “But he said it was a small town so I asked if he knew you.”

“Oh.” Lance is suddenly feeling very unprepared to have this conversation. “Well, yeah, I was
playing basketball. I fell. It’s over. Let’s move on.”

“I heard you’re really good.”

“I’m okay.”

“You’re probably really good.”

“I’m really just okay.”

Keith takes a step forward into Lance’s personal space. “Not buying it.” He looks up at Lance and tilts his head to the side, questioningly. It’s something, Lance’s has noticed, that he always does when he wants Lance to kiss him. It’s like he is tilting his head in preparation to fit their lips together. Lance doesn't think that he realizes he does it, which makes it all the more attractive. He finds himself subconsciously tilting his head in the opposite direction, ever so slightly. “Really,” Lance says. “Everyone here makes it seem like a big deal but…” His eyes flick down to Keith’s lips and then back up to his eyes. “But it really is just a small town.” He doesn’t like this conversation. He didn't come here to have this conversation. He came here to forget this conversation. He came here to get lost in Keith. To have a blissful moment away from his stupidly difficult life.

Apparently he’s pulling some kind of pained face now, because Keith just nods slightly and breathes, “okay”, before leaning forward and closing the space between them.

The kiss doesn’t feel urgent. It feels soft, firm, and lingering. Keith's lips part slightly and he exhales, long and hot, against Lance’s lips. Then, in a low, quiet voice, he says, “We have to be quiet, okay? There are still people here…”

Lance hums in understanding and pushes forward, backing Keith up against the desk and laying him down on it. “You should be telling that to yourself.” He mumbles, climbing over him and dipping down to kiss his neck.

Keith chuckles softly, swatting Lance on the back of his head. “Shut up.”

Lance breathes in the spicy smell of Keith's cologne. He may not be a fan of rich boys, but damn, Keith's expensive cologne makes him dizzy. He could probably smell it all day. Maybe it's because he associates it with sex. Or maybe it's because he associates it with Keith. Doesn't matter, he fucking loves it. He buries his hands into the thick mop of hair on Keith's head and tugs their lips together again, feeling lightheaded.

Suddenly, the intercom beeps. A shrill, female voice breaks through the heavy air. “Sir, your father is here to see you. I've sent him up.”

They both pause, staring at each other in sheer panic, then reality clicks and Keith pushes Lance off of him roughly. Lance hisses at the contact against his bruised ribs.

“You have to get out of here! You have to hide! I'm not supposed to have any guests in here this late!”

Lance glances around frantically. “There's literally nowhere to--!”

“Get under my desk!” Keith shouts, grabbing him with a sweaty, panicked hand and shoving him into the small alcove underneath his desk. “Stay absolutely still!” Keith hisses at him, before plopping into his chair and pushing his legs in. His knee hits Lance harshly in the nose but Lance bites back the pained noise he wants to make, because he hears a deep, intimidating voice coming
from somewhere near the doorway.

“Hi, son. I know you’re busy but I just wanted to talk about Diane before you go off and do...whatever it is you do after work.” He hears a smile in the man’s voice. Keith clears his throat.

“Hi Dad. Yeah...it wasn't really in the cards for me, I don't think. She didn't seem interested.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. Keith? With a girl?

His father sighs, sounding exhausted. “I need you to at least try, Keith.”

He can practically see Keith frowning at that. “I’m trying, Dad.” He says, sounding frustrated. “It just didn't work out.”

“I don’t think it’s possible to know that quickly.”

“What do you want me to do?” Keith snaps.

“I at least want you to see her again. There is a weekend conference in Phoenix on the 20th and her father and I have made plans for you two to go together. You can meet some important members from our Arizona branch and spend some quality time with Diane.”

“Dad, I can’t.” Keith says through his teeth. Lance lays a comforting hand on his thigh and watches his muscles loosen.

“Keith, stop this. I understand where you are coming from but enough is enough. You need to start thinking about your image and how it affects the family.”

Lance feels Keith’s muscles tense again under his hand and squeezes his thigh a little tighter.

“I…” Keith sounds defeated. “I was just saying I can’t because…” He swallows. “Because I already made plans for that conference.”

“Oh?” His father sounds surprised.

“It’s not a date but...I have been in contact with…” Keith clears his throat, stumbling over his lie. Lance holds his breath. “I’ve been talking with a marketing rep at a firm in New York. He is a valuable connection to have so I invited him to go to the conference with me as soon as your secretary told me about it.”

“Keith,” His father says gently. “I’m very impressed. What’s his name?”

“Uh.” Keith sounds like he’s blanking. Lance pinches his ankle and his knee jumps. “Lance! Lance...McClain. Is his...name.” Lance tenses at the mention of...well, his first name. “He was just hired so there isn’t much information about him on the website yet but, he’s very eager to...um, you know, be a contact for us.”

Lance lets his head fall, nuzzling his nose and mouth into the inside of Keith’s thigh. Keith entire leg twitches at the contact.

“That’s great news Keith. I’ll let Joe know right away. We can arrange for another date with Diane when you get back.”

Lance can tell by the subtle pull in Keith’s leg that this wasn’t something Keith wanted to hear. “Okay, dad.” He ends up saying uncomfortably.
“Alright, Keith. I’ll see you at home.”

“Okay.”

Lance is very lost in this situation. There is something very...intimate about being here and listening to Keith speak with his father. Lance has never talked to Keith about his family, but he always just assumed that they were your typical rich family who drinks too much champagne and doesn’t have a care in the world. But listening to them talk is...heartbreaking.

No wonder Keith is in a job that he hates. No wonder he studied business management despite his love for cars. No wonder he’s working at a garage every evening, unpaid and without any compensation. He is under so much pressure to be someone he’s not. Lance wonders how long he’s been like this, stuffed in a business suit and stifling who he really is.

Lance wonders why he doesn’t just leave.

Is this what his life would have been like if he stayed home?

The minute Lance hears the door shut he scrambles out from under the desk, pushing Keith’s chair away and stepping back into the office. “Your father,” He begins, dusting off his knees, “Sounds terrifying.”

Keith is blushing, arms crossed over his chest. “Really didn’t appreciate you stuffing your face in my crotch while I was talking to my dad.”

Lance laughs. “Oh come on, that wasn’t your crotch.”

“It was close enough!”

“Okay, jeez, I’m sorry! Calm down.” Lance hops up onto the desk so that he’s facing Keith, who is still sitting in his fluffy office chair. “So who’s Diane?”

Keith huffs a sigh, sounding exhausted. “Some girl my parents want me to marry.”

Lance, for some reason, feels something heavy settling in the pit of his stomach. It feels strangely like disappointment, which is dumb, because why should he care who Keith marries? “Oh. Sounds stressful.”

Keith swallows hard. “Don’t know how much longer I can lie to them.”

“Why not just tell them you’re gay?”

Keith looks at him like he’s insane. “Do you have any idea how disastrous that would be? Being gay isn't something that is widely accepted in this part of town. It would completely ruin my family’s reputation. And business.” He clears his throat. “I can't keep doing that. I’m already bad enough at this.”

Lance scowls. “So you’re just going to keep going on dates with people you don't like until one day, you marry one and have to spend the rest of your life grinning and bearing it?”

Keith is frowning now too. “Not that it’s any of your business, but there are worse things in life than marrying someone you’re not madly in love with.”

“Oh yeah? Like what? Having a job you hate? Majoring in something you hate?”

Keith’s eyes go from angry to furious in a snap. “You know nothing about me, or my life.” He
spits, standing up and jabbing Lance in the chest. “So stay out of it.”

There is an awkward, tense silence that fills the air and Lance realizes that he’s crossed a pretty massive line, in more than one sense. They had an unspoken rule about prodding into each other’s personal lives, seeing as this relationship is supposed to be strictly sexual. Keith had almost broken the rule earlier when asking about Lance’s injury, and now Lance has broken it, and he can tell by the fury swirling in Keith’s eyes that this was not his finest choice. There is a reason they have kept this relationship for sex only--it is to avoid messy situations like these.

Emotions honestly ruin everything, and Lance was so happy that he had finally found something that didn’t involve them. But he’s made a mess of it now.

“I’m sorry.” He says softly. “You’re right, it’s none of my business.” A small voice in the back of his head nags at him to ask Keith all of the personal questions building up in his mind but he holds back because... that’s not why he’s here. He came here to hook up with Keith. That’s it. That’s what Keith is to him. That’s how it’s supposed to be.

Keith’s face softens. “No, I’m...sorry for snapping.” He mumbles awkwardly. “I’ve been a little stressed lately.”

“Yeah.” Lance sighs. “Same.” He waits a little and kind of expects Keith to bring it up again, to start talking about it on his own, but he doesn’t. He just takes a step closer to Lance, and then closer still, until their breathing the same air and there is a small sliver of space between them. He raises a hand to Lance’s cheek, gently stroking his thumb over the bandage. “Sorry I slapped you earlier, too.” He says, just as softly; but this time there is a hint of a smile on his lips.

Lance chuckles wearily. “Yeah but I might have deserved that one.”

“You definitely did.”

“I respectfully disagree, but we’ll leave it at that.”

Keith is smiling again, all of the anger seeping away from his eyes. Lance takes a small, relieved breath at the sight of it.

“Is it too much of a stretch to suggest that we continue doing what we were doing? Before we were rudely interrupted?” Keith asks, sounding a little nervous.

“Can I just say one more thing?” Lance asks. Keith raises an eyebrow.

“What?”

“My last name is Sanchez.”

Keith looks a little thrown off. “What?”

“When you were telling your dad about, you know, that guy that probably doesn’t exist,” Keith flushes, “you made up a last name. Which made me realize you don’t actually...know my last name.”

Keith blinks owlishly. “Holy shit. You’re right.”

“So, it’s Sanchez.”

“That’s...oh. I guess the Spanish makes more sense now.”
Lance smiles. “And you are?”

Keith looks like Lance just asked him the most stressful question ever. “I mean, I find it a little hard to believe that you don’t know my last name.” He says, a little sadly. “My family is, unfortunately, a big deal in this area.”

Lance shakes his head. “Not a clue.” There is a very conflicted expression on Keith’s face. Then he looks down and avoids Lance’s eyes.

“Kogane.” He says. It sounds more like a breath than a word, but Lance hears it just fine. He looks at Keith’s short, black eyelashes and slightly flushed cheeks.

_Keith Kogane._

“Pretty.” Lance says. He intends on it being teasing but it comes out gentle. _Really fucking pretty._

Keith clears his throat, looking a little flustered. “Can we please forget today happened and fuck on my desk?”

“Dude, do you even have to ask?”

***

Fucking on Keith's desk actually turns out to be much more awkward and painful than Keith thought it would be, and they both have to keep pausing in incredibly compromising positions because they're laughing way too hard.

“Get your elbow out of my face, you lump.”

“Oh! You just kneed me in the stomach, asshat!”

They both dissolve into giggles and settle on just blowing each other instead because it's hard to fuck on a desk, okay?

“I swear every time you do that it gets better.” Lance breathes once Keith finishes him off. “Do you just spend all your free time researching how to give a blow job? I bet you do.”

“Oh definitely. I have literally nothing else to do.” Keith says sarcastically, rolling his eyes. He watches as Lance lets his eyes flutter open. His labored breathing is starting to even out again. Wobbling a little, he pushes himself off the edge of the desk, smiling at Keith.

“I think you should get a trophy.”

“For sucking dick?”

“Yeah, you need to be recognized for your talent.”

“I'm think I'll be fine without a trophy.”

“Well you may not care but I won't stand for it.”

“Okay, Lance.” Keith runs a hand through his hair, feeling a little nervous. Not only did he just lie
to his father’s face multiple times, but now his father expects to be introduced to a boy who doesn't exist. And the only solution he can think of is asking Lance to come with him but, that's *insane*, right?

“What the *hell* are you thinking about? You look like you're about to explode.” Lance’s voice breaks through his panic.

“I just...well I was...” Keith doesn't meet Lance’s eyes yet. There's got to be another option. But he really and truly has no other male friends. His dad knows shiro. His dad knows the bartender. His dad doesn't know Lance. But he can't ask him to do this because...well, that's not part of the deal. Also, it's probably incredibly rude. And Lance has a life, he can't just fuck off for a weekend to drink champagne with a bunch of rich assholes.

“Dude, seriously. I don't mean to pry but, are you even in there?”


“Yes?”

“Lance Sanchez.”

“...yeah?”

“Can you...like, just for the weekend...”

Lance raises an eyebrow.

“Well not this *particular* weekend but a weekend in the near--”

“Jesus, spit it out, Keith!”

“Be Lance McClain? For the weekend? With me?”

Lance looks very taken aback by this. “*What*?”

“Lance McClain! The marketing rep that I know from New York City. You know, the one I just made up?”

“Yeah I *know* who Lance McClain is--”

“*Please*. I know that this isn't...like, I shouldn't even be asking but, I have no other friends. And if I show up to that conference alone my dad will literally have my head.”

“Keith--”

“I'm too young to die.”

Lance shakes his head quickly. “I don't think so.”

“Lance, *please* I'll do anything.”

At that, a smirk begins to appear on his lips. He crosses his arms over his chest. “Anything?”

“Yeah. All of the sex things. Everything you can imagine. So many things!”

Lance narrows his eyes in thought. “Interesting.”
“All you have to do is put on a suit, and sit in uncomfortable chairs while boring men talk about investing!”

Lance frowns. “I don't have a suit.”

“I'll get you one!”

“I can't pay for it.”

“Whatever! I can.”

“I…” He sighs. “I feel like it’s a bad idea.”

“It's a horrible idea.” Keith says confidently. “But what else can I do?”

“You really don't have anyone else?”

“Not anybody that my dad doesn't know!”

“Also, I know nothing about marketing. I'll make an ass of myself, and you.”

“I don't care. I just need to have a body next to me so my parents don't freak out.”

Silence stretches between them, and Lance is making a face that Keith can’t decipher. There is worry in his eyes.

Taking a very large risk, Keith nervously adds, “if you're concerned about practicing basketball, the hotel has a court. I'm pretty sure it does, at least.”

Lance’s eyes flick up from the ground to meet his gaze, looking shocked. Keith's observes the small blush spreading through his cheeks. “Oh.” He says, probably not meaning to sound as relieved as he does. Then he says, “Arizona?”

“Yeah it's in Phoenix.”

“I've...never been there before.”

“That's a reason to come!”

Lance studies his face. “And you'll have sex with me every night we are there? No matter how tired you are!”

“Yes I promise.”

“You'll do everything I say?”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Yes, sure, everything that's filed under a sex slave, just count me in.”

“Can you wear silk boxers?”

“What? No. That's weird.”

“Hmm sorry then it's a no go.”

“What? Are you kidding me?”

“Everything I say, Keith!”
“Fine, I'll wear the damn boxers!”

Lance grins. “Oh, this is gunna be fun.”

***

Lance is seriously stupid. He doesn't understand why he agreed to do this. He's got homework, and an exam, plus no room to be missing hours at work. He really and truly doesn't have time to miss an entire weekend of his life, especially for someone who he hadn't even considered a friend until about a week ago. Now, he is standing in store that is made almost entirely out of mahogany and smells like wood polish and perfume. In the mirror in front of him, he sees himself. Except, not himself. Because he is being fitted into a dark, navy, pinstriped suit and he can barely recognize himself in it.

“I feel like this makes me look way too important.” He says, cringing as he tugs at the bottom of his jacket.

Keith is standing behind him and laughs. “Yeah, that's just what suits do, I think.”

“Makes me uncomfortable.”

“But you gotta look important. You're a working man in the business world, Lance McClain.”

“I sure am.” He deadpans. “But I feel like a bean pole.”

“What?”

Lance has been wearing loose athletic clothes and sweats for so long it's like he’s forgotten what his body looks like in something fitted. He’s not used to the narrowness of his waist or the thin, spindly legs that he sees in front of him now. “I look so skinny! Where's all the meat on my bones?” He says defensively, gesturing down at himself. “How can something so expensive make me look so bad?”

Keith looks personally offended by what Lance said. “Lance. Jesus. Don't make me say it.”

Lance frowns, studying the scowl on Keith's face. “Say what?” He moves to loosen the silk tie around his neck, tugging at the knot and letting it fall.

Keith watches the movement, sighing. “You know what.”

“I really don't.” He turns around to face Keith and crosses his arms over his chest. “All I know is that eating saltine crackers for dinner and working out twenty one hours a week has made my body look like scrawny as fuck.”

“There are... so many things wrong with what you just said.” Keith says, shaking his head. Lance swallows. Keith's shoulders fit so nicely in his suit. They stretch it in just the right ways. The jacket hugs tightly around his waist.

“See?” Lance says pointedly. “Yours fits great.”

“Because mine is fitted, you asshat.” Keith says, scowling further. “Just like yours will be. Stop freaking out.”
“I'm not freaking out!” Lance says, very much freaking out.

Keith lets out a sound that vaguely resembles a growl and takes a few steps closer to Lance. He can feel his breath, hot on his face. “Look, I don't know how you see yourself, and frankly, I don't care at all.” Keith says a little apathetically. Lance winces. Then Keith continues. “All I know is that I think you look--” he pauses suddenly, looking conflicted, but blinks it away. “--really fucking good.” He says. “And I'm finding it really difficult to not pounce on you right now, because Jesus, you can pull off a suit.”

Lance swallows. “Really?”

Keith is looking more and more uncomfortable with every passing second. “Yeah. So stop it, okay? Really, you look great.”

The warmth in Lance's chest surprises him. Dull, and throbbing, and...familiar. It burns just enough to be unsettling. He sighs and tries to push it back down, but it's getting a little harder to ignore than usual. “Okay, well...thanks.”

“Yeah, of course.” Finally, Keith's irritated face softens. He lifts his hands and fiddles with Lance's collar, beginning to unbutton it near his neck. “So, after Marco takes the measurements this will be ready to be picked up in two days. I'll do it so you don't have to worry about driving all the way out here.”

Lance hums, loving the light brush of Keith's fingers against his neck. “Okay, thanks.”

***

Keith is freaking the fuck out.

Lance is an attractive guy, there is no doubt about it, and he's always known in the back of his mind that Lance tends to bury his body in loose, baggy clothes. But when Lance walks out from the changing room in a dark blue, pinstriped suit, it actually takes his breath away. He isn't prepared for the long, thin line of Lance’s body to be shown off so brilliantly by the close-fitting fabric. He's seen Lance naked a million times so he should know what his body looks like, but seeing it in a tailored suit is a completely different story. Long, slender legs, a cute ass, a thin, tight waist, and broad shoulders, all framed so precisely by the sharp cuts and swoops of the navy jacket and slacks. The worst part of all is that Keith wants to say that Lance looks hot, or sexy, or fuckable, but the only word that keeps coming to mind, over and over and over again, is beautiful.

Because Lance is just...so fucking beautiful?

So, like the dumbass he is, he ends up blurting “really fucking good” instead of what he wants to say, because he's pretty sure that fuckbuddies don't call each other “beautiful” when they are trying on clothes.

I mean, fuckbuddies also don't go to business conferences and take on fake names but, here they are.

Lance steps down from the platform in front of the mirror. “Guess I’ll go, you know, change out of this thing.”
Keith nods, scanning Lance up and down because he seriously can’t control himself. “Yeah, do that.”

“You’re drooling.” Lance smirks, suddenly back to his overly confident self.

Keith scowls. “Go away.”

“Wanna come with? I may need some help—” Lance begins suggestively, but Keith is already grabbing his wrist and pulling him into the changing room, slamming him up against the closed door and kissing him senseless. Lance lets out a surprised noise and laughs lightly, lips smiling against Keith’s. “Damn,” he mumbles. “You weren’t kidding about wanting to pounce on me—”

“Please stop talking.” Keith says, rolling his eyes and connecting their lips again.

Lance lets out a very quiet whimper when Keith bites down on his bottom lip and the voice in the back of Keith’s mind is just screaming, over and over; Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful.

It doesn’t stop, even after they’ve both finished and collapsed onto the shaggy carpet.

It doesn’t stop as Lance changes into his oversized hoodie and ripped sweatpants.

It doesn’t stop as Keith drives home, feeling the persistent blush in his cheeks and the uncomfortable warmth in his chest.

***

“You’re going away for the weekend? With Keith?” Pidge shouts incredulously. “To Arizona?” Lance is finally done studying about six chapters of finance for his exam on Monday, which he had to do in one night because he’s leaving. Pidge walks into his room unannounced, claiming she is bored because Hunk is at work. Of course, they started talking, and of course, Lance had to bring up his upcoming trip.

“Yeah, just for a couple of days.”

“When?”

“This weekend. Pretty sure I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“Keith? Like the guy you’re sleeping with?”

“Yes, Pidge.”

Pidge looks like the gears in her head are turning a thousand times a minute. “Wait, so you’re dating now?”

“What? No!” Lance flushes intensely and he knows that Pidge notices. “We’re just sleeping together. It’s purely physical.”

“So why are you going on a weekend trip together? Pretty sure fuckbuddies don’t do paid vacation.” She says, crossing her arms judgmentally.

“He really needed help, and I mean, I was available so…” Pidge raises an eyebrow at him. “Look,
it’s really hard to say no to him, alright?”

“Because you like him.”

“No, I don’t. Pidge, get over it. Me and Keith will never actually be a thing. I knew you were going to get like this when you met him.”

“What do you mean?” Pidge snaps defensively.

“I mean I knew you were going to think something else was going on! Look, this isn’t the first time that I’ve done this, alright? I do friends with benefits all the time.”

“Yeah, but I’ve never heard about them. I’ve only heard about Keith.”

Lance frowns. “There is nothing romantic going on between me and Keith. He just needed a favor, and he promised to fuck me so it worked out, alright?” Lance can hear his voice wavering a little but holds his ground. Because really, maybe Keith makes his heart race a little and maybe his stomach gets a little fluttery but it’s because Keith is just an attractive guy, alright? It’s not because Lance wants to start writing love poems and singing from balconies and all that shit. He and Keith are far too different-- different backgrounds, different values, different ideas of what a happy life should be. Plus, Keith probably has a million better contenders in his life. He probably sleeps with rich men who wear nice clothes and use fancy words. He never has to worry about their roommates being home or their scraped-up faces.

Pidge looks entirely unconvinced. “Okay, fine. Whatever.” She says, shrugging nonchalantly. “As long as you know that.”

“I do.”

“Alright then.” Pidge hops off of his bed. “I’m going to Mcdonalds, want anything?”

“Nah it’s fine.” Lance replies. “Probably should be eating less trash with tryouts coming up.”

“Right. Well, I think there’s some rice and chicken in the fridge from yesterday if you want.”

Lance smiles. “Thanks Pidge.”

As Lance hears the front door slam shut, he feels his phone vibrating in his pocket. It’s a text from Keith.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Hey so im gonna be at ur place around 5am to pick you up. We’re flying out early

Are you fucking joking?

Lance
5am? It’s a fucking saturday, dude!

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Im sorry! The pilot doesn’t want to leave any later than that

Lance

Excuse me. Pilot?

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Yeah our private jet guy

Lance

Youre kidding right

Keith (hot guy from bar)

No?

Lance

Oh my god im going to die. The one day that i dont have to wake up at 4am youre making me wake up at four am

Keith (hot guy from bar)
Lance smiles a little at that, imagining Keith adorable little pout as he types out the message. Sighing, he responds.

**Lance**

_Sorry sorry. So is your dad going to be flying with us? Because im technically supposed to be from nyc remember_

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

_Nah he’s going to be flying in from somewhere else, dont worry_

**Lance**

_Whew_

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**

_Got ur suit ready?_

Lance chuckles.

**Lance**

_Wouldn’t you like to know? ;)_

**Keith (hot guy from bar)**
Lance curls up in the passenger seat of Keith’s offensively expensive car. He still has sleep in his eyes and the morning air really is very cold when you’re not about to play three hours of basketball. Keith, mercifully, isn’t talking, because he knows how early it is. By the looks of it, Keith seems like he does this kind of thing a lot, because he’s already fully dressed with his hair gelled and his cologne on. Lance, on the other hand, is still in his plaid pajama pants and blue hoodie, curled into the seat with disheveled hair and a pillow crease on his cheek. He stuffs his face into the expensive leather and lets his eyes fall shut. He can already feel himself drifting off. During the week, he is pretty acclimated to waking up early because of his basketball practice. However, once the weekend comes, he lets his body recharge and make up for all of his lost hours. This, he decides, is not the proper way to recharge, and he can feel the exhaustion all the way down to his bones.

He doesn’t know how long they drive for, but when they get there, he wobbles out of his seat, bleary eyed and dazed. He feels Keith’s arm wrap around his waist, grounding him, as they walk across a large, empty parking lot. The cold air does a really good job of slapping him awake with every step that they take, and soon his eyes are fully open, all the sleep gone from them, and he is glancing at his surroundings. Keith’s arm doesn’t move from his waist.

They are in a large, empty lot that is surrounded by warehouse-looking buildings and industrial factories. Lance raises a questioning eyebrow, looking down slightly at Keith, who smirks up at him and points ahead. About twenty feet in front of them, there is a black, shiny jet, buzzing and rumbling to life, with a small staircase leading up to the slim doorway.

Lance pauses, halting when he sees it. Keith’s arm falls from his waist.

“Holy shit.” He mumbles, voice raspy from sleep.

“It’s just a plane.” Keith shrugs, sounding a little uncomfortable.

Lance laughs in disbelief. “Holy shit I’m going in there!”

Keith smiles. “Yeah.”

Lance grabs Keith’s wrist, which really isn’t necessary but the excitement of the moment gets to
him, and starts booking it to the entrance, laughing wildly as he pulls Keith behind him.

“Lance! My legs aren’t as long as yours oh my god --” Keith shouts from behind him, tripping and stumbling through Lance’s excitement. Lance stomps up the stairs and into the jet, finally letting go of Keith’s wrist and flopping into one of the large, leather chairs. “Oh. my. God. ” He says between breaths.

Keith turns towards the direction of the cockpit. “Morning Rick.” He says, like it’s customary. A voice replies.

“Hiya, sir! You ready to go?”

“Ready when you are.”

***

Keith can’t get enough of Lance’s shocked and easily impressed face as he rushes from one end of the plane to the other, screaming about every single thing he sees. He’s still in his pajamas, with shaggy bedhead and a hoodie littered in holes, but Keith just loves looking at him. The childlike excitement is almost too much to handle. He’s bouncing up and down like he’s just had twenty cups of coffee.

“Keith, there is a mini bar on this plane. I can’t even get one of those things in my life!”

Keith chuckles, resting his cheek in his hand. “My parents had it installed after a particularly stressful conference last year. It’s actually quite new.”

Lance grabs a small bag of pretzels from the basket on the bar and sits back in his chair, across from Keith’s. He tears the bag open with his teeth and Keith watches, slightly aroused. “This is fucking amazing, dude.” He tosses a pretzel into his mouth.

“Well I’m glad you’re feeling better than you were this morning.” He says, eyeing the stray hairs that are poking from Lance’s head at odd, adorable angles.

Lance grins at him. “Dude, same. I thought I was dying for a second there.” He glances out the window, presumably watching the clouds roll by, and Keith can’t tear his eyes away from his face. Jesus, he must be more tired that he thought. He blinks a couple times and attempts to shake himself out of it. “You should get changed, we’re probably going to land soon.” He says. Lance looks at him and nods, pretzel crumbs falling from his mouth. Keith stifles a giggle.

Lance stands up and starts sifting through his bag. He pulls out his neatly folded suit and then strips off his hoodie, pulling it over his head and messing up his hair even further.

“You’re changing out here?” Keith asks, swallowing hard as he scans his eyes over Lance’s smooth, dark skin.

“I mean, it’s nothing you haven't seen before.” Lance mumbles, chuckling.

“Fair enough.”

Lance slides his pants off. His briefs are tight and gray. Keith finds himself thinking that he misses
the blue ones. In an instant, they are covered by the dark navy material of Lance’s slacks, which, after the fitting, do a much better job at outlining his long, strong legs and the small swell of his ass. Keith feels warmth begin to curl in the pit of his stomach, suddenly aching to pull Lance tightly against him and make him--

“Oh wow, this fits a lot better now.” Lance says casually, as if Keith’s entire world isn’t falling apart due to his stupid ass. “That tailor has some serious skill.”

Keith clears his throat, willingly trying to stop the rapid heat collecting between his legs. “Yeah, Marco is great.”

Lance slips on the crisp, white button down, which contrasts deliciously with his tan skin, and starts buttoning it up. It stretches across his chest just tightly enough for Keith to still see the definition of his collarbones, and the dips of the muscles in his shoulders. He tucks it into the waistband of his tight pants, and then picks up his blazer, shrugging it over his shoulders and letting it drape over him. Keith is engaging in a very intense internal battle, with once voice screaming at Lance to keep it on and another one begging for Lance to take it off. He doesn't know what he wants more.

Lance wraps the untied bowtie around his neck and looks down at it, a little concerned. “Can you teach me how to tie this thing?” He asks innocently.

Keith nods, exhaling slowly and attempting to calm down the heat in his face. He reaches forward with shaky hands and begins tying the bowtie, looping the fabric delicately through his fingers. There is a comforting heat radiating from Lance’s neck, so close to his hands, and he wants to run his fingers up to Lance’s jaw. He wants to cup it roughly as they make out. He clears his throat for what feels like the fifteenth time since the plane took off.

It’s just Lance. The same Lance it’s always been. The same Lance he sleeps with and then leaves five minutes later. But now it’s Lance Sanchez, who sacrificed a whole weekend just to save Keith’s ass, who wakes up at the crack of dawn to follow his fucking dreams, who gets excited over minibars and free pretzels, and who looks really, really good in a suit. And naked. And pretty much all the time.

“You okay?” Lance asks, a little cautious.

“You okay?” Lance asks, a little too quickly, finishing up the bowtie and taking a few steps back to admire his work. Maybe he only feels this way because Lance is really good in bed. Yeah. That could be it, right? Sex can sometimes exaggerate emotions. That could definitely be it. Because there’s no way Keith actually likes Lance. They’re from different worlds. Lance is charming and flirtatious and outgoing and hardworking. He goes after what he wants. He’s probably sleeping with guys who are just as exciting as him, just as genuine, and probably just as hot. He probably thinks of Keith as a last resort-- just the stuffy, frigid businessman who doesn’t really do anything special in bed but gets the job done anyhow.

So Keith knows that there isn’t anything between them. Because honestly, how could there be?

Lance smiles crookedly at him, as if to ask, ‘how do I look?’, and Keith is tugging him forward by the collar before he even know he’s doing it.

The entire kiss feels like a stumble. Lance’s lips collide into his a little painfully and he makes a
quiet grunting noise, sounding shocked and also in a little bit of pain. But Keith cushions it to the best of his abilities by wrapping his arms around Lance’s shoulders and falling back into a chair, making space for Lance to fall on top of him. He moans embarrassingly loud when Lance settles onto his lap and Lance makes a shocked face, mixed with a little bit of concern that Keith really doesn’t want to see, so he grabs Lance by the back of the neck and smashes their lips together again. It starts out sloppy but they quickly find a pace, licking into each other’s mouths and moving their hands hungrily. Lance chuckles, low and filthy, into Keith’s mouth.

“Jeez, Keith. You turn into a psycho when I put this thing on.” He rasps hotly, moving his mouth to Keith’s cheek in order to catch his breath. Keith just hums, irritated at the broken contact, and holds his chin steady. This time when he closes the distance between them, the kiss is slow, and gentle, and soft. The taste of Lance, so sweet and intoxicating, lingers on his tongue. He brushes his fingers over the smooth skin on Lance’s cheek, then his jaw, then down his neck. Just feathering touches, barely there, ghosting over him. Lance replies with a soft whimper, breaking the kiss slightly to change the angle before dipping back in again. A gentle push of lips. A slow swipe of tongue.

It’s...different. It’s different from anything he has ever done with Lance before. It’s slower. It’s gentler. It’s...not really leading to anything else. Lance sighs softly, breaking away from Keith and nudging forward, brushing their noses together, before moving in again, this time cupping the back of Keith’s neck with his hand and pushing forward a little harder.

Keith’s head is spinning. He’s not sure if it’s arousal or something else entirely, but he settles on arousal, because anything else is not worth dealing with right now. Lance’s fucking deodorant fills his nose and he pulls him impossibly closer, wanting to drown it, wanting to forget where they are going, and forget everything, really, except for the feeling of Lance’s tongue lazily swirling in his mouth and Lance's lips moving do deliciously against his.

Lance pulls away with a small popping nose, exhaling hotly against Keith’s mouth. Their noses are still touching. His eyes stay shut. “Um…” He says shakily. “H-how long until we get there?”

Keith swallows. “Not enough time to do anything.”

“Fuck.” Lance breathes. “Why’d you start this then?”

“I... don't know…”

Lance sighs, slowly, reluctantly, climbing off of Keith’s lap. Keith fights the urge to tug him back down and lets him go. “Well, I’m going to go, uh, splash some cold water on my face or something then.” He says, lips flushed red and cheeks an attractive rosy shade. Keith just nods, not really knowing what to say back. He watches Lance walk away and hears Rick’s voice over the speakers saying that they are landing shortly. Thank god. Because being secluded with Lance Sanchez thousands of feet above any kind of civilization has really not been good for him at all.

***

Phoenix is actually prettier than Keith thought it would be, and the hotel that the conference is held in is one of the more impressive ones that he has been to. The lobby is all high ceilings and glass windows. Marble, wood, and all kinds of gold decorate the vast halls and intricate artwork. There is a fountain in the center that is creating beautiful designs with the water, crossing and weaving
the streams in a really gorgeous way. Lance looks awestruck, whipping his head from one side of the large space to the other, trying to absorb everything he can, all at once. He looks at Keith, still mildly in shock. “Damn!”

Keith nods. “I know, this place is incredible.”

“I can’t even-- damn!”

Keith laughs, and so does the lady behind the desk who is handing them their room keys. “Enjoy your stay.” She says happily. Lance nods excitedly.

“You don’t have to tell me twice!”

Keith rolls his eyes and gestures for Lance to follow him. After a few more minutes of gawking, they get into the elevator.

“Ooooh are we sharing a room?” Lance asks, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“We have separate rooms.” Keith deadpans, and regrets it a little when Lance’s face falls. “But they’re conjoining, so they are connected.”

Lance smiles again. “Yes! Fancy hotel sex is like, fourth on my sex bucket list.”

“You have a sex bucket list?” Keith asks incredulously, as the elevator doors open. “And I’m only hearing about it now?”

“Well, it’s actually a little embarrassing because I wrote it when I was like seventeen.” Lance says, chuckling. “So it’s not something I openly advertise very often.”

“Oh my god.” Keith says, grinning. “You wrote this list when you were seventeen and you are still using it. You have it memorized!”

“It’s important to me!” Lance pouts.

Keith laughs. “Okay, well, I’m glad I could cross off one of the items on your bucket list.” He unlocks the room door and they both walk in, shrugging their jackets off.

“Oh, you’ve crossed off more than one.” Lance sits on the edge of the bed and takes his shoes off.

Keith plops down next to him. “Really?”

“Uh, duh.” Lance says, rolling his eyes. “A fitting room was number seven, which we just did.” Keith blushes at the memory. “Number twelve was an office, which we’ve done like a thousand times. And number sixteen was a mansion, so, checked that off.”

Keith clears his throat, already blushing way too hard. “What’s, uh...what’s number one?”

Lance tenses a little at the question. Not a lot, but just enough for Keith to notice. He scoffs a little nervously. “One is...my own bed. Well at the time, it was my bed at home, but I think it’s pretty much just any bed that belongs to me.” It comes out as a nervous ramble. “Which I know we hook up in all the time, but--” He shakes his head, laughing apprehensively.

“But what?” Keith asks, bumping their shoulders together.

“But, I mean, when I was seventeen I really wanted to, you know, save my bed for someone really special. Like, you know, ‘the one’, or whatever.” He shakes his head, quickly. “It was really stupid.”
Keith blinks, chest tightening. “Doesn’t sound stupid to me.”

“It is.” Lance replies, nodding. “Do you know how many people I brought home who probably would’ve had a much better time if I had just let them on my bed? But I never did. It was pretty idiotic.”

Keith swallows. “Well what made you start letting people on your bed? Did you just give up?”

Lance turns to look at Keith now. His bright blue eyes look dark and stormy, almost as deep as his suit. He is blushing a little because of the oversharing, and his lips quirk upwards in a hesitant smile. “Well, I don't know. I really wanted to impress you, for some reason.”

Keith stills. “Me?”

“Yeah. I mean it might’ve been because I was smashed. And really really turned on. And had a rough day. I don’t know. Plus, I was really self conscious about how my couch smelled. Pidge had spilled barbecue sauce on it that morning. And I figured you were way too hot to get fucked on barbecue sauce cushions. So.”

“Oh my god, you let go of your eight year long soulmate fantasy because of barbecue sauce? Dude, I was sloshed out of my mind, I wouldn't have given a flying fuck.”

Lance’s face slowly cracks into a smile. “Oh...my god ... you’re right.”

It doesn’t really seem like an appropriate time to laugh but Keith is already going for it, doubling over and clutching his stomach with his arms. Lance doesn't look offended. Instead, he joins in, burying his face in his hands and attempting to his his embarrassed blush.

“I barely even remember that night!” Keith says between laughs.

“You think I do? Can you imagine the meltdown I had when I realized I’d just broken a lifelong promise to myself while completely shitfaced?”

Keith laughs even harder at that, and Lance smacks his shoulder. “Stop laughing at me!” He shouts, but Keith can tell he’s grinning. “It was an honest mistake!”

“Oh man.” Keith breathes, trying to calm himself down. “That is...so sad.” But he’s still biting back a grin.

Lance reaches out and tugs teasingly at a lock of Keith’s hair. “Yeah.” He says, voice a bit quieter. “But I don’t regret it.”

Keith abruptly stops laughing, butterflies exploding in his chest. “Wha--?”

There is a loud knock on the door and they both startle. Lance looks at Keith with wide, panicked eyes.

“Keith? Are you in there?” His father’s low, booming voice emanates from the other side of the door. Lance squeaks.

“Yeah dad, I’m changing, I’ll be right there!” Keith yells back at the door. He stands up and grabs Lance’s shoulders, holding the panicked boy steady. “Lance. Look at me. Calm down.”

Lance takes a long, shaky breath, nodding slowly. Keith continues. “Look, my dad may seem intimidating but he’s really a nice guy. All you have to do is be yourself, alright? You just...have a
different name. And...occupation.” Keith shakes his head, frustrated at his inability to give comforting advice. “Honestly, just be Lance. It’ll be fine.” Another knock. Keith sends Lance the kindest smile he can manage with the avalanche of emotions raging in his chest. Then he walks over to the door, preparing himself for a long, long weekend.

***

There are a few things that Lance notices about Keith’s dad.

First of all, he’s terrifying. Not in the way people are usually terrifying though. He walks into the room and his presence just makes Lance want to shrivel up and die. You can tell by the way he walks, the way he holds himself, and by the emotionless look on his face that this is a man who’s seen some shit, who has dealt with hundreds of people far stupider than him, who is always in command.

He also notices, almost immediately, that this man looks absolutely nothing like Keith.

He has short, choppy light brown hair that is graying on the edges and bushy, thick eyebrows. His skin is tan, closer in color to Lance’s than Keith’s, and he has very long legs that rival Keith’s shorter ones. His eyes are green and his nose is big and...how...did this happen?

“Hi dad.” Keith says. He gestures towards Lance. “This is Lance, the rep I was telling you about.”

Keith’s father extends his large hand and Lance takes it a little nervously. “Hello, Lance. It’s very nice to meet you.”

Lance starts to feel at ease when Keith’s father greets him. He’s done this before. He does this a thousand times a day at work. Introduce yourself, make conversation, listen to what they have to say; it’s all stuff that comes so naturally to him.

“Likewise.” Lance says, putting on his most charming smile. Maybe he can kiss some ass too. It wouldn’t hurt, right? “It’s an honor to finally meet you.”

Keith’s father seems to be pleased with this, because he grins happily. “Looking forward to doing business with you. Tell me, what is New York like this time of year?”

Ah, the preliminaries. The “small talk.” It’s actually, according to Lance’s textbook, an imperative part of striking a business deal. Lance can tell that this man is experienced; that he’s probably done this about two hundred times already since he woke up this morning.

“New York is actually quite chilly right now, which is strange!” The lie rolls smoothly off of Lances tongue. “Usually around this time the summer weather still lingers, but not this year I suppose.” He steals a glance at Keith, who is looking a little impressed, with one eyebrow raised.

“Right, Keith was telling me you wanted to escape the city for a while.” He was? “Such a nice hotel, isn’t it? A great place to get away.”

“This hotel is fabulous!” Lance says, a little too excitedly. “The weather here in Phoenix is also a much needed break from the cold.”

Keith’s father nods, agreeing. “Well, Lance. Enjoy the conference. Hopefully my son,” he glances
pointedly at Keith, “will be of good company to you. It was nice chatting, but I have much to do. Hopefully we can talk more throughout the day.” He turns to Keith. “I trust you know the schedule for today, Keith?”

Keith nods a little stiffly. “Yeah, dad. I’ll see you at the first talk. Thanks for stopping by.”

His father smiles kindly at him, a smile which bears no resemblance to Keith’s, and nods goodbye to them. The door shuts behind him with a soft click. Lance lets out a rush of air he didn’t know he was holding.

“Damn, you talk like a business man.” Keith says, impressed. Lance scowls.

“Not happy about it.”

“Are you kidding? I’d give anything to be that good at talking.” Keith sighs. “Anyway, that was my dad. You’ve met him. Nothing else will be nearly as stressful as that was.”

Lance nods, desperately wanting to ask if Keith gets his looks from his mother, but he knows not to prod. “So what is the schedule for today?” He asks instead.

Keith flops down on the bed and stares up at the ceiling. It looks comfortable, so Lance does the same. They lay shoulder to shoulder, studying the extravagant decorations on the ceiling above them.

“Well, the first talk is at noon.” Keith says. “I think there is a talk every hour after that until five.”


Keith nods. “Whatever you think it’s going to be like, I promise you, it’ll be ten times worse.”

“You should be a motivational speaker.”

“I already am one. I even wrote a book.” Keith says emotionlessly.

“Fascinating.”

“It’s a How-To book.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. The tips of tricks of tolerating a sub-par life.”

“You’re really touching people’s lives with your literature.”

“As to be expected.”

Lance giggles and turns his head to face Keith, who has a small smile on his lips. Keith’s eyes are still trained onto the ceiling. Lance tries and fails to quell his rapid heartbeat as he studies Keith’s profile. How is this boy so gorgeous? What kind of deal did he make with the devil to have that face? “We’re going to have so much sex tonight.” He says, watching Keith’s pretty face dissolve into a huge grin as a loud laugh escapes his lips. He shoves Lance’s shoulder, hard.

“Go to your room, you perv.”

“I’m just stating the facts!”
“You are impossible.” Keith sighs, but the happy grin and the flushed cheeks tell Lance that he thinks otherwise. “Get outta here.”

“Alright fine, but prepare yourself!”

“Okay, Lance.”

“I brought the cooling lube!”

“That stuff doesn’t work.”

“We’ll put it in the mini fridge!”

“Go brush your hair or something. I can’t take this.” Keith giggles, stuffing his face into a pillow.

“What’s wrong with my hair?”

“It’s sticking out all over the place!”

“It’s called ‘artistically disheveled’ Keith. It’s a fashion trend.”

They bicker back and forth and time melts away. They are still bickering when they get into the elevator to go to the first talk. They are still bickering in the conference room as men and women in pantsuits take their seats around them. When they finally have to stop, Lance already misses it, and pokes Keith in his side repeatedly to prolong the feeling.

He doesn’t want to put a name to the feeling, but it’s there, spreading like wildfire in his chest and consuming every inch of him.

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr: dimplesandcurlssss
Eight

Chapter Summary

Pidge stares down at him. “So, was it worth it? Did you have a lot of sex?”

“No.”

“Seriously?”

“We...forgot.”

“You forgot to have sex with your fuckbuddy?”

“We got caught up in other things, okay?”

“Like falling in love with each other?”

“I’m not in love with him!” Lance shouts into his hands

Chapter Notes

Here is another update absurdly close to the last one because I was on a role and couldn't stop myself lol (hi im trash). I feel like i owe you guys an apology in advanced for all the shit hitting the fan in the next few chapters but these two idiots couldn't just go on blissfully fucking each other and keeping trillions of secrets without something going wrong right?

there is smut in this chapter (sigh, oops), also some homophobia will probably be surfacing within the next couple chapters too, so if that is something that makes you uncomfortable then please skip over it! stay safe, loves.

Thanks so mucchhh for reading, love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three talks later, the first day of the conference is nearly over. Lance is actually a lot better at bullshitting than he thought, because he’s somehow managed to make everybody believe that he’s from a marketing consultancy that “specializes in unique brand solutions to best cater to our users” which literally means nothing, but apparently sounds like it does. Every time he shakes a new person’s hand, he feels like he delivers his spiel even faster, easier, with more confidence. There are people asking for business cards, for addresses, and for contact info. He gives them all fake phone numbers, chuckling a little to himself because it’s a prank he used to pull when he was, like, fifteen. Keith gets gradually more impressed as the hours pass. Each talk gets more and more boring, stretches out for a longer period of time, and although Lance could probably be learning something from them he can’t help but feel like he’d rather just get hit by a truck.
Once the final two talks come to an end, a short, stocky man approaches them with a beautiful girl accompanying him. This girl is unlike any girl Lance has seen before, but he can’t help it if the small voice in the back of his mind says Keith is still prettier, dumbass. It just talks on its own. He has no control over it, okay?

Keith elbows his side as they get closer. “That’s Diane. The girl my parents are setting me up with.” He mumbles. Lance nods in understanding, suddenly a little irritated. Stop, he tells himself. It’s none of your business.

“Keith!” The man says loudly, shaking Keith’s hand.

“Hello Joe.” Keith says a little stiffly. He shakes the Diane’s hand as well. “Diane.”


“Right, sorry. Lance, this is Joe, he works with my father.” Lance shakes his hand. “Lance is a marketing rep for a company in New York.”

“Hi, how are ya?” Lance greets cheerfully.

“Hello, Lance. Nice to meet you. I hope Phoenix is treating you well?”

Lance nods. “It’s been brilliant.” He holds his hand out (a little flirtatiously, but he’s only human) to Diane. “And you are?”

She smiles kindly. “Hi, I’m Diane, Joe’s daughter. It’s so nice to meet you.”

Keith interjects. “Diane works at her Father’s company.” He says, to start a conversation, mostly.

She giggles adorably. “He makes it sound much more important than it really is.”

“Now Diane, don’t be underselling what you do.” Joe scolds lightly. She sighs.

“So what do you do Lance?”

He gives his spiel for what feels like the fiftieth time, watching their impressed faced as they nod in understanding. He still doesn’t quite know what they are understanding, because nothing he’s saying makes any sense, but they look thoroughly blown away by the time he finishes talking.

“Sounds interesting! It’s a wonder I haven’t seen you around!” Joe says, clapping Lance on the back. He hears Keith stifle a laugh and then clear his throat.

“Lance is...a new hire. Fairly new to the company.” He says, all business, but there is a light smile on his face.

Diane grins at him. “Well, welcome to the wonderful world of business conferences.”

Lance laughs. This girl seems kind. Kinder than most of the people he’s met today, at least. He can see her becoming friends with Keith. They have the same sarcastic personality and the same dry humor. He glances at Keith. “Well, we were just about to head to dinner.” He lies, trying to hint to Keith that he wants to leave. “But it was very nice to meet you both.”

“You too!” Joe says. “Hopefully we’ll keep in touch!”

“Of course.” Wow, Lance is getting pretty good at lying.
Keith waves goodbye and they both watch Joe and Diane walk away, before booking it to the elevator before anyone else can stop them. Once the elevator doors close, Lance sighs, rolling his shoulder and cracking his neck. “Jesus, you were right.”

“What?”

“About it being ten times worse than I thought it would be.” He says, laughing. “I’m exhausted.”

“See? Told you.”

“How do you do this a lot?”


“It’s horrible.”

“That too.” The elevator door opens and Lance is suddenly hit with the urge to sleep, yawning loudly and rubbing his eyes. When he opens them, Keith is smirking at him, blushing slightly. “Yeah, same.”

Minutes later, they fall into the hotel room and collapse onto the bed. “I need to shower.” Keith says tiredly.

“Yummy.”

“Lance.” He can hear the eyeroll.

“What? I’m just being honest.”

Keith turns to look at him. “Well, do you wanna join me?”

Lance swallows. “Of course I do.”

“Then let’s go.” He says, lifting himself off of the bed and shrugging off his jacket, loosening his tie, starting to unbutton his shirt. It falls to the ground with a soft thud and Lance drags his eyes over the pale, naked skin and defined muscles. Keith slips his pants off and kicks them away, revealing obscenely tiny red briefs that make Lance’s throat close up. Or at least that’s what it feels like. As if he can feel Lance staring at him, he crosses his arms and raises an eyebrow. “You coming or not?”

Lance clears his throat and scrambles off of the bed, frantically pulling his clothes off and tripping after Keith as he walks into the bathroom. Keith turns on the water and then faces Lance, already looking flushed with anticipation. “You look really good.” He says, voice low and gravely, and he trails his fingers along Lance’s bare collarbone. Lance laughs breathlessly.

“So do you.” He dips his fingers underneath Keith’s waistband and pulls him a little closer. “These aren’t silk, though.” He says, a little disappointed.

Keith huffs. “I brought them…” He says slowly. “They’re in my bag.”

Lance hums. “Maybe later on tonight, then.” He says, voice barely above a whisper.

Keith backs away slowly, stripping off his briefs and stepping into the shower. Lance follows him, eyes tracing over the muscles in his back. Something in Lance’s gut is screaming DANGER but the arousal is definitely outweighing it, because Keith looks so fucking irresistible and that cologne -- it’s all too much. He strips off his briefs and steps in behind Keith, not even waiting before he
wraps his arms around Keith’s naked waist from behind him, pressing their bodies together and nuzzling his face into the base of Keith’s neck. “Fuck…” He whispers into the pale skin there. “Fuck, I’ve been wanting this all day.”

Keith hums, tilting his head back to onto Lance’s shoulder. “Same.” The water covers them. Lance can feel it soaking into Keith’s thick hair and dripping from his own eyelashes. He opens his mouth and starts kissing just below Keith’s ear, sucking gently and dragging his lips across the sensitive area. Keith gasps shortly and pushes back against him, causing his bare ass to rub against an area far too close to Lance’s crotch. Lance inhales sharply against Keith’s neck. Moving away before things start escalating too quickly. Keith turns around to face him, in all his naked glory, with a pout on his stupidly adorable face. “Why’d you stop?” His hair is soaking wet now, sticking to his head and sloppily pasted onto the sides of his face. Water droplets run down the sharp planes of his pink cheeks and his lips are shiny, red and flushed.

Lance chuckles, moving in closer. “Sorry…” He falls forward slightly, pressing their foreheads together. “Don’t wanna come too fast…”

“If we try and have sex in here,” Keith starts, voice still impressively gravelly, “I’m going to slip and break my neck.”

Lance laughs out loud, throwing his head back, and he feels Keith’s face falling into his neck, chuckling as well. “Yeah, probably.” He replies. “Guess you’ll just have to shampoo me then.”

“You’re too tall.” Keith mumbles into his neck. Then he feels Keith’s hand again, snaking up his stomach and beginning to play idly with his nipple, which is one of his favorite fucking things that Keith does because he always does it when Lance is right on the edge, about to lose it. And it always pushes him over.

But now, the movements are lazy, slow, and a little sloppy. He is just dragging his fingertips along the sensitive nub, back and forth, and breathing into Lance’s neck. Lance laughs a little shakily. “You…” he starts, a shiver running down his spine. “You are a tease.”

Keith hums. It’s starting to become one of Lance’s favorite noises. “I’m hungry.” He says, dragging his fingers down to the healing scrapes on Lance’s ribcage. “We should get dinner.”

“Mmhmm.” Lance cups Keith’s bare ass in his hands and listens to him gasp lightly. “We should get champagne.”

“Yeah?” Keith asks, hand sliding down further, brushing over his belly button. “What are we celebrating?”

“Surviving…” Keith grinds forward, almost too gently, brushing their hips together. Lance’s eyes fall shut. “Surviving the first day.”

“I don’t know…” Keith says, moving his face so that their noses touch. His breath is hot and delicious on Lance’s face. “I get really handsy when I drink.” He teases. He grinds forward again. Lance takes a deep breath.

“I don’t think I mind that too much.” He tightens his grip on Keith’s ass, pushing their hips even closer together. Both of them let out a ragged breath. “I kinda like your hands, anyway.”

“Do you?” Keith circles his hips, slow but rhythmic, against Lance’s. “I can think of a few things to do with them.”

Lance whines softly. “I’m sure you can…” He breathes, as Keith pushes harder. The added friction
has Lance shuddering, the feeling of water pounding on his head starting to numb. The only thing he can feel is Keith Keith Keith all around him. Keith’s nose and lips brushing against his, Keith’s breath on his face, Keith’s abs and shoulders and smooth yet calloused skin. He feels Keith’s thick hair between his fingers and Keith’s hard cock between them, rutting against his and making it so hard for him to think clearly. Being naked in bed, or on a couch, is much different than being naked right in front of each other like this. Lance refuses to accept the fact that all of this is so intimate and he refuses to accept that this entire trip has just been so intimate because there is no way that Keith feels like this too because this isn’t-- that’s not what it’s supposed to -

“ Oh my god... ” Keith rasps, muffling his moan with Lance’s lips as he pushes forward, closing the small breath of distance between them. Lance starts intensifying his movements, pushing harder and faster against Keith, and this really wasn’t how he pictured having an orgasm tonight, rutting against each other like a couple of fourteen year olds, but honestly anything that involves both of their dicks is like heaven to him.

The pleasure builds, the heat in the room is now due to more than just the running shower. The air fills with heavy, ragged breathing and small, surprised noises. Keith’s skin feels different when it’s wet. It’s softer, easier to touch. It smells different. It smells more like him , and less like the cologne he uses. It has Lance’s head spinning, his vision blurring as the heat coils in the pit of his gut. His stomach muscles contract, jumping as another wave of pleasure shocks it’s way up his spine.

Keith mumbles something into his mouth, sounding a little broken, but Lance can barely hear it over the waves of pleasure crashing into him, one after the other after the other.

“Want us to come--mmf--at the same time.” Keith whimpers, forehead falling against Lance’s lips. Lance feels like his chest might burst.

“Okay…” He says shakily. “Tell me when…”

There’s that voice again; DANGER DANGER DANGER---

He can feel Keith’s thighs starting to shake against his, which is how he knows it’s getting good. The new rhythm they have built between their rocking hips is so fucking delicious. Keith whimpers loudly into his neck, biting down on his skin. Lance grabs at his back, scratching his nails down hungrily, which elicits an even filthier noise from Keith’s mouth.

Lance wonders if Keith has ever done this with anyone else. He wonders if anyone has ever made Keith feel this good. What he wonders the most, which is scaring the shit out of him as Keith gathers his hair in his fists, is why the thought of it makes him so angry. Another moan from Keith has his hips twitching and he knows that he isn’t going to last much longer.

“Get ready-- fuck ” Keith gasps and smashes their lips together, and Lance hopes that is his cue because he is so close that it’s almost painful and now Keith’s tongue is in his mouth and Keith’s hands are in his hair and Keith’s smell is in his nose and holy fucking shit--

His orgasm shakes him to his core and has him moaning into Keith’s neck. Keith comes as he does, pulling at his hair and arching his back so that their stomachs press harshly together. It’s short moment, a burst of fire, and then it’s the two of them, clinging to each other under the pouring water, which has started to run cold. Lance can feel Keith’s cum splattered on his stomach and all he is thinking is holy fuck holy fuck holy fuck--

“Holy fuck.” Keith says. “That was a lot better than I thought it would be.”
The voice in Lance's head is shrieking, honestly having a little bit of a meltdown, and Lance doesn’t even know why. Or maybe he does. But he doesn’t want to. Because there no way that he...this isn’t supposed to make him feel like this--

“But I actually need to shower now so…” Keith raises an eyebrow at Lance, who takes a bit of a breath and tries to steady his thoughts.

“We literally just rubbed our naked dicks against each other and now you want to shower in private?”

Keith tries to scowl, it shows, but his face melts and he chuckles, rolling his eyes. “Get outta here Lance.”

“Fine, but I’m ordering four bottles of champagne and drinking it all myself.” He says back, practically bathing in Keith's happy laugh before marching out of the bathroom, heart fluttering like crazy.

***

Four bottles of champagne, it turns out, is a little too much for two people.

Lance has easily finished a little over a bottle and a half himself, and Keith is right behind him. They mostly ordered an absurd amount of expensive bubbly as a joke, but it ended up being less of a joke when Lance felt himself getting drunker and caring less about his liver.

Lance has only been drunk with Keith one other time, and it was the night they met. He barely remembers the details about it, but he wishes he did, because drunk Keith is the fucking best. Right now, he's curled up on the bed and laughing obnoxiously loud at something Lance forgot he said, holding his stomach with one hand and covering his face with the other. Lance really wants to know what he said because if it gets this reaction, he’ll say it every day until he fucking dies.

Keith finally calms down and turns to face him, both of their faces smushed onto one tiny, decorative hotel pillow. Keith's eyes start to blur out of focus because of the proximity and his breath smells like alcohol.

“I fucking love being drunk.” He says, little too loudly.

Lance laughs. “Dude same. It's the greatest.”

“I always drink at events like these, even though my dad can't stand it.”

“You truly are a rebel.”

“Parents fear me.”

“I'm sure they do.”

Keith giggles, biting his lip. Even with Lance's vision spinning he knows it's one of the greatest things he's ever seen.

Desperate for a different conversation, or distraction, rather, Lance blurts, “Your father doesn't look like you.”

It takes his drunk brain an impressively long time to regret his decision. He watches Keith's entire body tense up, he watches his dark eyes turn stormy. Even through the drunkenness there is a distinct change in his body language. “No. He doesn't.” He says, and Lance is expecting anger, but instead he gets sadness.

“Does...does your mom?” He asks, even though it's not his place. Even though he knows he shouldn't.

Keith shakes his head slowly, eyes gazing unfocused at the wall begin Lance's head.

“Oh.” Lance says, a million more questions on his tongue.

Keith looks like he’s trying to figure out what to say. By the crease between his brows Lance can tell that he’s a little conflicted, because sober Keith would stop talking but drunk Keith is very, very different.

“They aren't my birth parents.” He finally says, eyes falling closed. His words are a little slurred but still decipherable. “They adopted me when I was eight.”

Lance just stares at the tired expression on Keith's face, the new information taking a while to register in his clouded thoughts. Keith is...an orphan?

“And the other eight years…?”


Lance feels his heart squeeze tightly, a new ache spreading through his chest that he hasn't felt in such a long time. An ache not for himself, but for someone else. It’s foreign and it burns like acid.

Keith; Rich-Boy, fake-tree-loving, movie-theater-room Keith didn't have a real family throughout his entire goddamn childhood. He didn't live in a mansion. He didn't wake up in a queen sized bed every morning and he didn't always have a personal chef. He didn't have a mother to tuck him in when he was sick. Nobody cooked for him and only him. All those years spent cramped in a house with dozens of other kids...Keith doesn't act like the stereotypical, stuffy businessman because he isn't ....He’s...he is something else entirely. He’s…

“Say something so I don't feel like an idiot.” Keith mumbles, refusing to meet Lance’s eyes.

“What? No, I-- you're not an idiot. I'm just a little shocked.”

“But are you really?” Keith asks, sounding exhausted. His words slur together even further. “Do I seem like the kind of person who was raised by a stable, loving family?”

Lance studies his face, the hurt in his eyes doing quite a number on him. He can feel Keith's insecurity like a heavy weight on his chest. “Keith…don’t--”

“Enough about my life issues. Please.” Keith's face cracks into a hopeful smile. “I have a family now. My parents are good to me. And I just really wanna have fun tonight, okay?”

Lance knows he means sex, or at least he thinks he does, but hesitates. He wants to keep talking. Because he knows they're just...friends or whatever, but he wants to know more about Keith. About who he is and why he is that way. About his family and his childhood and everything in between
and shit he shouldn't have drank so much. He finds himself breathing a sigh of relief at the sight of Keith’s smile. It is wider and brighter than usual because of the alcohol. His heart stutters in his chest. How is this level of beauty even fair? “Okay, well you're in luck.” He smiles back. “Cause I have an idea.”

***

Keith is really, really, really not sober, which is why going to the hotel basketball court at 3:38AM seems like the best fucking idea he has ever heard in his life. Lance throws a black, sleeveless hoodie over his stunningly naked torso and pulls on a pair of blue basketball shorts. Keith just tugs on his red, plaid pajama pants and a loose, gray t-shirt. They find complimentary slippers in their closet-- big, white, fluffy things with rubberized soles, and scream giddily as they shove them on and burst out of the room. They laugh hysterically in the elevator for a reason Keith can’t quite place. They sprint down the hallway in the basement; past the spa, past the squash courts, past the hotel gym, until they make it to the basketball courts. The polished floor squeaks under Keith’s slippers. Lance takes a deep breath, as if smelling the place, and spins around with his arms open.

“I love the smell of basketball.” He slurs drunkenly, stumbling out of his spin. “I love basketball courts.”

Keith glances around. The walls are still spinning but he gets a good idea of the place. Good enough, at least. It's small, but big enough. There are a few buckets lining the wall, filled with various sport balls, and the whole room smells like burnt rubber and sweat. A smell, quite endearingly, that Lance apparently loves.

Speaking of Lance, he’s sifting through one of the buckets, pulling out a basketball and squeezing it firmly between his palms, as if to test it. He dribbles it a couple of times-- short, precise movements for someone who is so shit faced, and then smirks at Keith. “One on one?”

Keith frowns to cover up his smile. “You’ll crush me.”

“Oh come on, no I won’t.”

“Yeah you will!” Keith laughs. “I’ve never played basketball!”

Lance passes the ball to him and by some miracle, he catches it. He stares down at it, shocked. “Okay, that was lucky, but I actually do suck.”

Lance giggles. “I don’t doubt it. Pass it back.”

Keith throws a little blindly, because doing anything even remotely coordinated with the room moving like this isn't exactly easy. Lance pushes off the ground and darts towards the stray ball with an astounding amount of speed, and catches it quite gracefully, despite the fact that it was thrown about eight feet to the left of his head.

“Wow.” Keith breathes. “That was fast.”

“Speed is key in basketball!” Lance states, holding his swaying, drunk finger up like he’s a teacher. “I learned that the hard way.” He dribbles around Keith and Keith spins around clumsily, trying to follow him. Then he jogs up to the hoop and jumps, long legs taking him soaring, as he slams the ball into the basket. He lands with a heavy thud and says, “But strength is important too.”
Keith is very impressed and a little turned on. “And you’ve got both.” He says, like it’s a fact.

Lance shrugs and dribbles a few times, then tosses the ball aimlessly behind him. It goes into the hoop without bouncing off the edges. “Could be better.” He says, a cocky grin plastered on his face.

Keith doesn’t even remember them ditching their slippers but he realizes now that they are both barefoot. He leans over and picks up the ball, squeezing it in his hands like Lance did.

“Go on, shoot.” Lance is behind him somehow, Keith has no idea when that happened.

“It’s not gonna go in.” Keith mumbles, trying to make the hoop stand still in his vision. There are currently four of them where there is supposed to be one.

“I believe in you.” Lance says, in an overly serious tone that can only be interpreted as joking.

“It’s going to go...like...all the way over there.” He says, drunkenly pointing to the corner of the court.

“So?”

“So it’ll be embarrassing.” Keith is smiling as he feels Lance’s chin falling to rest on his shoulder.

“I can give you pointers,” Lance says, breath tickling Keith’s ear, “like in those cheesy chick flicks where the girl at the bar doesn’t know how to play pool.”

Keith, for some reason, is seriously having trouble controlling his laughing. Usually he’s better about this, but the bubbly made him bubbly, okay? So he giggles a little uncontrollably at Lance’s joke. “Oh yeah? Maybe I’ll even go home with you afterwards.” He says teasingly.

“That would be the goal, I imagine.”

“You think I’m gonna fuck you because you stand behind me and teach me how to shoot a hoop?” Keith slurs lazily. “You’ve gotta be outta your mind.”

“Well you did promise we’d fuck tonight either way.” Lance says hopefully.

Keith hums. “Don’t need your pointers.” He mumbles, and throws sloppily at the hoop. It misses by a good five feet. Lance bursts out laughing.

“Oh man, that was rough.” He says loudly, between giggles.

“I’m drunk, you asshat! I’d like to see you do better!”

And Lance does do better. In fact, he tosses the ball behind him without even looking at the hoop, and the net wooshes as it goes in for the second time.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Keith shrieks. “See? I told you! You are good!” He points an accusing finger at Lance, who just laughs a little shyly. He walks forward and wraps a hand around Keith’s finger, grabbing it and tugging him forward. Their bodies collide with a thud, and before Keith can squirm off of him, Lance’s arms are snaking around his waist, pulling him tight against his chest. “I’m drunk.” He mumbles into Keith’s hair.

“Me too. But you’re still good at basketball.”

“Mmhmm. Better than you, at least.”
Keith chuckles. “Fuck you, man. We can’t all be like… you know… ‘Cody’ or whatever.” It shocks him when it comes out of his mouth. For some reason, his drunk brain wants to bring up a boy that Lance flirted with months ago at the gym. He didn’t realize it bothered him but when he says it he feels a familiar irritation tugging at his chest.

Lance laughs incredulously, pulling away from Keith and searching his face. He looks completely shocked. “What?”

“You know! That guy you flirted with at the gym that one day.” Okay, Keith definitely sounds psychotic. “He was all ‘oh hey, I’m trying to up my game’ and you were all ‘oh totally, you’re a ten on my super strict attractiveness scale, get in my ass’--”

“I was not--!”

“And then he walked away with his stupid eight pack and his tight ass.” Keith frowns, crossing his arms. Lance’s hands are still gripping his shoulders, but the strong grip releases slightly as he studies Keith’s face.

“Oh my-- Keith. Are you... jealous?”


“Oh my god.” Lance slurs, stepping in closer. He wraps his arms around Keith’s waist, looking down at him with a soft expression that makes him blush furiously. “You are. You’re jealous of Cody.”


“Oh my god.” Lance slurs, stepping in closer. He wraps his arms around Keith’s waist, looking down at him with a soft expression that makes him blush furiously. “You are. You’re jealous of Cody.”

“What, man. I’m not. I mean, why, did you hook up with him? It’s not like you hooked up. Right?” He asks nervously, which apparently isn't helping his cause, because Lance raises an eyebrow at him.

“Well, what would you do if I told you that I did?” He asks curiously, voice considerably quieter than it was before.

Keith doesn’t even notice how close they are until he feels their noses brush against each other. His eyes flutter shut. “I would...be really upset.” He mumbles quietly, the alcohol pulling thoughts out of his mouth before he can give any consent.

“Yeah?” Lance asks, and it sounds like...it sounds like hope...

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“I...don’t know...”


Keith lets out a shaky breath. “Okay...Good.” It comes out too relieved. He didn't mean to make it sound like that. Fuck. But he already said it. And...Lance is so close to him and he...fuck.

This isn’t supposed to feel like this.

He isn’t going to let himself go down that road. He... he can’t ... he isn’t allowed --

He clears his throat and pushes Lance away. Lance makes a sad noise at the loss of contact, but
Keith honestly just feels like he can breathe again, air returning to his lungs as he tries to steady himself. The room is still spinning, but he doesn't think it’s from the alcohol anymore.

***

After what is probably another hour of lazily passing the ball around and flirting cautiously, Lance and Keith end up sprawled out on the floor of the court, brains starting to clear ever so slightly and the excitement from their stupidity dying down. Keith is getting sleepy, but the small window tells him, quite rudely, that morning is coming. The sunrise is a breath away and they haven't even slept at all.

Lance's shoulder presses against his and it's such a familiar, comforting feeling that simultaneously feels forbidden.

“So…” Lance starts, and Keith knows he's about to ask something personal. “So Kogane is...not your real last name?”

Keith clears his throat, thankful that the ceiling isn’t moving anymore. “It was the name on my birth certificate.” He says. “It was my name until I was adopted.”

“Gotcha.”

“So I consider it, you know...I don’t really know.”

“Yeah, I get it.”

“Why don’t we talk about you now?” Keith says, feeling way too exhausted to keep talking about himself. He doesn’t know when they crossed this line. All of the lines are blurred. He doesn’t know when it started being okay to just lay and talk like this, shoulder to shoulder, with no implication of sex in the near future. He honestly doesn’t know when they became friends. It’s like the transition was so seamless it doesn’t even make sense. But now, here they are. And it’s doing weird shit to his heart because none of this is how he thought it would be. And he’s really, really unprepared for it.

“What about me?” Lance asks, a little defensively.

“What’s your family like?”

He sees Lance visibly deflate, feels the heaviness against his shoulder. Obviously, it is not a question Lance wants to answer, which is crazy to Keith because unlike his cold, dead heart, Lance actually strikes him as someone who was raised by a loving, stable family. Keith clears his throat. “I’m-- I shouldn’t have--”

“No, you’re fine.” Lance cuts him off. “My family is wonderful. In every single way. They’re--” He pauses. Keith waits. “They’re amazing, really. And I love them to death.” The sadness in Lance’s voice is palpable. “I have three younger siblings; Maria, Alex, and Benny. And one older sister. Jane. My mom…” He sighs. “My mom has too much love to give, really. She’s my… well was my best friend.”

Oh. Keith’s heart clenches. “She passed away?”

“Well why not? She’s your best friend, right?”

“Just haven’t been home in a while.” Lance snaps. Keith can tell he’s hit a nerve, but pushes on.

“Because of money?”

“No.”

“Then why?”

It’s silent for a while after that. Keith actually almost drifts off, eyes falling shut and sounds muffling all around him. But then Lance speaks again. “They wanted me to be something that I didn’t want to be.” Lance says. “So I left.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “What did they want you to be?”

Lance’s lip twitches slightly. “You know. ’Lance McClain’. And all that.”

“Oh.”

“But I really wanted to play basketball. And they didn't want me to. So I just...yeah, I left.”

“And now you’re here?”

There are hundreds of unspoken words floating in the air; explanations, emotions, memories. “Now I’m here.” Is all Lance says.

“And you can’t go back?”

“I can...well, no. I don’t know.” He sounds torn up about it, his voice cracking as he shifts his weight. Now he’s facing Keith, and Keith can feel him breathing against his neck, so he turns to his side as well. Lance’s eyes are glassy but he blinks and then it’s gone. “I don’t know.” He says again. “I feel like they don’t want me around anymore. I mean...I left them. And for years I didn’t...even call.” He never breaks eye contact with Keith as he says it, which kind of eats away at Keith’s confidence to answer.

“Lance...of course they want you around.” He says, nervously. The vulnerability of the moment makes him feel more naked than he ever has been around Lance before.

“How do you know that, though?” Lance sighs. “You don’t.”

Keith lifts a hand to Lance’s cheek, a little involuntarily. He brushes his thumb over the healing scrapes on Lance’s cheekbone. “I just...I mean. You’re you, ya know? How could they not?” It comes out a little choked, despite him wanting it to sound completely casual. Lance’s eyes widen a fraction, and then without a warning he’s leaning forward, closing the distance between them.

They kiss. Just a kiss. Just a dry, hesitant press of lips on lips. No tongue, no wandering hands, no ragged breathing, and Keith’s heart is going a million miles a minute because this is wrong and this wasn’t part of the deal but--

The door clicks open and Lance completely freezes when Keith hears Joe’s voice, horrified and clear as day, saying, “Keith?”

They jump apart and Keith stumbles into a standing position, legs wobbling as he looks at Joe’s
disgusted face. He has his workout clothes on, which is probably why he is in this area of the hotel in the first place, and Keith realizes a little too slowly that the sun is up, no trace of dawn left and holy shit how did he not realize what time it was--

He opens his mouth to speak but Joe is already shaking his head with disdain, wrinkling his nose and marching out of the court. The door slams loudly behind him and he’s going to tell his father and no no no no no no no no this can’t be happening--

“Oh! Keith, look at me!” Lance’s hands are on his shoulder, holding his steady and he’s leveling Keith with a stern, determined look. Panicked tears fill Keith eyes and he starts shaking his head wildly, trying to squirm out of Lance’s grip. “I have to get to my dad first.” He babbles helplessly. “Lance, let go of me, I have to get to my dad--”

“It’s going to be okay, Keith--”

“No! It’s not! Do you have any idea what just happened?” Keith yells incredulously, finally yanking himself out of Lance’s grip. “This is a disaster!”

“Talk to your dad when you’re not hungover and sleep deprived.” Lance says, trying to calm him down. “Nothing you say is going to make sense to him right now.”

“Fuck, oh my god.” Keith buries his face into his hands, and he’s shaking, he can feel it.

Lance’s hand is on his cheek, soft and grounding. “Let just go get ready for the day, okay? We’ll deal with it as it happens…” He sighs. “I’m...really sorry Keith. That was on me, I shouldn’t have—”

“No, no it’s... it’s fine.” Keith mumbles. “Let’s just go before someone else sees us.”

***

Keith stares at his pale, terrified face in the mirror. The bags under his eyes are black with lack of sleep. His skin is dry and dull from the hangover and all he wants is for the floor to swallow him up so that he ceases to exist. He isn’t really sure what he expected the rest of his life to be like, but he was fully prepared to someday be okay with marrying a woman and having a slightly below average life, working long hours and exchanging passionless kisses until he dies. He never, not once, thought about what his life would be like if he came out to his parents. And he wasn’t exactly okay with living his entire life in the closet but he wasn't opposed to it either because this feeling of panic in his chest right now honestly makes the closet sound much, much more appealing.

Even though he’s showered, he still feels like shit, and he can tell Lance feels the same way by the yellowness of his usually bronzed, warm skin. Out of all the decisions they have ever made together, this, collectively, was the absolute worst. Not only is Keith hungover and forced out of the closet against his will, but now he’s got this dull aching in his gut whenever he so much as glances at Lance, and he desperately doesn’t want it to be what he knows it is, and there are too many things going on at once right now.

Because they were supposed to just have sex. That’s it. And now he’s--

There’s no way Lance feels the same way. I’m such an idiot.

There is a knock on the door that has him nearly shitting himself, and Lance, bless his soul,
answers it. When he hears Diane's voice, he leaves the bathroom frantically to hear what he is saying.

“Keith, my dad knows but I swear I didn’t tell him, honestly, I kept my mouth shut I never said a word!” She says hurriedly. Keith holds up a hand.

“No, I know, he...figured it out on his own.”

“Oh. Keith, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine, it was my fault.”

Lance steps in. “She knows?”

“Yeah I told her.”

“I talked to my dad.” She says. “I told him not to say anything. It’s none of his business after all. But it might...It might affect the relationship he has with your father.”

“I know.” Keith says sadly.

“Wow, I can’t believe homophobia is still a thing.” Lance says. “I haven’t encountered it in so long.”

Diane nods. “Yeah, it’s a bitch.” She takes a deep breath, looking between Keith and Lance. “Well, I’d better go. I’m sure my dad is trying to find me a new suitor as we speak.”

Keith smiles sadly. “Probably.”

“I’ll see you around, Keith. Good luck, okay?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

The hotel room is quiet when she leaves. Keith has an uncomfortable twisting in his stomach because realizing he has feelings for Lance has probably been one of the most stressful things that has ever happened to him in his life. Suddenly, all the casualness of their relationship is gone, and he’s a kid with a crush, and he doesn’t know what to say. The nervousness tugs at his tongue and nothing comes out, so he just ends up looking at him strangely. Lance thinks it’s funny though, and snorts a laugh. “You have this permanent look on your face of someone who just swallowed something painfully sour.”

Keith sighs. “I need to sleep.”

“Well the first talk isn’t for another hour so, you could take a nap.” Lance replies, licking his thumb and fixing his eyebrow in the mirror.

“Yeah...” Keith twiddles his thumbs. “Yeah.” He says again.

Lance chuckles. “Do you need something?”

Keith clears his throat. “You should probably sleep too.” Get in bed with me. Cuddle with me, you asshole.

Lance shrugs. “All-nighters are easier for me if I don’t nap.”

“Oh...” Keith walks slowly to his bed, kicking off his glossy shoes and shrugging off his blazer.
“Okay then...maybe just for a bit.” He lays down, curling up into a tight ball. The minute his head hits the pillow, he starts drifting off.

He swears, just before he’s out cold, he feels a pair of lips press gently to his forehead.

***

Lance is in pretty deep denial right now and he knows it. But he also knows that if he lets himself admit that he likes Keith—like, a lot -- then all of this will go to shit. The purpose of this...arrangement was for it to be emotionless but it hasn’t been that way for long time, at least not to Lance. And he needs to get the fuck out of this before it gets worse. Before he gets hurt. Maybe it would be better if he just quit Keith cold turkey. Never saw him again. Deleted his number and never touched him again. The thought makes him ache, but this is what he’s good at. Running away.

He sits on the edge of the bed and watches Keith’s chest rise and fall with slow, even breaths. When did this get so bad? When did this feeling become all-encompassing? Why does he suddenly feel like he’s drowning? He has had so many fuck buddies in his life. Once he’s done with one he moves on to the other. Usually because they find someone else. Fall in love, move on, forget about Lance and the brief fun they had. Keith was supposed to be the same way. Just a couple of fun weeks and then on to the next one.

But Lance is just lying to himself because Keith has been different since the beginning. Keith is the one he let into his bed, after years of saving it for the right person. Keith was the one he left alone in his house, because for some reason, he trusted him, and Keith was the one who texted him after two weeks of not talking. Because he didn’t forget. For some reason, Keith didn’t forget about him.

He needs this trip to be over. It’s doing crazy things to his head. The hangover isn’t helping, either.

Keith stirs, mumbling quietly, and buries his face into the pillows before stilling again. Lance’s heart feels like it’s bursting. He sighs.

Fuck.

***

The rest of the conference is incredibly tense. Keith spends the remainder of the time freaking out every time someone approaches them, because what has Joe said and who has he told and Lance can’t take it anymore because seeing Keith so emotionally charged is making him exhausted.

“Keith, calm down. It’s clear that nobody in here as heard anything. You’re fine.” Lance says softly, pulling him aside “Just breathe. You look like you’re turning purple.”

“This is the worst place to keep a secret Lance! He’s got to have told someone!”

“Maybe he’s a good guy?”
“I’m not counting on it.”

Fortunately for everyone, the rest of the day goes on without a hitch, and in the plane ride home, Lance shamefully watches Keith sleep until he falls asleep as well, heart still thudding painfully in his chest.

They’re both far too exhausted to say anything in the car. Keith stares out at the road, eyes a little unfocused, and Lance knows he’s still worried. But really, there’s nothing he can do to help. So he just sits, picking at his nails and looking out the window, not really sure what to do with himself. When they get to his house, he says goodbye and smiles a little, before ducking out of the car. As he’s leaving, he feels Keith grab his wrist, pulling him back in.

“What is it?” He asks, a little worried.

Keith leans forward and plants a kiss on his cheek; soft, gentle, and warm. Lance’s stomach flips.

“I don’t think I ever said thank you.” Keith mumbles against his cheek. His nose nudges along Lance’s cheekbone and Lance shivers. “So, thank you. So much.”

“Yeah.” Lance breathes. “Yeah, I-- of course.”

Keith leans back in his seat again, still not meeting Lance’s eyes, and Lance wants to scream WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU but he bites his lip, sighing and getting out of the car.

He watches Keith drive away and already misses him.

***

“You were right.” Lance says, bursting into Pidge’s room with what he hopes aren’t tears in his eyes because jesus christ that would be embarrassing. Pidge looks up from the book in her lap, very worried. Probably because Lance has never, in the six years that they have been friends, even uttered the words “you are right” to her, so this is all just a very worrying situation.

“Right about what?” She asks, concerned. Her eyes scan over Lance’s outfit and he can feel her judging him--his suit is disheveled and rumpled in some places. Plus, he has never worn a suit while standing in this house, which is also probably a little shocking. “About that restaurant last week? Because yeah, I know it sucked.”

“No, Pidge, not the restaurant.” Lance says, unamused. “About Keith.”

“Well, duh. Of course I’m right about Keith. Do you know how many guys I’ve seen you go through? I know your pathetic, pining emotions like the back of my hand.”

Lance frowns. “Not helping. Where is Hunk? I feel like he’s never fucking here anymore!” Lance says, a little too dramatically. But he’s exhausted and sad and he just misses his best friend so much.

“He’s on his way back from a study session with some friends. Has a big exam tomorrow.”

“Fuck. So do I.” Lance says, groaning and flopping onto the bed. Pidge stares down at him.

“So, was it worth it? Did you have a lot of sex?”
“No.”

“Seriously?”

“We...forgot.”

“You forgot to have sex with your fuckbuddy?”

“We got caught up in other things, okay?”

“Like falling in love with each other?”

“I’m not in love with him!” Lance shouts into his hands, which are now covering his face.

“Lance…” Pidge is giving him a very sympathetic look.

“Look, okay fine, maybe I like him, but I’m not in love with him.”

She sighs, defeated. “Okay.”

“I need to stop seeing him.”

“Why?”

“Because this has just been blown out of proportion! Having feelings wasn’t part of the plan, and I knew that from the start.” He says, rolling over onto his stomach and muffling his words into the mattress. “I should’ve stopped it the second I let him onto my stupid-ass bed to have stupid gay sex with him.”

Pidge laughs a little. It sounds sad. “Maybe you should ask him how he feels about it first?”

“Are you kidding? And live with the embarrassment of that rejection for the rest of my natural born life? Asking someone out and getting rejected is one thing, but asking someone out and getting rejected after sleeping with them for four months? Entirely different thing!” Lance shrieks. “That kind of wound to my dignity will never heal!”

“You are so dramatic.” Pidge says, rolling her eyes. “I can’t even believe it.”

“I’ll see him one more time.” He says. “Then it’s over.”

“Okay, Lance.” Pidge says, nodding. “Sounds fake, but okay.”

The door opens and Lance thanks every god in the world when he hears Hunk’s voice. “Guys? Anyone home?”

“Hunk!” He shoots off the bed and barrels into his large friend, wrapping his arms around him. “I missed you!”

“Hey Lance! Oh, you’re back!”

“Please never make me leave the house again.” He mumbles pathetically into Hunk’s thick sweater.

“Yeah, I heard you had super random plans this weekend. Is that-- hold up, are you wearing a suit?”
Lance pulls back, flushing. “Yeah. Do I look like one of the assholes at your wealthy parties or what?”

Hunk looks surprised. “Yeah, actually, it looks like it’s the exact same brand as--”

“Yeah, yeah,” Lance waves his hand, cutting Hunk off. “Same brand as your rich lover boy, gotcha.”

Hunk frowns. “If you would just meet him I swear you’d--”

“Oh my god, Hunk.” Lance says. “I don’t need any more boys in my life.”

Pidge pops her head out from her room. “His fuck buddy is giving him some trouble.”

“Is this the same one you’ve been seeing for like, months now?”

“I...Yeah…” Lance sighs.

Hunk laughs a little, shaking his head. “Lance, I told you one day one of these hookups would turn sour.”

“I was just trying to have a good time!” Lance says desperately. “It’s never gone wrong before!”

“So who is he this time then? I feel like I gotta finally meet this guy.” Hunk asks, a little jokingly, as he shrugs off his jacket and walks into the kitchen. Lance follows him.

“I don’t want to talk about it right now, if I’m being honest. And it doesn’t matter anyway. I think I’m gonna break things off with him.” There is a sharp pain in his chest as he says it.

Pidge comes into the kitchen as well. “He’s been here a lot, I’m surprised you haven’t seen him.”

Hunk shrugs. “What can I say? I’m a busy guy.”

“Yeah it is weird that you never did meet him.” Lance swallows. “Well, guess now you never will.” He tries to say it nonchalantly.

Hunk studies Lance’s face, because he knows that Lance is hurting. He can see it better than anyone else can. He knows there is something Lance isn’t telling him. But he also knows, more than anything, that Lance really doesn’t want to talk about this anymore.

“Hey Lance, could you pass me that pasta?”

“Sure.” Lance tosses the box of bowtie pasta in Hunks direction. “So, you going to make enough of that to go around?”

Hunk smiles. “Don’t I always?”

***

Keith waves goodbye to Coran after an exceptionally great shift at the garage, because it turns out that being emotionally crippled and drowning in mental chaos it actually a great motivator to fix cars and make everything else cease to exist. He was able to fix two more cars than he usually
does, and although his heart feels like it’s breaking at the seams from the trainwreck of the past weekend, he feels surprisingly at ease. Conversation with Coran is always the best. He has such incredible stories and actually a lot more in common with Keith than he originally thought. It’s a spot of sunlight in his otherwise dreary day.

Being in the office is especially suffocating to him now, because he feels like at any moment, his father is going to burst into his office with the same look on his face as Joe’s; pure disgust, pure hatred. Keith doesn’t know when it will happen. He does know that he will never, ever be prepared for it. Any second now, his parents could know the truth, and it terrifies him.

But maybe a small, tiny, practically microscopic part of him actually feels, shockingly, just a little relief.

The relief, of course, is overshadowed significantly by the terror, but it’s still there, miniscule and fluttering in his chest.

He drives by Lance’s house on his way home and keeps driving, because his entire body is screaming to be close to Lance right now but he knows it’s a horrible idea. He knows that he’s screwed things up somehow. He knows that this whole situation has become a colossal wreck and it’s his fault. So he drives right past it, and calls Shiro.

“Hello?” Shiro answers, and Keith starts unwinding at the sound of his voice, comforting and familiar.

“Hey. Can I come over?”

“Yeah, sure. I’ve got some dinner cooking.”

“Do you have whiskey?”

“Uh...yeah I’ve got that too.”

“Cool see you soon.”

Keith floors it and zooms down the narrow streets, until Lance’s house is just a dot in the distance.

***

Shiro is in his”casual attire” when Keith arrives, which is a pair of light jeans and a tight, black designer shirt. Keith, on the other hand, is still covered in grease and grime, and watches Shiro’s nose wrinkle as he walks in. “Okay. You need a shower.” He says, stopping Keith before he can sit on the blindingly white, luxurious couch in Shiro’s living room.

Keith looks down at himself. His white shirt is brown with dirt and his black jeans are faded into gray from wear. He hears Lance’s voice in his head, ‘ damn, car garage looks good on you’, which he had said to him one of the first times he came over after work. He flushes, blinking the memory away.

“Yeah, yeah you’re right, I look gross like this.”

Shiro smiles. “You know where the bathroom is. I’ll go make sure dinner’s ready.”
Keith comes out of the shower a half hour later, in practically swimming in Shiro’s clothes. It never occurred to him how much bigger Shiro is than him, and it irritates him a little. He really should start going to the gym again. He towel-dries his hair and plops down at the table, where there is already a huge pot of something and a basket of bread on the side. Shiro’s chef is one of the greats, and Keith will stand by that until his dying day. Shiro insists that Keith’s chef is just as good, but Keith has always liked the food at Shiro’s more. It’s definitely a spoiled-kid thought, but, some part of him was bound to end up a little snooty, right?

“This is fucking delicious.” He says, stuffing the bread into his face. Shiro laughs.

“It’s good comfort food, that’s for sure.”

Keith just continues to stuff his face and prays to god that Shiro doesn’t ask--

“Are you okay, Keith?”

_Dammit._ “Never better.” Keith mumbles around mouthful of bread.

“Because you seem…”

Keith frowns. “I seem what.”

“Upset...about something.” Shiro finishes cautiously.

“Everythings cool.”

“I don’t wanna be that guy but it really, really doesn’t look like it is.”

Keith sighs. “What do you want me to say?”

“Well, you can start with why you walked in and made a beeline for the liquor cabinet before even saying hi to me.” Shiro says, mouth twitching upwards in a smile.

And shit, Keith _did_ do that, didn’t he?

“It’s nothing. Really.” Keith says, tearing off another piece of bread and shoving it into his mouth.

“So this _isn’t_ about Lance?”


Shiro raises an eyebrow at him. Keiths sighs defeatedly.

“I just…” Wow, just like that, he isn’t hungry anymore. He stares down at the half eaten dinner roll on his plate.

“You have feelings for him.” Shiro says, voice gentle.

“No, I don’t. That wouldn’t--” He groans frustratedly. “That wouldn’t make any sense.”

“Why not? You slept together for months. You spent time together. Now you like his personality _and_ his body, which some _may_ call having feelings for somebody.”

“But, it wasn’t supposed to happen. I was so careful at first! I made _sure_ we didn’t get close. I
didn’t want this, remember?” He runs a hand through his hair. “And now I’m stuck with these stupid feelings and he’s probably fucking some other guy as we speak, and it was so stupid of me to think that any of this would actually work without a problem.”

Shiro shakes his head. “No, what’s stupid is that you’re making all these assumptions without even talking to him first.”

“Shiro, no, okay? Hate to bring it up, but look what happened last time I told someone I had feelings for them.” Obviously, he’s talking about Shiro, and it’s a gutsy thing to say, but it’s true. That kind of heartache plagued Keith for so long and it’s finally over. He promised he’d never let himself feel this way again. He promised.

Shiro sighs. “I know.” He says sadly. “I know it’s scary. But Keith, you have to face those fears sometime. You can’t just keep hiding from it forever because of...you know. One bad experience.”

Deep down, Keith knows that Shiro is right. Deep, deep, deep down. But it’s too deep for him to listen. “Whatever.” He says. “Can we talk about something else?”

Shiro’s shoulders fall, but he smiles anyway. “Sure.”

“Like how we should trade chefs? Because I think we should trade chefs.”

Shiro laughs. “There’s the rich boy your parents have always wanted.”

This has Keith laughing too, and he takes another huge bite of bread as Shiro shoves his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr: dimplesandcurlss
my (relatively new) art instagram: allscribbledup
Nine

Chapter Summary

lol you all said that Hunk was going to introduce Keith and Lance and...well...I mean you were halfway right. Depending on how you look at it. :p

im...really sorry about this one?

Chapter Notes

Homophobia Warning! Slight Violence Warning! Derogatory Names! PLEASE AVOID if it makes you feel icky! Ill put three dashes at the beginning and end of the scene if you want to avoid it! I’ve had this chapter written for like three days but I stupidly wanted to wait at least a week before updating. Then I realized one more day wont make a difference so anyway here it is haha.

I just want to say that the response to this fic has been insane? I was so nervous about writing it because everything about it is out of my comfort zone and I was so afraid of it being received horribly but so far people are liking it so I just wanted to say a massive THANK YOU for supporting me through this as a writer, for all the fan art and the messages on tumblr, you guys have really made the past month so incredibly special to me! i know it’s a random time to say thank you, but ive been going through some things and you all never failed to make me smile, so thank you!!! love <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith isn’t freaking out or anything. It’s just that he hasn’t heard from Lance since he dropped him off after the conference, and he knows that they were both acting a little off towards the end but...he misses him. It should not have affected them this much, right?

It’s been a week since they had last seen each other, and he hasn’t heard one word from the boy. To make matters worse, he’s exhausted with worry because Joe saw them kissing, and it’s eating him up on the inside. Usually, when something is bothering him, he goes to Lance and fucks it away. But things seem different now. He feels like texting Lance and saying “wanna fuck” just isn’t quite in the cards this week. And that...well...it requires some adjusting.

He may have been in a really bad mood last time he was with Lance, and realizing that he has feelings for the asshole didn’t exactly help. But Keith, for the life of him, can’t bring himself to talk to him. Now he’s sitting on the chair behind his stupid desk in his stupid office and all he really wants to do is bury himself under his covers and promptly die. This tight feeling in his chest isn’t going away no matter how much he wills it to. It clenches harder with each passing minute and he really doesn’t know how to just make it end; because all of this is just a little bit hopeless.

There’s probably a reason, Keith doesn’t know what that reason is, but there is probably a reason why he and Lance never actually went on a “date”. There is a reason why they just hooked up that first night, and then kept just hooking up. So Keith doesn’t know why he suddenly thinks that
now, maybe things can change. Because that’s just stupid, and naive, and so very childish. If Lance never wanted to date him in the first place, why would he now?

All of this, of course, on top of the fact that Keith’s sexuality could literally make or break his family business, and he has a secret job that his parents don’t know about, and he and Lance couldn’t be any more different. Really, in what universe could this possibly work?

Keith sighs tiredly. He’s already cried too much this week and he’s honestly a little sick of it. He’s not even sure what he’s crying about—just that Lance’s hair smells like vanilla or he’s about to lose the respect of his adoptive parents who worked so hard to make sure he wasn’t an asshole—not sure which one is worse. He glances at his watch and swears under his breath. His father is making him go to an impromptu networking event with him tonight to “seal the deal” that the firm is making with a marketing agency. The thought alone makes him want to barf, but at least he’ll get to see that friendly bartender. He hasn’t seen him in a while and could use some happy banter.

Clearing off his desk and straightening his tie, Keith takes another long breath and heads out the door, shutting off the lights behind him.

***

“Oh man, it’s him!” The bartender announces happily, to nobody in particular, when he sees Keith approaching the bar. “How goes it, Keith?”

“It’s…” Keith tries to smile. “You know. It is. Something.”

“Wow. That was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Might wanna dial it down a notch.” The bartender says jokingly. “Glass of red?”

“Yes, please.”

“So what have you been up to?”

Keith laughs a little humorlessly. “Nothing exciting. Just work, mostly. Any new gossip?” He takes the wine glass and swirls it a little, watching the wine make a small tornado in the center of it.

The bartender sighs, wiping up some wine that spilled. “I think there have been a couple plastic surgeries, but I haven’t caught wind of anything else.”

Keith feels relieved. Good, nobody is talking about him. “Oh yeah? Who got surgery?”


“Are you kidding?” Keith says, holding back a laugh. It feels good to smile.

“Nope. Super ironic because his wife is freaking gorgeous and hasn't had anything done.”

“Must be a killer to the self esteem.” Keith jokes.

“I bet. Oh, and that brunette in the corner? She’s gotten her boobs done three times, according to a very reliable source.”
“Oh? And who might that source be?”

“The man she’s having an affair with.” The bartender says with a wink. Keith laughs out loud.

“Oh man, I really needed to hear something like that today.”

The bartender bows his head. “Glad to be of service.”

Keith’s father catches his eye from across the room and beckons him to leave the bar, almost as if to say, ‘get off your ass and meet people.’

“That’s my cue.” He says sadly, turning to the bartender. “See you in a few.”

The bartender sends him a two finger salute, and oddly enough, it looks like something Lance would do. “See ya. Good luck, man.”

“Yeah, Thanks.”

***

What people don’t usually say about shit falling apart, is that it always happens when you least expect it.

Keith is talking about something rather dry with a man named Pat when he hears his father’s voice, somewhere farther back in the banquet hall, saying, “What do you mean? Did he say something rude to her?”

And then Joe’s voice, nasty and loud. “No. She just isn’t interested in him anymore. Stop asking, alright?”

Shit. Keith holds up a hand to Pat; or is his name Paul? “I’m-- sorry I have to go.” He says hurriedly, and starts frantically weaving through the crowd, following the sound of his father’s voice.

“I’m just wondering why, Joe. I feel like I deserve an answer.” His father says sternly, all business. Keith walks a little faster, heart thudding painfully fast in his chest. He can see the top of his father’s head a few feet away. A waiter with a tray blocks him and he struggles to scramble past.

“I just think it’s best if we make sure they stay away from each other!” Joe snaps, getting increasingly irritated. Keith holds his breath and pushes past the rest of the crowd.

“Dad, hi.” He says hurriedly when he reaches him, glancing at Joe. “What’s up?”

He can feel Joe gazing at him maliciously but tries really hard to ignore it. His father raises an eyebrow at him; approaching him during a networking event isn’t something that Keith does very often. Keith clears his throat awkwardly, obviously his diversion isn’t doing a very good job of changing the subject. He grabs his father’s wrist and tugs it, avoiding Joe’s burning eyes. “There’s this new wine that you should really try--”

“Wait, Keith.” His dad says, sounding a little irritated. He turns his attention back to Joe. “You owe me an explanation. This isn’t at all appropriate.”
“Dad--” Keith pleads.

“I owe you nothing. Especially not my daughter. You have a filthy, filthy family and I want no part of it.”

His father bristles. “Excuse me? What on earth have I done to merit this kind of behavior from you?” His father speaks with confidence. Strength. “I will not allow for my son and I to be spoken to like this. If there is something we did, tell us so we can apologize.”

“I don’t want an apology from you. I would rather we never spoke of this again. Just make sure your despicable son stays as far away from my daughter as possible.”

A crowd is gathering around the angry duo. The banquet hall gets quieter as they get louder. Joe’s angry eyes tear into Keith’s face. Keith finally relinquishes his rip on his father's wrist and turns to face him, irritation rising and bubbling in his chest. “Leave my father alone.” He grits through his teeth.

Joe looks horrified that Keith would even so much as speak to him. He gapes. “I don’t want to hear a word from you.” He spits. “You don’t even belong here.”

The irritation turns to anger. “Leave my father alone.” He says again, this time taking a step forward. Keith’s father puts a hand on his chest. “Keith, please. Let’s handle this like adults.” He says, but the confidence in his voice is wavering. Keith feels a stab in his gut that can only be described as guilt, because his father doesn’t know what’s happening, and he’s getting treated like shit for no reason. “Dad--”

“This conversation is over.” Joe says nastily. “Get out of here if you know what’s good for you.”

His father is losing his calm composure. “You tell me what’s going on right now Joe.” He says, voice raising.

“As if you don’t already know!” Joe fires back, curling his fists at his side. His wrinkled, ugly face scrunching up into an expression that just makes it wrinkle more. “You should think twice about where you let your son run off to in the middle of the night!”

Keith’s heart clenches and the anger rises even further, making his fingers twitch and his shoulders tense and he grinds his teeth together. “Stop it!” He shouts uselessly, voice cracking with panic.

His father shouts as well, but it sounds more frustrated than angry. “What are you talking about? My son doesn’t sneak off anywhere!”

Joe snorts. “And now you can’t even keep track of your children? I bet you don’t even know what your son was doing in Phoenix this weekend--”

“I said shut up!” Keith screams again, taking one step forward. His father no longer tries to stop him. Keith doesn’t know if it’s because he doesn’t care or if it’s because he’s given up. The banquet hall has gone eerily silent; nothing around them but judgemental whispers.

--- triggering content ---

“How dare you approach me like this!” Joe shouts. “You have no right to be yelling right now, you disgusting little faggot!”
A collection of surprised noises crackle among the crowd. Keith’s blood runs cold. The word stings like a slap in the face. A punch in the gut. No, he thinks. No no no no no please no --

“So you better keep your filthy hands off of my daughter! We are not letting a dirty queer like you into our family!”

All of the sounds around him start to muffle. The air is suffocating, laying heavy on his chest. He hears his father shouting something but doesn’t know what he’s saying. The knot in his throat begins to loosen, angry tears filling his eyes, and he chances a glance at his father now, who is staring at him with a broken, horrified expression. In a snap, the breaking in his chest turns to fury, rising uncontrollably and spilling out before he can stop it. He is seeing red—and in a flash of movement, he charges at Joe, grabbing his collar aggressively and throwing a left hook directly to his chin.

The crowd around them gasps, appalled and terrified. Everyone starts scrambling. Joe falls to the ground with a thud and Keith climbs on top of him, throwing another punch. He can hear his father somewhere in the distance, screaming for him to stop, but the anger is consuming his common sense like a wildfire, coursing and unforgiving.

Joe grabs him by the front of the shirt, and, to Keith’s surprise, throws a punch across his jaw that makes him stumble off from on top of him, dazed. Joe stands up and charges at Keith now, and the entire crowd is in chaos, and his father is begging and pleading from somewhere far, far away and Joe tackles him to the ground, landing another two punches on his face before Keith gathers his bearings. He grabs Joe’s fists with one hand throws a hook with the other, over and over and over again. Hot, angry tears stream down his face and the pain from the last couple hits is throbbing mercilessly in his head, making his movements sloppy. His throat feels raw from screaming but he can’t hear himself. White noise surrounds him, muffled and loud and dizzying. Joe is shouting something, derogatory and offensive, and it feels like poison falling from his lips as he tries to yank himself out of Keith’s grasp. Keith is stronger than him though, and probably would’ve knocked him completely unconscious, if there weren’t two strong arms grabbing him aggressively from behind and pulling him off of Joe’s body.

--- end triggering content --- (Joe calls Keith an offensive name and Keith lashes out--they get into a fist fight)

“Hey, hey, stop that! Calm down!” A deep, familiar voice says.

Keith struggles relentlessly against the grip, thrashing and clawing his way out of it like an animal, but whoever this person is, they are stronger than him, and Keith feels himself deflate, Give up. Frustrated tears are still pouring down his face and he feels his shoulders shaking with the sobbing that he can’t even hear himself doing. He is being pulled further and further away from the scene. Further and further away from his father, who looks distraught and terrified, and Joe, who is slowly lifting himself off the ground, blood dripping from his nose. He spits another insult at Keith but he can’t hear-- the pain in his head is becoming too unbearable and his vision is starting to blur. Suddenly he’s in a bathroom, propped up against the counter, and he is feeling large hands lightly slapping his cheeks.

“Come on, buddy, stay with me, stay awake.” It’s the bartender, eyes big and worried, as they search Keith’s for some sign of consciousness. “There’s an ambulance coming but I need you to stay awake. You probably have a concussion. Don’t fall asleep, okay?”

Keith blinks slowly, trying to take a deep breath. His ears are ringing and his hands are shivering uncontrollably. “Ouch.” He says shakily, eyes fluttering shut.
“No no no, open your eyes. Look at me.”

“My dad…”

“It’s okay, just… don’t worry about any of that just stay awake.”

“He hates me…”

“Keith. Look at my finger.”

Keith lazily lifts his eyes, trying desperately to focus on the finger in front of his nose.

“No, great, now keep looking at it. Don’t look away, okay?”

Keith can feel the dizzying sensation consuming him. Damn, Joe hit harder than he thought. Now that his thoughts are clearing up slightly the fight comes back to him in flashes.

He hears Joe’s voice in his head. *Faggot. Filthy.* Tears are filling his eyes again and his lip quivers. He can feel his eyebrow twitch with the rage that is threatening to burst out of him again. He sees his father’s face, heartbroken and disappointed.

“Hey.” The bartender’s voice is soft. Calming. “Hey, don’t think about it right now okay? Just focus on getting better first.”

“Can’t go home…” Keith mumbles.

“It’s okay, you can come to my house. I’m sure my roommates will understand.”

Keith nods slowly. He hears the sirens coming from somewhere near the building. Without the finger in front of his face, he finally lets his eyes shut.

***

Lance, most definitely, has *not* been staring at his phone for a week.

And by “not”, he means he totally has.

It’s not like he’s desperate to talk to Keith or anything...it’s just that it’s been a week and he hasn’t heard anything from him. Which is strange because for the past month at least, they had been seeing each other almost every day, or at least talking to each other every day. So this feels a little bit like a hole where something is supposed to be.

He gave himself one more night to see Keith. One more time, and then he’d never see him again. He’d end it right there, dump all of his feelings out the window, and be done with all of it. Unfortunately, he’s stalling, because he really and truly knows that he doesn’t want it to end. It’s only been a week but Lance feels like there’s a small part of him that doesn’t quite make sense anymore, without Keith there bantering with him and kissing him dizzy. It doesn't make sense and it makes him feel so damn *stupid* -- but not seeing Keith’s face for a week has him missing it endlessly. In, you know, an ‘I’m not in love with him’ kind of way, of course.

He flops down at the kitchen table next to Pidge, who has her nose stuffed in a textbook and her hand stuffed in a bag of doritos. “What’s for dinner?” He asks.
“Leftover turkey sandwich from lunch.” She says idly, pointing to the fridge with a cheese-covered finger. Her eyes don’t leave the textbook.

Lance shrugs. “Mmkay. Mayo?”

“Behind the pickles.”

“Thanks.”

Lance hums a tune as he sifts through the fridge, eyeing the small, pathetically wrapped turkey sandwich and sighing to himself. He really is starving, so it’ll have to do. He pulls it out of the fridge and unwraps it, spreading mayo onto one side.

Still humming, now with a sandwich in his mouth, Lance stalks back into the living room and flops down onto the couch. The TV has been broken for ages, so he turns it on for the fun of it. Some days it works, magically. Today is not one of those days.

“Don’t you have work to do?” Pidge asks from across the room.

“Actively avoiding.”

“Gotcha.”

Lance hasn’t really been in the peak of productivity lately. His practices in the morning are lazy and sluggish, with little improvement happening; which is super concerning given the rapidly approaching tryouts in two and a half weeks. He tries desperately not to worry about it, but he can feel it slowly tearing away at his sanity, making him more irritable and snappish. Deep down, he knows it’s because of a bunch of reasons, the biggest one being his family. He’s tried to text Maria since her birthday and has gotten no reply. It is a small action that leaves him discouraged and makes it even harder for him to focus.

Lance sighs and flops down onto his back. “Where’s Hunk?”

“Work.”

“Its...one in the morning.”

“He texted and said there was some kind of emergency.”

Lance snorts. “What, did they run out of bubbly?”

Almost right on cue, the front door bursts open and Hunk walks in hurriedly and there is...he’s carrying someone in his arms.

“Lance, could you get off the couch?”

“Hunk, whats going on?” Lance turns around and stumbles off of the couch. “What’s happening?”

Pidge scrambles off of the table to help. Lance tries to see the person Hunk is holding but Hunk turns away too quickly. “Who is that?” Pidge hisses, whispering. “Whats going on?”

“A fight broke out at the event today.” Hunk says, placing the person on the couch. “He’s asleep now, I didn’t want to wake him up, but there was this really nasty guy and he--” Hunks voice continues rambling, on and on, but it turns into a string of muffled gibberish and Lance stops listening because hold up -- that’s Keith.
Keith Kogane is on his couch, with a bruised cheek and dried blood under his nose. A long, angry scratch runs from below his ear to his chin. He looks a little worse for wear but he’s Keith-- shaggy black hair and long dark eyelashes and the unmistakable smell of his spicy cologne.

Hunk just carried Keith into his house.

Pidge’s voice is the first to break the silence. “What the fuck--”

Hunk interrupts her. “I know that this isn’t what you guys had planned tonight but he really can’t go home. And I guess you were bound to meet ‘rich lover boy’ sometime, right? Anyway, it was a really, like really huge fight with--”

Keith stirs and Hunk pauses. Lance still can’t find his words.

“How the f--” Pidge says. “How the f--”

Keith’s eyes flutter open and focus directly on Lance’s face. Lance swallows, a flush starting to form on his cheeks.

Keith’s eyebrows furrow in confusion. “...Lance?” He asks sleepily.

The next string of events are nothing short of chaos.

Keith sits up abruptly, as if he is shocked. “Lance?” He asks again, frantic.

“Wait, wait hold up, Keith. You know Lance?” Hunk asks Keith, flabbergasted.

“You know Lance?” Keith snaps back.

“Yes! Lance is my roommate! How do you know him?”

Lance cuts him off. “Hunk, how the fuck do you know Keith?!”

“How do you know Keith?!” Hunk shouts back.

“Hunk?” Keith asks, eyes wide like he’s realizing something.

Lance looks between the two of them, heart beating rapidly. “Oh my-- Keith is your rich lover boy?!” He shrieks at Hunk.

“Excuse me?” Keith spits, glaring at Lance.

“No he’s-- I mean yes I guess he is but not actually--!”

Pidge howls with laughter, “Holy shit!”

“No, dude! No!” Lance shouts. “No, Keith’s not your guy he’s my guy!”

“Roommates?” Keith interjects uselessly.

“Keith is the guy you’ve been sleeping with?” Hunk questions incredulously.

“Yes!” Lances shrieks.

“This whole time?”

“Yes!”
“The guy who likes spearmint and wears suits all the time?!”

“Yes, Hunk!”

“Oh my god!” Hunk turns to looks at Keith. “You’ve known Lance this whole time?”

Keith flushes. “What the fuck is happening right now?” He shouts uselessly, voice cracking. “Am I dead?”

Pidge is still cackling, tears streaming down her face. “You must be joking!” She squeaks through her laughter. “Oh my god!”

“You’ve gotta be shitting me!” Lance exclaims. All this time--Keith was the one that Hunk wanted to set him up with? Keith was the one who had ‘Lance’s type’ written all over him. Keith was the ‘super chill’ one who’s father is a ‘big deal’. Keith was the one who got drunk on two glasses of wine and talked shit about cufflinks. It was Keith this whole. fucking. time.

“Can someone please tell me what is happening? I was in a hospital and now I’m here and you all know each other?” Keith asks again, frustrated and raspy and fucking beautiful and Lance has officially forgotten how to breathe.

Pidge perks up, loving this way too much. “Four months! How the fuck did this never come up before?!”

They all stare at each other, eyes wide, taking time for the realization to fully set in. Lance gazes at Keith, his heart aching at the familiar curve of his jaw and purple of his eyes. He hears Hunks voice echoing in his head, ‘seems like the kind of guy you’d fall madly in love with, to be honest.’ His heart beats wildly and his chest suddenly feels too small for all of the crazy shit that’s going on within it. There are more scratches visible on Keith’s pale complexion now that he has calmed down enough to look at them; a series of short, jagged ones under his eye and another long, red one near his hairline.

“Oh man.” Hunk says, shaking his head. “I don’t usually say this but...small world.” Then he turns to Lance, jutting a finger into his chest. “Aha! I told you he was your type!”

Lance rolls his eyes. “Well yeah but how the fuck was I supposed to know you were talking about Keith?”

Keith is looking between them, confusion and pain contorting his face into one of absolute misery. “What the fuck.” He just says, to nobody in particular, before flopping back onto the couch and groaning into a pillow.

Lance actually laughs. It comes out of his mouth without any warning, but he doesn't try to stop it. Hunk is laughing then too, and Pidge never really stopped, so they all clutch their stomachs and laugh and laugh until there's no way it could possibly be funny any more. It's a strange feeling, it dissolves the tension in the room. It makes Lance grateful to have the friends that he has.

It’s been a week without Keith and now he is here-- with a bloody nose and a bruised cheek and the most breathtaking smile Lance has ever seen.

He decides that maybe he can keep the “Rich Lover-Boy” nickname for a little while longer.

***
The bartender's name is Hunk. That's why it sounded so fucking familiar. How could Keith be so stupid? Of course Hunk is hilarious, and kind, and caring. Of course his small waves and two-fingered salutes look so much like things Lance does all the time--he deals with Lance on a regular basis. He lives with Lance--he eats breakfast with him, and watches YouTube videos with him, and nurses his hangovers and lounges on the couch with him and of course they're best friends--it all just makes so much sense?

Hunk gives Keith some pain meds and a bag of frozen peas for his cheek. They checked his head injuries in the hospital and everything looked okay, save for a very minor concussion. Hunk looks exhausted so Keith hears Lance promise to stay out with him and wake him up every couple of hours. It's customary after a concussion, according to Hunk. That's how they end up sitting next to each other on the couch, a little too close for comfort, with their shoulders and thighs pressed together ever so slightly.

“Keith. You really need to stop thinking so hard. You're gonna hurt yourself.” Lance is smiling softly at him, but the teasing tone is definitely there, light and airy and so very Lance.

Keith chuckles, wincing as the pain shoots across his cheek. “I can't believe the bartender is your roommate.”

“I can't believe you're rich lover boy.”

“What does that even mean?” Keith asks, wincing yet again as he shakes his head.

“Hunk talked about you all the time! You were a very hot topic of discussion in this house. I honestly thought he had a crush on you but then he started saying that he--” Lance pauses, laughing a little nervously. ‘He wanted to set us up. And I wasn't having it, so I was like, ‘nah man I don't want your rich lover boy.’ and then it kind of just became a thing.”

“Ironic.” Keith deadpans. “We were fucking the whole time and all he wanted was one blind date from us.”

“That poor guy.”

Keith smiles. “Yeah.”

Lance clears his throat. Keith can feel his eyes on his injured face. “So...that bad, huh?”

Keith sighs a little sadly. “Worse than you think. My father didn't do this, though. It…” His throat literally closes up, memories rushing back to him of the disaster that just recently unfolded. He hasn't gotten a single call from his parents. Do they not even care if he's okay? He takes a shaky breath. “It was Joe.”

“I'll kill him.” Lance grumbles, surprisingly angry. “I could kill that asshole.”

Keith feels himself blush stupidly at that. “It was technically my fault. I'm the one who hit first. He called me a faggot in front on my dad and I lost it. Didn't know that he could pack a few punches too.” He says bitterly, pressing the frozen peas closer to his face.

“And your dad…?”

“Nothing yet.” Keith clears his throat but there are already tears forming in his eyes.

Lance sighs, looking at Keith and running a finger lightly over the angry, open scratch on his jaw. “You know, you should at least bandage these.” He says, tone suddenly much lighter. Keith's eyes
snap up to meet his. “God do you even know how to take care of yourself? They could get infected!” He says it mockingly, imitating what Keith had said to him when he had all those scratches on his face. And the realization must register in Keith’s expression because Lance laughs.

“Oh, fuck off.” Keith says, probably blushing like an idiot. He rolls his eyes, shoving Lance’s shoulder. Suddenly the tears in his eyes are gone. When did that happen?

Across the room, quite randomly, Keith can see a basketball—tattered and well loved. It is trying to be hidden but failing miserably, peeking out from behind the cabinet. He turns to look at Lance, feeling a little lightheaded with exhaustion. Lance is rubbing his eyes adorably, his hair shaggy and messy. Keith feels something inflating in his chest. “Am I going to have to find someone else to have mind blowing sex with when you become an all-star basketball player?” He asks lazily.

A slow, shy smile spreads across Lance’s face. It’s very satisfying to watch. Keith feels warm. Lance chuckles. “I’ve been told I’m a good multitasker.”

“Yeah?”

“So I’ll probably be able to manage doing both.”


Lance finally turns to look at him, a grin still plastered onto his face. “Gotta work hard for the things you care about.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Mind-blowing sex?”

Lance’s expression softens slightly. “Something like that.”

Keith feels the corner of his lip twitch upwards. He opens his mouth to reply but shuts it when nothing comes out.

“You should probably get some sleep.” Lance finally says, quieting his tone. “Or else you won’t heal.”

Keith nods. “Yeah.” He lets himself fall onto the couch, head on the armrest, and swings his legs out over Lance’s lap. He grabs blindly at the blanket towards his feet, and giggles a little when Lance helps it into his hands.

“You gonna trap me under here?” Lance asks, squirming underneath Keith’s legs and holding back a laugh.

Keith shrugs. “I mean, I’m just making sure you are well situated to do your job.” He mumbles. “You gotta wake me up every two hours, man.”

“But I gotta sleep too.” Lance whines.

“What if you fall asleep, forget to wake me up, and then I die?” Keith asks dramatically.

“Then I’d probably shed a few well-rested, non-sleep-deprived tears.”

“I hate you.”

“Yeah, I know.”

He feels Lance’s hands resting on his legs. The weight of them is warm and familiar. “Haven’t seen
you in a while.” He mumbles, feeling the temptation of sleep starting to wash over him. “I...miss you a little.” The confession makes his heart race, and he desperately tries to swallow it down.

Lance squeezes the base of Keith's thigh. “Yeah. I miss you a little, too.”

And Keith really wants to continue this conversation, because he's finally got Lance close to him and doesn't know when this will ever happen again, but his eyes are fluttering shut and he can feel the sleep taking him, heavy and pulling and so comfortable. So instead, he gives into it.

***

Keith wakes up to the smell of bacon and the sound of Lance’s singing, softly and slightly off key, drifting from the kitchen. He sits up groggily, head throbbing.

“If you like piña coladas
Getting caught in the rain
If you're not into yoga
If you have half a brain...”

Keith rolls his eyes. Of course Lance would know all the words to that song. It's such a Lance song. He tells himself that he doesn't think it's the most adorable thing ever and stands up shakily, shuffling into the kitchen.

“He lives!” Hunk says happily. Keith is still a little shocked by his sudden appearance in Lance’s house. His brain hasn’t quite made the connection yet, that this guy knows Lance and lives here and Jesus, what the fuck?

Pidge pushes her glasses up her nose. “We all thought that Lance forgot to check on you, so we kinda assumed you were dead.”

“Thanks for your concern.” Keith deadpans. Lance's singing cuts off.

“Mornin’ sunshine!” He says, eyes bright. He's got a rumpled t-shirt on with some boxers underneath. Keith glances down and sees little cartoon bananas all over the fabric. He bites back a smile. Lance is holding a pan and a spatula over the stove, frying what appears to be an inhumane amount of bacon and some scrambled eggs. Keith swallows, and seriously, is he already blushing? He just woke up for god’s sake.

“Hey, Lance.”

“How are you feeling? You look like shit.”

“Thanks. Because I'm feeling stellar.”

“Are you really?”

“No.”

Lance shrugs. “Just checkin’.”
“I can go get you some more pain meds.” Hunk says.

“That’d be great.” Keith smiles. “Thanks, Hunk.” He bravely prods at one of the open scratches on his face, hissing when it stings more than he is expecting it to. “I didn't even realize that he scratched me.”

Pidge nods. “Yeah, it looks pretty bad. The hospital gave Hunk some first aid cream to prevent infection, we should probably use it.”

Keith sighs. “Thanks guys. Really...I. I’m sorry for…” he doesn't know what to apologize for, but everyone is being so kind to him and he honestly doesn't deserve it.

“No problem, man.” Lance says, sitting down at the table next to him and clapping a hand on his shoulder. “Hungry? Sounds like you need some bacon.”

Keith seriously wants to kiss him. He refrains. He watches as the greasy bacon falls into his plate, coupled with some fluffy eggs, and his stomach grumbles loudly. “Yum.” He says dumbly. Lance nods.

“Yup! It's my favorite. Gotta love bacon.”

Hunk returns with a few pills and a glass of water. “There ya go, Keith.” Then he smiles. “Need anything else, sir? A glass of red, perhaps?” Then he winks and Keith laughs loudly, covering his mouth.

“Oh my god that is so weird.”

“Isn't it?” Hunk exclaims. “So freaking weird!”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “Oh man. Bartender inside jokes. It's too early for this.”

They all eat together, bantering back and forth and laughing over really, truly stupid jokes. It's a Saturday morning and the bacon is delicious and room is warm and smells like Lance. Hunk is cackling and Pidge is shoving his shoulder and Lance throws Keith a playful wink; and Keith has this absurd feeling, for a moment, that everything in his life is actually okay.

Of course, it's fleeting. And brief. Because the soreness in his cheek starts to throb again and then Lance raises a concerned eyebrow at him. “Back to reality today?” He asks cautiously.

Keith shrugs, clearing his throat as everyone turns to look at him. “Guess I have to go home sometime.” He says reluctantly.

Lance sucks some salt off of his thumb from the bacon and Keith watches his mouth intently, not even bothering to be subtle. He feels, quite pathetically, like it’s been years since he’s touched Lance. The desire to do so clouds his thoughts. The lips around Lances thumb slowly morph into a grin, white teeth peeking out from beneath them and catching the thumb between them. “Stop that.” Lance teases, dropping the hand from his mouth. “My eyes are up here.”

Keith flushes intensely, turning away. He runs his hand through his hair, flustered and a little embarrassed. “Thanks for breakfast.” He mumbles. “I should probably get going though. Get this over with.”

“Do you need a ride?” Lance asks. He's already getting up as he asks it but Keith stops him.

“Nah I'll get an Uber don't worry about it.” He says, and he might be imagining it, but Lance’s face
falls ever so slightly when he says it.

“Oh. Okay. Well, I'll walk you out.”

Hunk and Pidge exchange a look that goes unnoticed by Lance, who is frantically gathering his dishes and tossing them into the sink. Keith thanks them again for all of the help, especially Hunk, and makes his way to the door. Lance follows.

They stand face to face at the doorway, which is something they've done about a thousand times before. Keith swallows down his nervousness as he watches Lance's eyes dart around his face, probably inspecting his injuries.

“I'm fine, Lance.” He says tiredly. “Physically. At least.”

Lance nods slowly, some of the worry seeping from his eyes. “Yeah, no, I know, it was just…” He sighs, smiling sadly. “I know.”

Keith tries to give him a reassuring smile. “Thanks for walking me to the door.” He says, trying to change the subject before it gets too depressing. “I'm having flashbacks to my high school prom now.”

“You don't seem like the kind of guy who went to prom.” Lance says teasingly.

“But I did!” Keith replies. “With a girl named Judy. She wore this bright red lipstick that got all over my face when we kissed. It wouldn't come off with water. I was furious.”

Lance laughs, eyes crinkling and nose scrunching up adorably. “Wow, that would happen to you.”

“And then she asked if we could have sex in the car, so I lied and told her that I had chlamydia.”

“You what?”

“Vaginas freak me out, okay? I panicked!”

“Chlamydia?”

“Oh my god why did I tell you this, I'm an idiot.”

“Oh my-- Keith! You are just--!” Lance shakes his head laughing in disbelief. “What the fuck?”

“I mean, it worked! She took me home and I didn't have sex with her!”

“You could've also just said no like a normal person?”

“I mean...whatever!”

Lance is laughing out loud now, and Keith's heart flutters at the sound. He takes a step closer to Keith and wraps a hand around the base of his neck, stroking his jaw with a gentle thumb. “You literally beat the crap out of a man yesterday, but you're afraid of a little red lipstick?” Lance asks him, voice soft. His eyes look teal in the sunlight filtering into the room.

Keith scoffs, and there's no way of hiding his blush at the gentle touch. He wants to lean back into Lance's hand, but stays still. “I mean. I wasn't afraid.” He crosses his arms. “It just wouldn't wash off!”

“I can imagine that got you really frustrated.” Lance says playfully.
“Yeah. I did.”

“Hothead.”

Keith scowls to hide his smile, which apparently is one of his default facial expressions when around Lance. “Fuck off.”

Lance giggles. “Well, you don't have to worry about any red lipstick when we make out.”

Keith’s face gets impossibly warmer, nudging forward and brushing their noses together. “No... guess I don’t.”

He wonders why Lance is doing this right now, while his face is covered in bruises and scrapes and he probably smells like trash. Lance was really only supposed to say bye and open the door for him. Maybe it's out of pity, because Keith is about to go ruin his entire life in less than twenty minutes. But Keith's heart flips relentlessly as their lips meet.

It's only been a week but Keith feels literally starved for Lance’s stupid, stupid lips, and when he feels them, something inside him melts. A very pathetic whimpering sound makes its way out of his throat and Lance responds by snaking an arm around his waist, pulling him closer as if to tell him that he understands. The fluttering in Keith heart moves to his stomach, his toes, his fingertips, as Lance swipes his tongue along his bottom lip, asking for permission. Keith parts his lips and their tongues brush together and Lance's touches are feather-light on his broken skin and Keith swears that he just keeps melting and melting and melting.

Lance's body is warm and solid against his. The rumpled shirt covering his skin is worn out and thin, like all of Lance's well-loved clothes, and Keith runs his fingers over the fabric eagerly, wanting to touch everything he can before he's gone. Because after facing his parents, who knows if he'll be seeing Lance again?

It feels like a goodbye. Both of them know, deep down, that things probably aren't going to be easy anymore. Casually hooking up with Lance every week probably won’t be part of the agreement Keith makes with his parents when they chain him to a wall in the basement. But they just kiss and kiss and kiss, and Keith doesn't know how long they stand there, just making out, until the tingle in his lips turns to full numbness and he is completely out of breath. He breaks off of Lance with a shaky exhale and moves back slightly. Lance doesn't let go of his waist.

“Well. Thanks.”

Keith swallows. “I guess I'll see you around?”

Keith is expecting a thousand horrible things when he gets home.
He’s expecting yelling, and screaming, and possibly some form of physical violence. He’s expecting derogatory names and lots of tears and loads of confessions and honestly? He’s expecting to be thrown into the attic and locked there for the rest of eternity so that his parents can tell all of their business friends he died in a horrific fire, never to be seen again.

He really, and honestly, prepares himself for the absolute worst. To be treated, openly and harshly, like dirt. He stops at a few stores and buys some of his favorite snacks, eating them in the car so that he can have them one last time before his metaphorical death. It may seem dramatic to some people, but his parents know that he’s gay now. And that’s seriously not okay. Because they won’t stand for it, and none of their friends will stand for it, and their careers won’t stand for it, and Keith is officially unwanted-- he can already feel it.

He finally gets lucky enough to have a family and then he goes and fucks it up. Typical.

Stuffing the last hostess cupcake in his mouth, Keith gets out of his car and stares at his looming, terrifyingly large house. His hands are shaking and his heart is thudding painfully in his chest. He takes a deep breath. “You’re prepared for this.” He mumbles to himself. It’s a lie, but he tells it to himself enough times that he almost starts to believe it. Because he has literally thought of every possible scenario that could potentially transpire when he opens those double doors. So really, there won’t be any surprises, right?

Wrong.

Keith is so, so, so wrong.

Because when he opens the doors, his parents are sitting in the foyer; polite smiles on their faces and hands folded neatly in their laps. With them is a girl with long, blonde hair and emotionless eyes, and before Keith can open his mouth to say anything, his father’s booming voice fills the room. Despite his kind smile, the words come out cold. “Keith, how wonderful of you to join us. Some arrangements have been made, and we want you to meet Greta.” His dad gestures to the disinterested girl on the couch. “Your fiancé”.

***

Lance didn’t even realize how long he stood at the closed door until Hunk is suddenly standing behind him. “Hey, Lance. You good?”


“He’s a really great guy.” Hunk says sadly. “I haven’t spent as much time with him as you, but I have spent a decent amount. And I see why you like him.”

Lance nods, not in the mood to deny it any longer. “It just feels… like a lot.” He says uselessly, not really knowing what to say. “I just like him…a lot.”

“I wasn’t kidding when I said you’d fall for him if you met him.” Hunk says.

They both make their way to the living room. Lance sits on the couch next to Hunk and he can still smell the faint scent of Keith’s cologne lingering on the cushions from the night before.
“I just wonder what’s going to happen.” Lance says tiredly, looking down at the ground. “I hope he doesn’t get hurt.”

“He seems like a tough enough guy.” Hunk smiles. “Whatever it is, I’m sure he can handle it.”

Lance wants to say that unfortunately, whether or not Keith can handle it isn’t exactly the problem. “Yeah.” He says, sounding unsure. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr: dimplesandcurlsss
my (relatively new) art insta: allscribbledup

The song Lance was singing: Escape- Jimmy Buffet

<3333
Chapter Summary

three cheers for characters you thought were 100% evil actually just being misunderstood and making some mistakes along the way but ultimately having good intentions

hip hip hoorayyyy

Chapter Notes

me and my dramatic ass enjoyed writing this. by the way, I kind of wish i could just hang out with all of you? you seems like super fun people??? anyway, thanks for the comments and kudos you are all wonderful!

um. slight angst warning. and by slight, i mean there is angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What the hell do you think you're doing ?” Keith is reeling, heartbeat through the roof and fists clenched so hard that his nails are practically cutting into his palms.

His parents face him, both sporting similar cold, stern looks. He had tugged them into the kitchen immediately after they broke the news that he's apparently engaged now. They don't seem phased by his anger.

“Damage control.” His mother says. “It's necessary, you cannot fight it.”

Keith turns to his father. “Dad...dad look I'm sorry . I shouldn't have lashed out I should've…” His voice cracks. “Please don't make me do this.”

His father looks at him and Keith can actually see his face soften, just for a second, before his mother snaps at him again. “You have always been like this! Overly emotional and acting on your impulses without even thinking about how it affects others! When will you learn ?”

“Fine! I lost control of my temper, but that man was attacking dad just as much as me and he had it coming!” Keith shouts back.

“Have you seen your face? Do you not see what these impulses do to you?” She sighs frustratedly. “I’m not even talking about the fight! I’m talking about sneaking around a hotel at night and kissing strange men!” She says the word ‘men’ like it is painful coming out of her mouth, her powdered nose wrinkling in disgust. “Are you even aware of the talk that has been going around over the past twenty four hours? No! Of course you aren't! Because you were only thinking of
Keith’s father still has not said anything. His arms are crossed over his chest, making it seem like he is angry, but his eyes are giving him away. He doesn’t look angry. He looks hurt.

Keith clenches his fists even harder, lump forming in his throat. “I don’t kiss men to hurt you. I kiss men because I want to!” His voice comes out strained.

His mother recoils like she’s been hit. “Don’t talk like that in this house!” She spits.

“Dad—” Keith pleads, turning to his father again. “I’m sorry. I never meant to embarrass you. Please, I-- I don’t… I do everything you guys want but I can’t…”

Understanding registers in his father’s eyes. Sympathy. It’s an emotion he very rarely sees on his father’s face. But it fades. “Keith, listen to your mother.” He says harshly, although Keith can still sense reluctance in his voice.

Anger bubbles in Keith’s chest. “Who even is that girl, huh? I’ve never even met her before!”

“We thought it’d be best,” His father clears his throat, “if we just made this our decision.”

Contrary to his father’s mellow tone, his mother’s slices like a knife. “We tried to give you a choice with Diane and you ended up physically assaulting her father!”

“Do you even know what he called me? Did you even know that I was in the hospital for hours and neither of you called to see if I was okay?!” Keith’s voice breaks but he pushes on. “You’re supposed to be family!”

“We’re supposed to take care of you!” His mother snaps back. “And that means keeping you away from inappropriate behavior! Not encouraging it!”

“Family is supposed to do more than that!” Keith says, but it comes out a little bit like a sob. “You’re supposed to love me! No matter what.”

He sees both of his parents falter at this-- because not only is it a childish thing to say, but Keith has never said anything like that to them before. His mother looks distraught.

Keith’s father, looking smaller with every passing minute, clears his throat. “Son, you could be very happy with her. We only want what is best for you.”

“You mean the firm?” Keith replies. “Because there is no way you think I’ll be happy with her, dad. Come on, that’s not me at all. You know me--”

“Enough!” His dad snaps, cutting him off. “We tell you to go to business school, and you fight. We tell you to work at the firm and you fight. We tell you to date a nice girl and you fight and I’m so sick of fighting with you!” His dad is shouting now, voice raised higher than ever before.

“I’m gay, dad. I like boys, okay?” Keith admits, voice shaking. “And cars, and engineering, and I don’t understand why you can’t just--!”

“You’re confused, is what you are!” His mother interjects angrily. “So eager to rebel that you’ll do crazy things!” His father holds a hand up to silence her.

“Martha, please.” He says, trying to calm her down. For a moment it almost sounds like he is going to defend Keith. But then he doesn’t. “We are the only family you have, Keith. We took you in
from a horrible, horrible place!” He says apathetically. “We have given you everything we can and you don’t give anything back! When are you going to show even the slightest bit of gratitude?”

There it is, out in the open-- the topic that has never been brought up. It feels like a stab in the chest. Adoption isn’t something that is usually spoken about after the child is adopted--at least in their family, it kind of the unspoken rule.

“So now I owe you for loving me?” He asks sadly.

“No. You don’t owe us anything, but we’d like your respect.” His mother answers, voice slightly softer.

But they’re right. Because they did take Keith from a horrible, horrible place. They did raise him, and give him everything he could ever want. They decorated Christmas trees with him, and cooked Thanksgiving Turkey with him, and took him shopping and gave him his own room with his own bed and they do love him-- in some twisted, fucked-up way, they do love him.

And he knows that now, looking at his father’s face and seeing the pain in his eyes, like a man who is always trying his best and always falling short. Something in his heart aches at the sight of it. They’re right. They’re right. They’re right.

Keith has to...show gratitude. He can’t forget where he came from.

Crumpling like a napkin, Keith lets his shoulders and fists fall, taking a long, deep breath; slowly admitting defeat. Tears are filling his eyes and he doesn’t really know if it’s from frustration or just pure sadness, but they drip slowly down his injured cheeks and he sighs, hugging his arms around himself. “Of course I’m thankful for everything you’ve done for me.” He mumbles. “But you have to accept me for who I am.”

“I accept that you have many things to work on.” His mother says, still a little cold but her voice has warmed significantly. “And it would be best if you followed our orders and taught yourself some discipline. We really do only want what is best for you, Keith. And the road you are taking right now--all this talk of cars and homosexuality-- is not a good one.”

Keith bristles at that, but keeps his mouth shut. He already knows he’s lost this battle. He can feel his parents inching closer and deep down he recognizes the ache in his chest-- the ache to feel loved, to feel accepted, to feel like he’s part of a family. It’s a pain that he despises, it’s been one of his demons for so long, constantly sucking the life out of him and making him loathe parts of himself. He wants that ache to go away. He wants a family.

No matter what the cost.

***

Lance has not made one. fucking. basket. It has been two and a half hours and he hasn’t gotten the fucking ball into the fucking bucket once. He tugs at his hair, wanting to scream, as he watches the millionth ball bounce off the edge and back in his direction.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” He says, to nobody, waving his arms around and groaning in frustration.
When he was younger, his dad would always stand under the basket, waiting for him to shoot. When it looked like the ball wasn’t going to go in, his dad would catch it just before it reached the basket, and slam it for him. “See, look! You always make it in!” He would say. Lance would always pout, and argue. “No, you did!” he would reply, and then his dad would say, “Well, we did it together. That’s what being on a team is all about, right?”

He sure as shit is sick of playing alone.

He plants his untalented ass onto the cold concrete and checks his phone. No texts. To be fair, it is early. Everyone in their right mind is asleep right now.

Which is why he finds himself typing a message to Keith before he can stop himself.

Lance

Are u alive

It’s bad, really. The whole “having feelings for your fuckbuddy but now none of the lines are where they used to be and nothing makes sense” thing is pretty fucking bad. Keith left his house five days ago with a bloody nose and a split lip and a bruised cheek and Lance hasn’t heard one word from him. Realistically, he was expecting this. But it still hurts, a lot more than he thought it would, and he wonders what exactly happened. Because he knows that Keith’s family probably wasn’t happy with him but...he’s not going to do something stupid, right?

He checks the clock on his phone. 5:43AM. Why the fuck did he text Keith now? There no way that grump is actually awake at this--

Lance’s phone buzzes and it startles him so much he actually squeaks.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

I think so

Lance’s stomach twists.

Lance

What happened? And why tf are you awake rn?
Keith (hot guy from bar)

Why are you texting me when you should be playing basketball? ...i cant sleep

Lance

Did you try counting sheep

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Is that a serious question

Lance

Of course it is

Keith (hot guy from bar)

No lance. I didn't count sheep.

Lance

Hmm. well that's probably why you’re still awake

Keith (hot guy from bar)

I might actually hate you

Lance giggles. The cold, morning breeze nips at his nose and he sniffles.
Lance

Want some company?

His heart thuds wildly as he sends it.

Keith (hot guy from bar)

i ...dont see that being a good idea...given the situation

Lance

Parents?

Keith (hot guy from bar)

...yeah.

Lance

Oh come on, theres no way they are awake rn. Just sneak out and be back by seven

Keith (hot guy from bar)

I...dont know

Lance feels the frustration spreading throughout his chest. It stings and makes him take a deep breath. Why can’t Keith just fuck what his parents say? Is it a money thing? I couldn't be. Keith doesn't strike him as a shallow person.
Lance

Okay, well… if you change your mind im in the parking lot in front of the mini mart

Keith (hot guy from bar)

Okay

Lance sighs. He lets his eyes shut and focuses on his breathing, because for some reason his heart rate is doing some crazy shit right now and he can’t think straight. He needs to get practicing again, even though he knows that today has been a dud. He’s just not in it right now. He can’t make the basket and he doesn't have a team to back him up. He doesn’t have his dad to slam all of his misses. He doesn’t have anyone to help him, really.

He must drift off, because when he cracks his eyes open, the black sky is turning navy blue as the sun starts to rise, and when he turns his neck a little to the left, he sees Keith’s face; dark eyes piercing into him and sharp features only a breath away.

“Ah!” He shrieks, stumbling into a standing position. “The fuck, Keith? How long were you laying there staring at me?”

Keith shrugs, sitting up and blinking tiredly at him. “Probably like eight minutes.”

“Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“You looked so peaceful! And tired.” Keith blushes. “It’s hard to wake someone up at 6AM alright?” Keith has dark bags under his eyes that Lance isn't really used to seeing on him. His lips are chapped and a little bitten, and his hair bears an uncanny resemblance to a bird's nest. He's got his classic red, plaid pants on with a large, black hoodie engulfing his upper half. His hands are hidden in the long sleeves and it hangs sloppily off of his shoulders. Despite looking like his life is ending, he looks really fucking adorable.

“You watched me sleep for eight minutes? That's creepy, man.” Lance says, trying to sound much more confident than he feels.

“You're easy on the eyes.” Keith says, smirking. “So stop pretending you don't love it.”

Lance officially feels the flush spreading across his face. He clears his throat. “So you managed to escape the paternal chokehold, I assume?”

A strange, sad look passes Keith's face. “Um. No, not really. I have to leave when it gets light out, probably.” He glances around. “Like an hour or so.”

The crickets chirp around them, filling the space between them with soft, steady noises. The only
light is coming from the dim street lamp above the bucket, showering them both in pale, fluorescent beams.

“So.” Keith says, leaning back on his hands. “Is this where all the magic happens?”

Lance scoffs. “Used to be. I’ve been off my game lately.” He flops down next to Keith and relaxes his legs. Their knees knock together but neither of them move. There is something off about Keith. Lance can feel it. There's something he isn't telling him. He glances at Keith's profile, paler under the white light. God, he's so beautiful. What were they talking about again? Oh yeah. Lance is off his game. “Haven't made a shot yet today.”

Keith shrugs. “Happens to the best of us.”

“It's...a really big deal to me, though.”

Keith turns to look at him, eyes curious. “But everyone has off days. It's fine. Don't beat yourself up.”

Lance practically hears his older sister's voice in that moment, echoing in the empty halls of his high school after a particularly devastating game. Jane had said those exact words, and kept saying them, every single time that Lance's self esteem was anywhere below one hundred she was there. “Don't beat yourself up, alright? You get back up off your ass and keep trying. Not every day will be perfect.”

“Did I say something wrong?” Keith’s voice breaks through his reverie, slightly concerned. Lance probably looks like a kicked puppy--it's something Pidge always calls his “I-miss-my-family” face.

“What? No, not at all. Just reminded me of my sister. She was always telling me not to be so hard on myself.” Lance says, chuckling sadly.

Keith hums. “Why do I feel like that's something a lot of people tell you not to do?”

“Because...it is.”

“And yet you're still hard on yourself.”

Lance sighs. “I can't help it. I came to this city alone and I just need it to be worth it.”

“It will be. You made two baskets last weekend. While you were shitfaced.” Keith grins crookedly at him. “And besides, you're not alone anymore.”

Lance's heart flutters wildly. “No?”

“You've got Pidge. And Hunk. Hell, you've even got Coran. And the rest of the town is rooting for you.” Keith smiles gently at him.

Lance nods. What about you? He wants to ask, but he stops himself. “Yeah. I know. You're right.” He laughs nervously. “Something my mom said when my sister Jane went off to college was that if you play your cards right, you can have a different family wherever you go.” He swallows. “It's super cheesy but I guess I kind of believe it now?”

Keith smiles. “That's...oddly comforting.”

“Right? Like, I think about it a lot more than I should.”

There is a long pause. The sound of a car engine echoes from a few blocks away.
“Why don't you go see them, Lance?”

Lance actually has a physical reaction to the question, leg twitching slightly as he tenses. “I...don't want to talk about it.”

Keith sighs. “Okay.”

Lance doesn't know when they laid down, but their backs are on the floor now, eyes exploring the non-existent stars.

“This place is actually strangely pretty at night.” Keith says, sounding uncomfortable with using a word as dainty as ‘pretty’.

Lance chuckles. “It gets gorgeous when there's a lot of stars out.”

“Is this where you take all of your hookup victims, to charm your way into their pants?”

“Hey! I'm classier than that!” Lance argues, poking Keith's side. “And besides, I don't need the fucking stars to get in people's pants.”

Keith laughs. “Fair enough.”

“You're the first person I've ever brought here, anyway.” Lance says stupidly, the words falling out of his mouth without any warning. He bites his lip and stifles the panicked squeak that wants to come out after he hears himself say it.

“Oh?” Keith looks at him. “So I'm the first hookup victim?”

“That would require hooking up, asshole.” Lance says, smiling.

“Well, is ‘basketball court’ on your bucket list?”

“Nah.” Lance bites his lips. “But ‘empty parking lot’ totally is.”

Keith smiles at him, eyes teasing. He hums, nodding slightly, and then starts standing up.

Lance, for some stupid reason, feels a flash of panic at the thought of him leaving. “Where are you going?”

A pale hand extends in front of him and he follows it to Keith's grinning face. Hesitantly, he takes it, and Keith pulls him to his feet. They stare at each other.

“You're too fluffy to be seductive right now.” Lance says shyly, tugging at Keith’s messed up hair.

Keith just hums again. “You sure about that?”

“My fluff-to-sexy meter is almost never wrong.”

Keith leans forward and brushes his lips against Lance's neck. “Hm. Almost.”

Lance smiles at the touch. “Keith…”

Keith's tongue is on his neck now, slow and lazy, hot and needy. It trails along the skin below Lance’s jaw. Lance sighs shakily, tilting his head back without even thinking about it. Keith's hair smells like expensive soap despite the fact that it's a mess, and Lance lifts a hand to bunch up the thick locks in his fist.
Keith's hands slide to his back, gliding across Lance’s shoulder blades and settling a little lower. His body presses tightly against Lance’s, leaving very little to the imagination, and Lance can already feel his heart rate quickening.

Keith pulls back slightly, tilting his head in the telltale way he always does before they kiss. His eyes are large and questioning, flitting down to Lance's lips and back up.

And Lance is weak, okay?

Their lips meet and Keith practically melts into him, humming softly and falling into the kiss. Their bodies click together in the hottest way, and Jesus Christ it really doesn't take much to turn Lance on when it comes to Keith. All he has to do is exist.

For the first time ever, Keith seems to be handling him with care, as opposed to the aggressive, firm way he usually initiates kisses. Now it's just light touches that barely brush his skin, tentative swirls of his tongue and hesitant lips and---

It's careful. It's too careful.

And then Lance feels it, as Keith's finger trails from his jaw to his neck, Lance feels it.

“Keith.” He says, pulling away and looking down at him. “Keith, you're shaking.”

“W-what?” Keith blinks at him, panic evident in his eyes. “No I’m not.”

“Yes. You are.” Lance says, holding up Keith's hand between them and watching his fingers subtly twitch.

Keith stares with sad eyes. “Oh.” He says.

Lane knew it. The minute he saw Keith he knew something was off. “What happened with your parents, Keith? What's wrong?”

“Nothings wrong.”

“Then why are you shivering like a terrified chihuahua?” Lance snaps.

Keith frowns slightly. “Look, I just... Things are a little... different at home right now and I don't know when I'll be able to touch you again so can we just--” his face falls further. “Please?”


Keith leans in and kisses him again, a little less hesitant this time but still incredibly soft. Their tongues glide lazily against each other and Lance loves the feeling, never wants it to end, never wants Keith to leave. Keith's hand, still shaking slightly, is sliding up his shirt and smoothing over his bare stomach, and Lance feels his muscles jumping under the touch.

“You're all sweaty.” Keith mumbles against his mouth.

“Well excuse me, princess.” Lance snaps back sarcastically, wrapping his arms tighter around Keith's waist and pulling him closer.

Keith's hands, still under Lance's shirt, move to his back and slide up, then down, and further down, until they slip under the waistband of Lance's shorts and grip his ass. They both hum when he does it, and Lance breaks away, just barely, bottom lips still brushing against each other.
“Do you want me to get you first?” He asks, the same way he did the first time they ever hooked up.

Keith shakes his head. “Just you today.”

“What?” Lance asks through ragged breaths.

“Just wanna see you come today.”

“Keith--”

“Please…” Keith is already moving his hand to the front on Lance's shorts, palming his half-hard cock through his briefs. “Just come for me, okay?”

Lance gasps sharply at the sudden contact. “Uh.” His brain always stops working properly when Keith touches him like this. “Yeah…”

“Good.” Keith licks his hand sloppily before shoving it back into Lance’s shorts, passed his briefs this time, and grabbing him. Lance nudges forward as Keith starts to stroke him, pressing soft, open mouthed kisses to Keith's cheek. His jaw. His neck.

“Lance…” Keith breathes, and it sounds like a warning. It sounds like he should be saying “stop that” or “don't do that”, but Lance ignores him, and continues kissing his neck, because he’s too overwhelmed with sensation and emotion and he really doesn't know what else to do.

Keith still hasn't quickened the pace of his hand, which Lance isn't used to. Because there's a formula to this that Keith usually follows but right now his hand his still stroking him slowly, lazily, with heavy movements. Lance isn't used to being touched like that, and he is surprised when he feels a shiver run through him. The long, slow strokes actually have his heart beating much faster, feeling every inch of Keith's hand; every twitch and movement of his fingers.

“Mmmf.” He mumbles. It leaves his mouth before he can stop it. “You're taking your time today.”

His voice sounds rough.

Keith nods, forehead against his. “Don't want you to go.” It sounds distant.

Lance's heart flutters. “I-I’m not…” he takes a long, shaky breath as Keith's fingers drag across the tip. “I'm not going anywhere.”

Keith finally quickens his pace ever so slightly, and Lance doesn't think the plan to make him last longer is working out very well, because all of those slow movements seem to have added up. The second Keith's hand starts moving faster, Lance’s whole body twitches. “Ah --” He grips Keith's shoulders, trying to steady himself.

“God, I love seeing you like this.” Keith mumbles. “Love watching you fall apart.” It sounds downright filthy, and Lance's eyes flutter shut as he tries to level his breathing because fuck.

He squeezes his eyes closed, heat beginning to coil in his abdomen. Their breath mingles. Keith's voice is hot and raspy. His breath smells like toothpaste. Peppermint toothpaste, Lance notes, not spearmint. Didn’t Keith say...didn’t Keith say he hated peppermint--?

Keith quickens his pace even more and Lance’s head falls onto his shoulder, the heat in his gut coiling tighter and tighter. His shoulders start to tense and his fingers curl into Keith's strong shoulders. Keith's hand feels good. It always does. Soft in some places and calloused in others from
all of the garage work he does. Lance could probably come just thinking about that, be he gasps a little and controls himself, mumbling something relatively incoherent into Keith’s shoulder.

“Fuck.” He hisses. “Fuck Keith…” His voice comes out shaky. Broken. His hips start to twitch and Keith’s fingers dig into them, holding them steady. Lance feels the muscles below his belly button clenching, the heat spreading to his chest and curling and curling and fuck now he’s curling into himself and fuck fuck fuck-- Keith hums from somewhere low in his throat.

“You’re so beautiful.” Keith says, voice barely above a whisper, and Lance whimpers pathetically, nuzzling his face into Keith's neck because that's just too much and this is all too much.

He bites down on Keith’s neck and Keith startles. Lance can feel his low chuckle vibrating against his lips “Don’t be leaving marks on me.” He rasps.

Holy shit , Lance is close. The slow build-up was unlike anything he’s ever experienced with Keith before--because usually it’s so one-and-done, so quick, but this time Lance could feel every individual muscle tensing, every wave of pleasure crashing in every singly part of him and--

“Come for me, Lance.” Keith pleads. “Come on.”

Lance finally lets go, clutching Keith's hair and gasping brokenly into his neck. His back arches and Keith strokes him slowly until it's over. His whole body won't stop shivering, and he doesn't know long long he stands there, panting shakily into Keith's neck and trying to calm himself down. He feels Keith’s fingers running through his hair, light and gentle. He’s overwhelmed, and exhausted, and reeling, and for the first time in a very long time, he has no idea what to say.

Keith slips his hand out of Lance’s shorts, swallowing hard. Lance can see the aroused flush on his face. The blown-out pupils. He looks so sexy in the simplest way.

Lance searches for words but still can’t come up with anything. Keith, surprisingly, is the first to talk. “I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of that.” He says, voice still surprisingly low.

Lance blushes intensely, a nervous laugh bubbling out of his mouth. “You sure you don’t want me to get you?” He asks gently. “Because I’m totally down.”

Keith just looks at him, and Lance can see the conflict in his eyes. “I, uh…” He looks down at the ground. “Nah, I’ll take care of it. I...think we’re out of time.” He glances at the sun, which is starting to turn the sky from navy to light blue.

Lance wraps his arms around himself. “Oh. Okay.”

Keith sends him a sad smile. “Hey, come on. Don’t be like that.”

Lance attempts a smile back. “No, it’s cool. I’ve got work in a few anyway. Gotta shower.” Lance shifts uncomfortably, grimacing at the sticky situation happening in his shorts.

Keith nods. “Okay. Well...I parked over that way. So…”

Lance nods back. “Yeah. Sure. See you around.”

Keith’s smile falters. “Yeah...yeah hopefully.”
Keith sits in his fucking car with a fucking boner and before he can give himself a manly pep talk in the mirror there are tears in his eyes.

This was the last time. This was the last time he’s letting himself see Lance. He promised it to himself when he snuck out of the house in his goddamn pajamas at 6AM-- heart beating and fluttering like crazy. He said to himself-- one more time, and then stop seeing him.

Because he’s engaged now. It's what his family wants. It's what will make them happy. It's what will make them love him. He expected this to be his life anyway, and he can't keep pretending that this isn't happening; no matter how much he doesn't want it to. He can't keep waiting to wake up from the nightmare because it's real and it's actually happening. And no matter how much he tells himself to just leave-- he can’t.

Of course he never expected to fall for Lance either. But he tells himself that doesn't change things.

And now he’s driving in the direction of his house, thinking about the way Lance’s face looked as he was leaving--sad but stupidly hopeful. Tears fill his eyes and he can't get Lance’s smell off of his hoodie. A hoodie that he used to wear because it smelled like Shiro, now covered in the scent of Lance’s deodorant. Keith wants it gone so that he’ll never have to smell it again, but at the same time, he hopes it sticks around so he never, ever forgets.

He scoffs. Fuckbuddies. How the hell did it turn into this?

He's actually been fairly successful in avoiding his parents since “the announcement”, but he still has to eat with them and mealtime is always a little tense. Keith hopes that once he’s married, his family will feel like home again. It's been a while, he realizes, since he's felt that way with his parents.

He has had exactly two conversations with Greta--both about her condo in Cape Cod and neither of them lasting more than 37 seconds. She rolls her eyes a lot. She texts a lot. She never asked Keith about the scratches on his face.

Maybe someday, Keith tells himself reluctantly, someday I can learn to love her.

She really is a pretty girl. She's got big blue eyes and long, curly, strawberry blonde hair. Her laugh is cute enough, even though usually it’s about something nasty. She's got a few freckles, long and dainty lashes, full lips. If Keith's heart breaks every time he looks at her, that's probably something he can get over, right?

Right?

He rubs one out in a gas station bathroom like an uncivilized piece of trash, because he can't stand his boner anymore. He can't help but wonder what Lance would have done to him if he had stayed just a little bit longer, but truthfully, if he had stayed then he probably would've never been able to leave.

Keith drives straight past his house and pulls into Shiro’s driveway, because fuck that.

When Shiro opens the door, he looks surprised. “Keith?” It takes Keith a moment to realize that he probably looks like absolute garbage. Self consciously, he attempts to smooth down his hair. Shiro raises an eyebrow at him. “Jesus, were you dumpster diving or something? Not important. We actually need to talk.”
“Didn't come here to talk.” Keith mumbles grumpily, pushing past Shiro and padding into the living room.

“Keith, come on, look at yourself. It's time to face the facts.”

“Shiro will you please just stop trying to--” Keith pauses when he reaches the couch, a little startled by a figure that has somehow appeared there. There is a young woman sitting in one of the pristine, white armchairs with silvery hair that almost rivals their color. It's cascades in waves over bronze shoulders. Keith has never seen such a mix of colors on one person. Her eyes almost look iridescent, a mix of purples and light blues. She has a strong build with thin wrists and dainty fingers. She's wearing a tight, lilac dress and is raising one perfectly shaped eyebrow at Keith, looking amused.

“Uh, Keith. This is Allura.” Shiro says nervously. Keith doesn't blame him for being nervous given what happened last time she was brought up.

But Keith's hoodie smells like Lance now.

So.

“Hey, Allura. It’s...nice to finally meet you.” He says, extending his hand. He can almost hear Lance, saying 'she's got to be a fucking firecracker for someone to reject your fine ass’. And, well, she definitely is a firecracker. In a frighteningly beautiful way. In a way that he can imagine made Shiro absolutely melt.

She takes it and smiles brightly at him. It’s a little too pretty and it practically blinds him. “Hi, Keith. Shiro has told me so much about you.”

Keith inwardly winces a little at that, wondering about all of the horrible things Shiro could have said about him, but then forces himself to stop thinking about it. “Sorry...usually I look better than this.” He says awkwardly, gesturing down to himself. “It’s been a rough week.”

Her smile turns sad. “I understand.” She’s got a thick english accent that surprises Keith.

Shiro is suddenly behind him. “Don’t you think we should talk about...You know?”

Keith whirls around to look at him. “No.”

“Keith…”

And Keith is confused, because Shiro is the last person to ever tell him to disobey his parents. So what is this about?

“I know Greta.” Allura says suddenly.

“Allura, right now is probably not the best time to--”

“She’s a manipulative, conceited bitch.”

“--to tell Keith that.” Shiro sighs and runs a hand over his face.

Keith looks between them, eyes wide. “The fuck is going on right now?”

“I told Allura about your...predicament.” Shiro says, defeatedly. Keith frowns. “But it was only because I was really worried about you! My chef made sashimi that day and you didn't even touch it!”
Keith turns to Allura. “You know Greta?”

“Of course I do. She’s vile. Practically the devil with a wig on—”

“Now keep in mind that Allura is the type to...over dramatize.” Shiro says, using his best ‘damage control’ voice. “But yeah...from what I’ve heard, she’s bad news, Keith.”

“What did she do?” Keith asks, finally sitting down next to Shiro.

“She just treats people like trash. Rich people, but especially people who make less money than her. I saw her stealing money from the tip jar at a networking event last month! When the bartender asked her to return it, she spilled her drink all over the tabletop—purposely.” Allura explains sourly.

Hunk’s face immediately flashes through his mind. “She what? Doesn’t she have enough money on her own?”

“I’m telling you, all she does is mess with people. She’s bled all of her past boyfriends dry; makes them buy things for her but never spends her own. It’s sick.”

Keith feels a nervous, dreadful feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Well, what do you want me to do about it?” And all he really wants Shiro to say is ‘don't marry her.’ All he wants to hear is ‘it's okay not to marry her.’

But Shiro says, “Just be careful.”

“Be careful? That's your genius advice?”

Allura sighs quietly. “Make sure she doesn't take everything from you.”

“There's nothing left to take.” Keith spits, the image of Lance's smile flashing through his mind. Then it’s gone in an instant. “And besides, it's not like I can just not marry her, right?”

He threw the bone. Gave another opportunity for Shiro to tell him it's okay to leave. It's okay to disobey.

But Shiro and Allura just exchange worried glances. “These things...are tricky.” Shiro says, gaze falling to the floor.

Keith is out the door in under ten seconds.

***

If there is anything Lance has learned over the past 17 days, it’s this: seventeen days is not nearly enough time to prepare for basketball tryouts, and seventeen days is far too much time to be ignored by the guy you’re pathetically in love with.

And now he is standing in front of the double doors that lead to the Altea University Gymnasium, staring at them nervously and feeling the fear clench in his chest. This is it. Is third time really the charm? Or is he just fucked?

He takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. Trying to expel all extra thoughts from his mind.
Keith, his family, his unpaid bills, and uncooked dinner.

*Just think about basketball*, he tell himself. *You can do this.*

Keith was right. He isn’t alone anymore. He may have left his hometown alone, but he has another family here. He has people who are supporting him. And yes, he did make two baskets while shitfaced. So he can *totally* do this. He does it *every fucking morning.*

He keeps his family close to his heart as he pushes through the double doors.

*

“Name?”

“Lance Sanchez.”

“Age?”

“Twenty-two.”

The people in the panel exchange looks that they think are subtle, but Lance still catches it. He knows he's older than a lot of the guys trying out, and he hopes it doesn't affect his scores.

He’s waited in line for about fifteen minutes, and watched four people try out before him. They are all incredibly skilled, terrifyingly so, but Lance knows that deep down, he has what it takes. He’s probably failed a lot more than those guys, which also means he’s learned a hell of a lot more, too.

Now he’s staring at a panel of four judges, two of which are players from the current team and two coaches. They are looking him up and down-- probably assessing his physical stature. He always passes that part easily because of his height and his long limbs.

“We’re looking for six new players today.” One of the judges says. He looks like one of the players on the team. “Tryouts go until the end of the week, then we’ll have the new line-up posted in another two weeks.”

Lance nods, gulping nervously. “Sounds good.”

“There are three parts to this-- we’ll bring out an opponent for the last one. All okay?”

Lance nods. He’s done this twice before. He knows what he did wrong. He’s done it over a thousand times. “Got it.”

“Alright then!” The other team member says, sounding much more excited. “Let’s do this!”

Lance takes one last breath, and the whistle blows.

***

Time passes slowly and quickly all at the same time. Slow in an aching way and quickly in a stressful way. Every passing week, Keith tells himself that the more he ignores Lance, the less he will think about him, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. He deleted his number. He buried the
hoodie in the deepest depths of his closet. He still thinks about him almost every minute of every
day.

For the first couple of weeks, Lance texted him almost every other day. Sometimes they were just
funny pictures or cheesy pick-up lines, other times they were touching, like “are you alright?” or
“wanna talk?” And Keith honestly feels like the biggest sack of shit in the world, not answering.
But he knows how it will end if he does. He knows he’d somehow end up seeing Lance, and then
he wouldn’t be able to control himself and he’d make a huge mistake. Then he’d say something
stupid, like “I’m so hopelessly in love with you” or “Please never leave me” and live to regret it for
the rest of his miserable, married existence.

After almost a month and a half, Keith is properly sick of Greta’s bullshit. He misses Lance so
much that his chest physically hurts. Lance has stopped texting him altogether, probably given up,
which is what Keith wanted but it doesn’t change the stabbing pain in his heart.

The only thing that makes the entire situation less bleak is the time he spends with his parents--
both of whom are endlessly happy and are spending more time than ever with Keith. He tries to
ignore the reasons why they are happy and instead bathes in the affection he is receiving--it’s the
kind of paternal attention that he craves so desperately and his heart warms with each hug he gets.
He has dinner with them and runs errands with them and watches TV with them and it all seems so
mundane and meaningless to some people, but being part of a family like this is all Keith has ever
wanted.

Well, all he thought he wanted, anyway.

It seems pathetic, but the feeling is there, spreading through him and making him happy in a very
different way than anything else ever could.

In the beginning, his parents could tell that he was miserable. His mother didn’t quite acknowledge
it, but he could tell that his father noticed. Every time they locked eyes, something in his father’s
face would soften. Keith doesn’t expect anything of it, though. He’s known his father for more
than ten years and they have probably shared a total of three vulnerable moments together. So
realistically, there isn’t anyone to talk to about this.

His parents haven’t brought up his sexuality. They haven’t brought up the kissing, or the incident,
or the fight, It’s like it never happened. Keith honestly don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing, but
deep down, he knows it leaves a bad taste in his mouth. Greta comes over more often than not,
usually with her family so they never actually have to talk, one-on-one. Some days, she looks at
Keith and actually smiles, and Keith thinks that maybe things might be okay. But then on other
days he overhears her screeching offensive insults at the kitchen crew and his stomach twists
uncomfortably. She really is two-faced, in the worst possible way. When he asked her if this
marriage is something she wanted, she just shrugged and said, “Dad promised me a new car if I
went through with it.”

So, okay, things aren’t going super well. And Keith’s heart is broken into a million pieces. But his
parents care about him now. And in a strange, hollow way, it makes everything else feel slightly
tolerable.

He’s gotten a few too many calls from Coran, asking where he’s been. He still managed to go to
the garage a few weeks after he stopped seeing Lance, but then he found that with all of the new
networking events and family dinners he hasn’t quite had time to go back. It leaves a hole in his
heart that he wasn’t quite expecting, giving up something else that he loves so readily. So he
decides that, for the sake of Coran and his business, he should go down there and give a proper
resignation.
He grabs his keys and tells himself that this is absolutely *not* an excuse to see that side of town for the last time.

***

The bar is just as noisy as it was on his first night in this town. The lights just as dim, the counter just as sticky, and the old TV just as foggy. The night he met Lance in here is a muddled memory in his brain, but he can’t help but feel nostalgic when looking around. His heart feels like it’s breaking at the seams and he orders a shot.

Coran was sad to see him go, but not nearly as sad as Keith ended up being when he walked out of the garage for the last time. Tears pricked his eyes and he decided almost immediately to get shitfaced. This bar was closest, so here he is, downing a shot of vodka and sighing as the bartender plants another one in front of him.

A dark part of him wishes that he never met Lance. He wishes he could erase this night from his life all those months ago. If nobody had ever showed him what true happiness was then he wouldn’t miss it so damn much.

Jeez, that’s definitely the alcohol talking. Well, hopefully.

“You’re not from around here, are you?”

Keith startles, freezing as the familiar voice curls around him like a hot, suffocating embrace. His stomach drops to his feet and he whirs around, coming face to face with--

Yup, that’s Lance. That is undeniably *Lance* standing in front of him, with a small, hurt smile on his face and his dark skin and wispy hair and hooked nose and sweet deodorant and all of the things that make him *Lance* and Keith’s brain actually has to fight through weeks and weeks of unused emotions and words to actually be able to open his mouth, to say *something*, *anything* back.

“Lance.” He breathes.

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “Oh, you still know my name? That’s a shocker.” Keith can tell that it’s supposed to sound teasing, but it comes out angry.

Keith can’t stop staring at him. He actually can’t stop. He feels like an addict. He feels like he needs to breathe in all he can. He needs to run his hands all over that familiar body and refamiliarize himself with every single inch. He doesn’t want to leave anything behind this time. He *never* wants to leave anything behind because he never wants to *leave* and he wants Lance *all the time* and he’s so fucking *breathtaking*--

“Can we please go outside?” He chokes out, already standing up and grabbing Lance by the wrist. He hears Lance sigh defeatedly as they exit the bar. Keith doesn’t stop walking until they are around the corner. The cold air bites at his nose and lips. Their breath comes out foggy. Lance wraps his arms around himself, looking disgruntled.

“Why are you here?” He asks, voice accusing. “This is my turf.”

Keith swallows. “Lance...” He doesn’t know what to say. He *actually* doesn’t know what to say.
“Where have you been? Is your life really so busy that you can’t answer one text?” Lance scowls. “I mean I know it was just sex but you could’ve at least had the decency to say goodbye.” His voice breaks quietly. So subtle that Keith can barely hear it, but it does. “And now you’re here again, in my bar, looking pretty as fucking ever, and you expect me to give you the time of day?”

Keith sighs shakily. “I never said goodbye because I...I mean, I never wanted to, Lance.”

“If you never wanted to say goodbye then why the fuck did you leave?” It doesn’t sound angry. It just sounds sad. “You jacked me off and then disappeared forever! I mean seriously? I went to a business conference with you! The least you could do is send a little poop emoji or some shit! Jesus!”

Keith’s face is cracking into a smile before he can stop it. It’s such an immature thing to laugh about, but honestly, who else would ever use poop emojis to win an argument? Literally nobody but Lance. Lance hears his snort and looks up, shocked. “What’s so funny?” He raises an eyebrow.

Keith can’t stop giggling. “I’m sorry, it’s just--” He giggles even more. “Poop emoji.”

“Are you fucking-- Keith. Oh my god.” But a slow smile is stretching over his face too, and at the sight of his barely crooked teeth and his dimples, Keith’s brain is reeling. “Don’t make me forget that I’m mad at you!” Lance scolds. “That’s not fair!”

He suddenly feels Lance’s hands on his wrists, pulling him in closer, and their bodies are pressed flush against each other before he he knows what his happening. Lance’s arms snake around his waist. Lance’s nose brushes against his.

They breathe each other in for what feels like hours. Keith is absolutely consumed by desire, the smell of Lance and the familiar pressure of his body and the way his arms fit so firmly around Keith’s waist and the telltale pattern of his labored breath-- Keith can almost feel the lips pressing against his and he’s dizzy with the thought of it. He is lightheaded and floating and sinking and jesus christ how does Lance still have this effect on him after all this time?

“I miss you so much.” He says brokenly.

“You have no right to say that.” Lance mumbles.

“I know.”

He doesn’t know who moves forward, but then they are kissing, and it’s like thousands of explosions are going off all over Keith’s body, searing and popping and burning and it’s almost so good that it’s painful. Lance lips taste just like they always do, and it’s sweet in an intoxicating way that leaves Keith shaking pathetically as Lance deepens the kiss.

This isn’t what he came here for and this isn’t supposed to be happening-

Lance whines as Keith’s hand slips up his shirt and it sounds like he’s saying Keith’s name. The sound of it alone has heat stirring in the pit of Keith’s stomach and he can’t do this--

He places a hand on Lance’s chest and pulls away gently, separating them with a soft popping noise. Lance is breathing raggedly, looking at him with wet, pink lips and a hurt expression.

“Lance, I’m engaged.” He says quickly, the words tumbling out of him at an unforgiving pace.

Lance scoffs. “Excuse me?”
Keith swallows hard. “After the fight. My parents made arrangements with this girl’s family. And
I’m..I’m engaged. To her.”

Lance searches his eyes for a moment as the news sinks in, then he jerks backwards like he’s been
burned, arms falling from Keith’s waist. His eyes widen. “Excuse me?”

“I didn’t tell you because I thought...I just thought it would be easier if--”

“Keith.” Lance cuts him off. “You’re not actually going to do this, are you?”

Keith just stares. “I...I mean, I am.”

Lance stares at him, a horrified expression twisting onto his face. Keith swallows, nervous beneath
the gaze. Then Lance laughs, loud and humorless.

“You,” He said, crowding into Keith’s personal space and jabbing a finger into his chest. “You
are a coward, Keith.”

Keith flinches. The words sting. “What?”

Lance’s expression is unlike any expression Keith has ever seen on his face before--it’s angry, and
hurt, and so intense that Keith can feel the gaze burning his skin. “You’re a fucking coward. All
you do is what everybody wants you to do. Do you even know how to think for yourself?”

Keith crosses his arms over his chest, scowling. “You don’t know the whole story.” He defends.

“It’s like you get off on being miserable!” Lance shouts. “You actually thrive on hating your life!”

“Well what do you expect me to do?” Keith screams, now ganging up on Lance. He takes a step
forward. “This is what my family wants!”

“Screw what your family wants! What about what you want! Do something for yourself for the
first time in your goddamn life!”

“I do things for myself!”

“Like what? Fucking some guy you met in a bar for five months and not telling anyone about it?
Getting drunk at networking events because you can’t handle how much you hate them? Going on
dates with girls you’ll never ever love?”

“Shut the fuck up!” Keith raises his voice. “For some people it’s actually a lot harder to drop
everything and follow their dreams, alright? There are extenuating circumstances!”

“Fuck extenuating circumstances!” Lance has an angry flush on his face, voice cracking as he
screams. “You hated college! You hate your job! You've lived your entire life doing things you
can't stand! Grow a pair and do what you need to do to be happy!”

Here it comes. The anger, the rising of his temper. Keith can feel it crawling up his throat, and he
braces himself, ready to spit fire. Angry tears burn behind his eyes. “Oh yeah? Like you, Lance?”
He spits. “You were lucky enough to have a family who loved you and raised you and took care of
you and you left them!” He sees his words register in Lance’s face, in the form of tears slowly
filling his eyes, but he keeps shouting. “So I should be more like you, then? Following my
happiness’ and leaving my family in the dust and living every fucking day in miserable regret--”

“Shut up!” Lance shoves his shoulders hard and Keith stumbles backwards. “I don’t regret going
after what I love!” There are angry tears starting to drip from his eyelashes and Keith’s heart is physically breaking, but he can’t stop.

“You have no right to tell me how to live my life! Unlike you, my family is actually important to me!” Keith growls. Lance’s face crumbles even further, and he snarls at Keith.

“You have no idea how important my family is to me!” He sobs. “I’m not evil for wanting to be happy!”

“No, but you’re selfish!”

“Oh fuck you, Keith--”

“You’re selfish and naive, like a fucking child--”

“Fuck you--!”

“How about you think long and hard about your relationship with your family before you start shitting all over mine!” Keith snaps, fuming. “Just fuck off, Lance. You think you’re better than me because you ‘grew a pair?’ Well guess what? You fucked up too!”

Lance is crying now, an angry whimper tearing from his throat. Keith is panting, heart rate through the roof and hands shaking. He curls them into fists in an attempt to stop his own tears from falling. He just listens to Lance cry, and it’s like a slap in the face. A punch in the gut. It hurts more than all of Joe’s hits combined. And Keith can feel a part of his heart slowly crumbling, piece by piece, until there is nothing left of it. Because he did this. He made Lance cry. Holy shit he made Lance cry--

“Don’t marry her.” Lance says, and all of the anger is gone from his voice. It sounds weak and wobbly and quiet. “I don’t care what you think of me. Or my family. Just don’t marry her.”

Keith takes a shaky breath, trying to calm himself down. “What do you care if I marry her anyway?” He says, voice still angry. “It doesn’t concern you.” He lies through his teeth.

And then Lance is walking towards him, stopping when he is so close that Keith can count his freckles. His blue eyes are stormy. Bloodshot. Swollen. “It doesn’t concern me?” Lance repeats, breath fanning over Keith’s face. His voice sounds bitter. Then it sounds emotionless. “It doesn’t concern me.” He says again.

Keith has finally gotten his breathing to calm down, and he swallows, searching Lance’s blank gaze for some hint. Some form of emotion. “No.” He lies. “No, it really doesn’t.”

Lance nods slowly, eyes never leaving Keith’s face. “Right.” He says quietly. Then out of nowhere, in a flash of movement, Lance swings his arm and sends a punch directly to Keith’s nose, hard and painful. Stars burst behind Keith’s eyelids and the pain blinds him momentarily as he stumbles backwards, covering his face and holy fuck Lance just fucking punched him.


Keith hears the door of the bar open and close, and then Lance is gone.

***
Lance bursts through the front door with tears already pouring down his face. His heart is in pieces. He can barely hear himself think. All he can hear is the mantra in his head, repeating *fuck keith fuck keith fuck keith* over and over again and he’s *fuming* because today was supposed to be the best day ever.

Today was supposed to be the best. day. *ever*.

Because this morning he found out that he made Team Altea.

He had cried when he found out. And screamed, kind of like a little girl, but if you ask him he’ll deny it. Happy tears filled his eyes and Pidge and Hunk tackled him to the ground, showering him with tiny kisses and his heart felt so full after more than a month of feeling empty because of the Keith sized hole in it.

He did it. He followed his dreams and achieved them. It was everything he ever wanted. All of the long hours, the gym job, the dreary business classes and the early mornings. All of it was leading to this moment and he worked so hard for this and he’s so happy. He’s so fucking happy. Now he can go on to play on a team. He could get *paid* for playing basketball, how wild is that?

But when he went out to get some drinks for Pidge and Hunk, he saw Keith.

After over a month of not hearing anything from him, he saw Keith, sitting slumped over the bar in his expensive suit, just like he was when they first met. Just as beautiful, too.

It was a big fucking mistake to approach him, but he did it anyway. Because he’s weak. Because he misses him. He doesn’t really know why.

And now he’s collapsing onto the floor in his living room, letting himself cry as Keith’s face flashes through his mind, hurt and furious. What the hell *happened* to them? It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter anymore because Keith is getting married. And it doesn’t concern him, apparently.

Of course he feels guilty for punching Keith, but really, he didn’t know what else to do. It was either punch him, or grab him by the shoulders and scream “I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU, YOU TWAT” and he wasn’t sure he had enough courage to do the second thing so he stuck with the first thing. After all of that talk about “growing a pair”, Lance could really use a lesson in it.

But now he’s just mad. And heartbroken. And he doesn’t know how long he sits there until Hunk and Pidge are by his side, frantically asking questions about what happened and where he was. And Lance is trying to calm them down and trying to calm down the voice in his head and everything is just too much, all of a sudden, because he has everything he wants and he’s going to play basketball for a *real team* but he still feels like a part of him is missing; and it’s something that he didn’t think would hurt after he *finally* made it onto the team. It’s something he thought would be numbed once he accomplished what he came to accomplish.

But it’s there. And instead of being numbed, it’s stronger than ever.

“Guys.” He says, cutting off Hunk and Pidge frantic babbling. “Guys...I think it's time for me to go home.”
Keith stares at his bloody nose in the mirror. The angry tears on his cheeks are finally dry, after about twenty minutes of sobbing into his pillow, and he only realized that he was still bleeding when he lifted his face and saw the red stain on his white pillow.

Lance punched him. And to make matters worse, he totally deserved it.

Keith flops back onto his bed and buries himself under the covers. Strangely, he feels like he's been numb for weeks and now all of a sudden he is feeling everything again. He was never getting over Lance, he was just getting numb. But seeing him reopened a flurry of feelings that he thought he was done with for good, and he curses every god in the universe for making Lance be the person who helps him see the world in vibrant color.

He sighs and closes his eyes, waiting for sleep to take him so he can at least have some version of inner peace. Then suddenly, there is a soft knock on his door.

Keith shoots upwards. Who the fuck could that be? This late at night?

To his complete and utter surprise, it is his father who peeks his head into the room. “You awake?”


His dad, quite unusually, saunters into his room and Keith sees a handle of whiskey in his palm. When he flops down on the edge of the bed, Keith can smell it.

“Dad...are you...drunk?”

His father shrugs. “Jus’ takin the edge off.” He slurs, sniffing. His typically slicked-back hair is shaggy and free of styling product. His tie is loosened and his shirt is unbuttoned.

“Are you...alright?”

His dad turns to looks at him, eyes soft. “I'm sorry, son.” He says gently.

Keith blinks. “What?”

“I'm sorry you don't like your job.” His father sighs. “Or networking. I know it's tough for you.”

“I mean...dad, it's...it's okay.”

“I see you downing that wine and I know it's not.”

Keith tries a smile. “I'll get better at it.”

His father shakes his head lazily, swirling the whisky around in the bottle. “No, Keith. You won't. Because you don't want to.”

Keith fights the urge to roll his eyes. “Well then what are you trying to say?”

“I'm trying to say that you hurt me, Keith.” His father finally meets his eyes. Keith blinks.

“I hurt you?”
“Why didn't you tell me?”

“Tell you what?”


Keith's eyes widen. “What?”

“Do you know what it's like to raise someone and not know the first thing about them? It's heartbreaking. I set you up with girl after girl and never had a clue. Just always figured I was choosing the wrong girls. Do you have any idea how ignorant I felt when that asshole Joe had to be the one to tell me?” His father rambles on drunkenly, frowning. “What else are you keeping from me?”

Keith frowns. “You're mad at me...for not telling you? Did it ever occur to you that there's a reason why I didn't?”

His father nods, looking back down at the whiskey bottle before taking another swig. He grimaces as it goes down his throat.

Keith watches in complete confusion. “Nobody you know would ever be okay with my sexuality. I just thought that you'd hate me--”

“I don't understand it, Keith.” His father interrupts. “I don't understand the whole liking a man thing, to be honest. And maybe I disagree with it a little because of that. I don't understand what you're going through. What you went through.” His father shakes his head. “But I could never. I could never, ever hate you. Even if other people did.” He looks back at Keith now. His father rubs his hands harshly down his face. His movements are slow and sloppy, disoriented because of the whiskey. “Maybe it wouldn't have been the best for our reputation but if I had known, if I had been there from the beginning then you wouldn't have gotten hurt and things could've been better--”

“Mom says I'm just confused.”

“Your mother wants you safe. Change scares her. And coming home with a split lip and a bruised face isn't what she had in mind. Try to see things from her point of view.”

Keith blinks wordlessly at him, a flush spreading across his face. “I work at a car garage.” He says. “What?”

“Every Monday, Thursday, and Friday, I go to a garage on seventeenth street and fix cars after work.” Keith says hurriedly, before he loses his nerve. “That's what else I'm hiding.”

His father raises an eyebrow at him, and then sighs defeatedly. “Thank you for telling me.”

Keith is floored by the simple response. He was expecting anger. Teasing. Anything but that.

His father rolls the whiskey bottle over in his hands. “Look, your mother and I...didn't used to have as many responsibilities as we do now.” He says wistfully. His words come out sloppy from the alcohol but they're clear enough. Keith wraps his arms around himself, waiting for him to continue. “When we adopted you...we swore to ourselves to make you the happiest child in the world. We stayed up late talking about the dreams you might have, the people you might meet at school, the things you would be good at. All we wanted for you was happiness. Bringing you home was, and still is, the greatest thing that ever happened to us.”
“Dad…”

His father breathes shakily. “Then my father died and the company was handed down to me-- it was like a switch went off in our heads.” His father frowns at nothing. “It was absurd. Money does weird things to the brain. And we forgot all of those conversations we had-- wondering what kinds of foods you would grow to like or what your favorite subject at school would be.” His father smiles sadly and he laughs nervously, as if he suddenly realizes that he's drunk and pouring his heart out into his son's bed. His tone shifts. “What I'm trying to say is, to us, you were never a showpiece to make the company look good. To us, you were always Keith. And we lost sight of that over the years. What I said, weeks ago, about taking you from a horrible place...and showing gratitude...I was out of line.” A gulp. “And I'm so sorry.”

Keith's eyes are filled with tears again and he blinks them away. “Then why am I with Greta? Why can't I find another job? Why are you doing this?”

There is a long pause and Keith watches his father’s face dissolve. His heart thuds in his chest as he waits for an answer.

“I’m scared for you.” His father finally says, sounding small, as if holding back tears. “I could see you turning into something that would be difficult to control and I--” another deep breath.

“Parenting is frightening. I tried talking to your mother. The engagement was her idea, after all. I think that deep down, she knows it's wrong. But she doesn't want to lose you. And all of the secrets made it very hard for her to believe that she still has any part of you left. Things have been...difficult for her to accept.”

“She can't accept that I'm gay.”

“She can't accept that you grew into someone she doesn't know anymore. Because she knows it's her fault for neglecting you. And now she knows nothing about you. The guilt makes her crazy.”

Keith swallows. “I'm sorry.” He says quietly, and he doesn't really know why.

“Keith.” His father finally turns his whole body to face Keith. “All I want, truly, is for you to be happy. And I thought you would learn to love this life. But you didn't. And you won't.” His father sighs. “Just because it's the life I love, doesn't mean you will. I thought that I could change you. Make you like me. And now it's may definitely be the whiskey talking, but...But I don't want you to be like me. I want you to be like you.”

Keith swallows. “You're drunk.”

His dad shrugs again. “Yes. But only because I'm too much of a coward to say any of this sober.”

You are a coward, Keith. Lance’s words echo in his head.

“So what are you saying?”

Keith's dad grumbles, rubbing his eyes. “I'm saying that I give up. I'm stepping back. It's time for you to start making your own damn decisions, even if I'm not okay with them.” His father says harshly. “You could start by taking Lance out to a nice meal. Perhaps some lobster.”

Keith freezes, face burning. “Wha--Did you just say Lance ?”

“You know the front desk at the office has security cameras, right? You know that boy shows up at least three times a week to see you? I'm not an idiot, Keith. I knew Lance McClain was a fraud the whole time. I recognized him from the footage.”
Keith blanches, heart thudding painfully in his chest. “Why didn't you say anything?”

“It was the first time I had seen you smile in a very long time.” His father says softly. Then he pats Keith's knee, as if this entire conversation was about football, and stands up shakily, wobbling a little. He extends his arms out to balance himself. “Woah. Had a bit too much, I think.” Then he looks at Keith, smiling softly. “I'll talk to your mother. Just get up on your own two feet and do something, Keith. Because I'm sick of seeing you like this. No matter how much I disagree with what you do...” His father waves. “It's up to you now.”

Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT! That fight scene between Lance and Keith was actually the first scene I ever wrote for this fic-- i built the rest of the story around it, so i was super excited to finally put it in lol! I wrote it like two months ago. so strange.

My tumblr: dimplesandcurlss
My art insta: allscribedup

message me i love hearing from you!

Thanks! <3
Eleven

Chapter Summary

Lance and the fam fluff it out. Keith gets his head out of his ass.

Chapter Notes

ahhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHHH here I am again! i hope you all like this chapter, my fluff overdrive kicked in and I kind of barfed this out. If any of you have read my other fic ('something just like this') you know how fluffy I can get so..good luck. Im still working on replying to comments! if you took the time to comment, then you bet your ass im going to take the time to reply to you because you are lovely for leaving one. So, just thank you so much to all of you for commenting and messaging me on tumblr! you are wonderful.

This fic probably only has about two more chapters left! I am trying to think up an idea for my next one-- maybe ill take requests if any of you have ideas? I have a couple but I'm not in love with any yet...we'll see! Thanks so much for reading, lovelies! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance used to visit home during the holidays. For the first two years that he moved away, he would make the seven hour drive to his house for thanksgiving, Christmas, sometimes Halloween. But it was always discouraging. Depressing, because the tension could be cut with a knife and he could always feel his mother's sad eyes, burning into the side of his head even when he wasn't looking at her. He could feel the sad words on the tip of Maria's tongue. He could sense the disappointment in Jane’s gaze and his two younger brothers give him these puppy dog eyes as if to ask “why don’t you play with us anymore?”

So by the third year away, Lance stopped going back. It hurt too much, he always knew that his family was tense because of him. He kept coming up with excuses, and for a whole year, he had some pretty good ones; not enough gas money, broken foot, midterms, etc. After a year of excuses, his family stopped expecting him to show up. And so he stopped showing up. It's been four years since then.

Now he’s staring at the empty suitcase on his bed, nerves jittering and heart pumping like crazy. He throws a pair of jeans in. Some sweatpants, some socks, a few shirts. He looks at the door to the bathroom. He wonders if his bathroom at home is still the same. Is his toothpaste still there? His razor that he never ever had to use?

Should he pack toothpaste? His house probably has more toothpaste. Maybe he can buy new toothpaste? Is there shampoo there? Maybe his coconut shampoo is still sitting on the ledge in that worn-down shower, congealing and drying out. That was his favorite shampoo. He never bought it again after he left. Maybe his sister stole it-- she always used to run into his bathroom wrapped in a
towel, teasing him about wanting to use his “girly shampoo”. Maybe she finished it off when he left. Maybe she just threw it away.

Pidge comes in and flops down on his bed, propping her chin in her hand and looking into the case. “How long are you going to stay?”

Lance shrugs. “I don’t know. They might kick me out in two days. But I have a couple of weeks before practices start and I think I’ve saved enough vacation time to stay for about…I don’t know. Probably a week.” Lance finishes a little sadly. “Can’t miss too much school anyway.”

Pidge nods. “Well, we’ll miss you.” She says seriously.

Lance swallows. He is tempted to cry again but stops himself. “Yeah.” He sighs. “Let’s hope I live to tell the tale.”

“Oh, stop being so dramatic.” Pidge says gently. “They’re your family, Lance. No matter how much you fight, they can’t hate you. They probably just miss you now.”

“We’ll see.”

“Listen, Lance...maybe you should--” Pidge starts, but she stops herself, like she doesn’t know how to phrase it.

Lance throws a few more things into his bag, including a box of crackers and his phone charger. He lets his mind wander a little, wondering how his parents would react if he told them that he made the team. Would they even be happy, or just upset? Do his little brothers like girls now? Are they old enough to have crushes? Is Jane even home right now? Is she dating someone? Does she have a job?

“Lance, buddy, I’m not letting you drive seven hours in this state of distress.” Hunk’s voice chimes in as he walks into the room. “You look like you’re about to pass out.”

“This is a big deal, guys!” Lance says, frowning. “How are you not freaking out as much as I am? Do you not realize how scary this is?”

Pidge and Hunk exchange worried looks. “Lance…” Pidge starts again, but Hunk helpfully speaks for her.

“Dude, look, you’ve been through alot in the past...two days. Maybe we should all sit down and talk a little--”

“I’m fine.” Lance snaps. “Well, not fine but I know what I need to do.”

“And we’re happy that you’re finally going home!” Hunk amends quickly. “We just don’t think the reason is... very healthy one…?”

Lance scowls. “What reason ?”

“You know...the whole ‘running away from Keith’ thing.” Hunk says sadly.

“ Keith ran away from me . Did I not mention he’s marrying someone? And then I punched him? I’m never talking to that asshole again.”

“We know! And we’re all mad at him and he’s bad news and all that but… dude. You're moving from one heartbreak to another, maybe you should take a breather before seeing your family. Kind
of gather yourself from all of the Keith shit before taking the trip.”

And shit, Lance totally thought he was done crying but curses at himself when he feels the tears filling his eyes for the millionth time this week. “Keith and I were just supposed to have sex, okay? And we both overstepped our bounds and it got messy. I'll get over it.” His voice quivers, and oversimplifying the story like this makes something in his chest feel like it's cracking under pressure, but he puffs out his chest and holds back his tears in an attempt to look like he knows what the fuck he's doing.

“You’re in love with him, Lance.” Pidge says, voice uncharacteristically sympathetic. “Stop pretending that you’re over it. You need more time.”

Lance groans in frustration, turning to his friends. “I don’t need time, I need my family.” Lance’s voice cracks. “Okay? So just let me...do this.”

He huffs frustratedly and watches as Hunk and Pidge nod, slowly backing out of the room. “Okay...well let us know if you need anything.”

Lance just nods back. Then he’s alone again. He sighs and curls onto his bed, burying his face into the pillow. Deep breaths...just take deep breaths...

The hoodie he’s wearing still smells a little bit like Keith, just a whisper of a scent, and it’s enough to have Lance’s head pounding. He never knew that one person could obliterate his heart so easily--it’s a terrifying discovery that he really would’ve been better off never discovering. Lance has never been the kind of person who feared love. He was never the kind of person who feared commitment, and he never understood people who did. But now he does. Because out of all of the times he’s been rejected in his life, it never hurt quite like this; and he never, ever wants to feel this way again.

He specifically remembers one night, years ago, when his older sister Jane came home crying the morning after her senior prom. His morbid curiosity had him listening at the stairwell as his mother tried to calm her down. She was crying because she had lost her virginity and the boy had left her early the next morning. Lance was far too young to understand much about it, but he remembers his mother’s calming voice, saying “Sometimes being intimate with someone can make you grow attached to them, Jane. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

As Lance grew up and had his fair share of one night stands, especially after he left home, this was something that always made him scoff and roll his eyes. Maybe Jane got attached, but not him. Maybe it was just a girl thing. Maybe he just wasn't built to become ‘attached’ to people. Maybe, despite how much he used to crave it, maybe falling in love with someone just wasn’t in the cards for him.

Of course Keith had to come in and fuck it all up.

God, fuck that guy.

Lance stands up and shakes himself out of his reverie. He has packing to do, after all.

***

“I’m moving.”
Shiro looks up at Keith with a shocked expression on his face. They are sitting in a five-star brunch buffet and Shiro’s arm is draped lazily across Allura’s shoulders. Allura nearly spits out her food when Shiro’s grip suddenly tightens on her arm.

“What? Where?”

“I… don’t know.”

“When?”

“…I don’t know.”

Shiro raises an eyebrow at him. “Um?”

Keith sighs. Ever since his enlightening conversation with his drunk father, things have been...kind of a mess. Not necessarily in a bad way, but in a chaotic, disorganized, and overwhelming sort of way. Having never made any decisions for himself before, Keith suddenly has no idea what to do. His father told him to stand up on his own two feet. To take charge of his own happiness. The idea of it is very appealing, and ideally, it should’ve been exactly what Keith needed to hear. But Keith realizes, quite quickly, that he doesn’t know how to do that. In fact, taking charge of your own happiness is actually terrifying. And he suddenly gains a whole new appreciation for Lance’s courage-- his motivation and drive bringing him to where he is now.

The day after “the talk”, his family agreed to end the engagement with Greta. Her family was not at all phased-- they apparently saw that this was hopeless and already lined up four other men for her. Keith’s heart felt like it could pump normally again, not being suffocated by the weight of an impending marriage. His mother had smiled sadly at him after they made the call, and Keith could see the frustration in her eyes. But she was trying, and that was much better than how she was acting before.

And now Keith knows that he should be thinking about his future, and a new job search, and moving into a new apartment, but all he can think about, without fail, is Lance. The day after they fought, he woke up still seething with anger, with guilt, with frustration. It had taken a whole day of him wallowing in his bed and crying intermittently in order to be able to actually stand up, bathe himself, and put some clean clothes on. And he feels like he should want to move on. He should want to drop everything about this life and start over. But his heart hurts and he is constantly aching, just thinking about him. Because he’s just so stupidly gone for him, in the most painful and breathless way. Because him and Lance were just never meant to work, and Lance punched him in the nose, and Keith always knew that they came from different universes but he never thought it would effect them as much as it did. There was a part of him, desperate and all-encompassing, that actually thought he had a chance in hell with Lance. Before everything happened. Before he watched Lance dissolve into tears, right in front of him. Before he fucked up and didn’t even apologize. But that part of him is just on fire now, burning in a searing way that feels eerily similar to the way he feels when Lance kisses him.

Or...used to kiss him.

So he just sits in the painfully fancy cafe, staring blankly at Shiro and Allura as they look back at him, concern plain on their faces.

“You want to move?” Shiro asks again.

Keith swallows. “Not really. But I mean… could be nice, right?”
“I mean…” Shiro sighs. “It seems…”

“Impulsive?” Allura finishes helpfully.

“Very fast.” Shiro agrees.

Keith shakes his head. “Well if someone told you to take charge of your own happiness, what would you do?” It sounds a little harsher than he meant it to.

“Well, what makes you happy?” Allura asks.


“Okay, so why don’t you go down there and start working full time with Coran?”

Keith swallows. “It’s just…it’s really close to…”

Shiro and Allura share a sympathetic look.

“Keith…” Shiro says gently. “That’s why you want to move away?”

“Well can you blame me?” Keith snaps. “Everything that makes me happy somehow reminds me of him. I need to get out of here.”

“Or maybe you could get some closure and actually feel okay again.” Shiro suggests.

“Are you crazy? There’s no way he’ll listen to anything I have to say. Let alone give me ‘closure’. Which doesn't even make sense, by the way. Because fuckbuddies dont need closure, thats the point.”

“You honestly still believe you guys were just fuckbuddies?” Shiro laughs incredulously. “Jesus, Keith, how deep does that denial go? The moment that boy marched into your office to show you his business exam, you were more than fuckbuddies.”

Keith feels his heart lurch painfully in his chest. “I can’t talk to him.”

“You should at least try.”

“It’s literally been forty eight hours since he punched me in the face.” Keith says flatly.

“Maybe not right now but…if you ever do move away, then at least say goodbye to him.”

Keith clears his throat. “I don’t…whatever.” He picks at his scrambled eggs. “Maybe it’s better if I just let the whole thing go.”

“Maybe.” Shiro says. “But that’s for you to decide.”

Keith is convinced that “making decisions for yourself” isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

***

Lance taps the steering wheel nervously as the GPS fires directions at him. He should be coming up to his street any moment now, and he only knows this because things around him start looking
vaguely familiar. He sees the gas station that he used to buy chocolate at with Maria. He sees the Toys ‘R’ Us where he went shopping with his mom to buy a new crib for his younger brother. One particular stab in the chest was the small, fenced lot where he used to play basketball with his father. The hoop didn’t use to have a net, but it looks like someone just installed a brand new one. Muscle memory kicks in and he turns left onto his small street, heart already inflating nervously. He can hear his blood rushing in his ears.

The street is quaint, and colorful, just like he remembers it. It looks a little smaller now, maybe because he’s gotten bigger, but it still feels just the same. He can still smell the freshly cut grass through the cracked window. He still sees his neighbor Adam’s house with the same silver minivan in the driveway. He used to play tag with Adam in his backyard when he was a kid. Adam grew up to be a giant dick, but hey, is Lance any better? Probably not.

Lance briefly wonders how Keith would have fit into his life if they had met all those years ago. Would Keith have lived in the pistachio green house across the street? Would they have played tag? Would he have come over for dinner, and eaten his mother’s famous empanadas, and stayed late into the night with Lance; reading picture books and doodling with magic markers with a flashlight under the covers?

Would they have been happy? Would they have fallen in love the right way?

Now his emotions are doing all kinds of uncalled-for shit. On top of the anxiety he feels for seeing his family, he is now wondering how things would’ve gone if he had grown up with his ex-fuckbuddy and they had fallen in love like they were in some kind of Pixar movie. He takes a deep breath and attempts to shake himself out of it, and turns around to see his house.

It’s almost exactly the same as it was years ago-- the yellow paint is a little more faded, cracking in some places, and the dark wooden door that his father had always hated is finally painted over with a white color, just like he always begged his mom to do. He sees his mother’s car in the driveway, plus another one that isn’t familiar to him. He guesses that it’s Maria’s- she can drive now, after all- and the thought makes his stomach twist uncomfortably.

Being here feels almost surreal. It’s like he’s floating in space and it hasn’t quite hit him yet. The discomfort and fear is oddly weighed out by the familiarity of the area. He didn’t expect to feel so at ease here, especially after being gone for so long. But there are some things that never change. Filing this comforting thought in his mind, he shakily walks forward. His knees feel wobbly as he takes the three steps onto his front porch. His fingers jitter as he reaches into the birdhouse to the left of the door, where he knows his family keeps a spare key. His heart jackhammers as he turns the key and he takes one large gulp as the door creaks open. He steps into the house and shuts it softly behind him.

The floating stops. It hits him.

Tears automatically fill his eyes as he scans over the small living room and kitchen area. The smell comes in a wave that almost knocks him off his feet-- the earthy spices from his mother’s cooking, so delicious and achingly familiar. The sweet scent of Lemon Lysol that was used ages ago when they presumably tried to clean the tabletop. The familiar, overly floral smell of Maria’s cheap perfume, wafting through the air from her room like it always used to. Lance used to complain about it but now when it hits his nose his first instinct is to swallow hard and attempt to hold back his stupid, stupid tears.

The worn out, fading patterns on the sofa cushions remind Lance how long he’s been gone. The stacked-up papers on the island in the kitchen leave an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of his stomach. That surface was always used for cooking family dinner, but the piles of mail suggest it
hasn’t been used in a while. Their old, small TV has been replaced with a 52 inch plasma screen, a decision which has ‘Maria’ written all over it. A few tiny t-shirts are littered on the floor, probably belonging to his younger brothers. There is a basket of unfolded laundry next to the couch. There is something boiling on the stove. There are a stack of dirty plates from breakfast still scattered across the kitchen table. There are crumbs on the floor, scraps on the wall, crayon drawings next to the fireplace. Lance can almost feel the chaos, the scrambling, the shouting in Spanish and the food being flung all over the room.

This is home.

He is home.

He blinks the tears away, and barely has time to strain his ears for signs of life before Maria casually saunters into the room, looking down at her phone. She’s in pj bottoms and a tank top—clearly just out of the shower because her long, curly hair is scrunched up and wiry, still dripping a little from the ends. She is taller than Lance remembers, by at least three inches, and the baby fat from her face is completely gone, leaving only very mature features in its place. She still looks young, but more like a young adult than a young child. Her figure has filled out more than Lance expected it to. She was always self conscious about her small hips and “little boy” figure, but it looks like she caught up eventually. She probably doesn’t still wear glittery tank tops from Justice anymore. Lance swallows, something deep within his chest aching at the sight of her. Last time he saw her, her shirt had the words “Diva Princess” written in sequins across the front and her hair was in pigtail braids. Now she looks like a young woman, with her nails painted navy blue and her hair cut in stylish layers.

He doesn’t know how long he just stares, shy and dumbfounded, until Maria looks up from her phone. Her lazy gaze falls on Lance and she shrieks, eyes blowing wide. Lance winces and covers his ears.

Yup, still the same old Maria.

“Holy shit! Lance ?!” She screams, phone clattering to the ground. “Oh my-- mamá! Lance is here!”

Lance doesn’t have time to prepare himself before Maria is bounding towards him, tackling him into a hug that sends him hobbling backwards, completely unprepared.

“Maria.” He chuckles, a little sadly, wrapping his arms tightly around her. The cheap floral smell fills his nose and then his his eyes fill with tears again as he buries his face into the side of her head. “Oh my god you’re not little anymore.” He mumbles, more to himself than anything.

“What are you doing here? Oh my god mom is going to flip a shi--!”

“Language, Maria!!” Lance hears his mother’s voice from the hallway. “No permito ese lenguaje en mi casa--” His mother enters the room still scolding Maria in Spanish, waggling a thin finger over head head in the ridiculous way she always does when she starts babbling. Her eyes finally reach his face and her entire expression dissolves, cutting off her rant.

Lance can almost see the emotions melting in her eyes. She smiles shakily and her eyes fill with tears. “Mijo.” She says wobbly, hands falling onto her chest. “Dios, Mijo, what a surprise.” Her last words are mumbled into the fabric of Lance’s shirt as she grabs him and pulls him into a hug. “I didn’t know you were coming. I would’ve prepared dinner.”

Lance laughs wetly into her shoulder. His mom is a tiny thing, almost a foot shorter than him, but a
hell of a lot stronger. She comes from a long, long line of fierce Cuban women who shout a lot and cook to show love. Of course the first thing she’d say after four years is “I would’ve prepared dinner.” Lance shakes his head into her shoulder, letting a few tears fall. He doesn’t want to let go. He doesn’t want the moment to end, for the inevitable tension to set in-- the tension he worked so hard to avoid for all these years.

His mother pulls away and holds his face in her hands. “Dios Mio you haven’t eaten in years. I’m sure of it. Look at this face! How could you do this to yourself?”

“Mamá, por favor, I’m okay.” Lance says gently, lowering his mother’s hands from his face. “I’m okay.” He says again.

More tears fill his mother’s eyes and she shakes her head. “Why are you here? I’ve been worried sick about you, every moment of every day!”

Lance gulps, and okay, the tears are definitely falling now. He’s probably cried more over the past two weeks than in his entire life combined. Maybe Hunk and Pidge were right about him taking a breather between heartbreaks. Maria walks up behind his mother and puts her chin on her shoulder, looking at Lance expectantly, with an equally sad expression on her face.

Lance opens his mouth to respond, fear closing up his throat.

The side door bursts open and Lance sees his gigantic, looming father crouch into the kitchen, followed by his two younger brothers, Alex and Benny. Lance barely recognizes them. They were eight when he left-- now they’re thirteen. They’ve grown almost a six inches, coming up to Lance’s chest instead of his bellybutton. Their hair is light brown and choppy, just like his, and they’re both splattered with small brown freckles. This trait was lost on him as he grew older but seems to be hanging onto them just fine. Lance’s heart flutters as they both spot him, and he wonders, quite stupidly, if they’ll even recognize him. But then grins break across both of their faces and with their cracking, pubescent voices, they scream, “LAAAAANNNCEEEE!” And charge forward, knocking him onto the ground. Lance lets out a small “oof” as he loses his footing, and then there are arms around his neck, his shoulders, messing up his hair and tugging on his shirt and he can't help the happy laughs that burst from his mouth. They are shouting questions at him but he can barely hear what they are saying through all of the screaming. His brothers are much heavier than they used to be when they did this, and Lance is almost crushed under the weight, wheezing and laughing and shoving them off.

Something feels different this time. Something feels different about being home. Lance has never been greeted like this. He’s never felt so welcome. This is all so unexpected and so overwhelming because he knows that at one point his family was angry. They had to be. Maybe they still are. So why does he feel like he never even left?

His brothers leave him laying on the floor and Lance looks up to see his father staring down at him with large eyes and a kind smile. He holds out a large hand for Lance to take and Lance just stares at it for a moment, not sure what to do. Ultimately, he takes it, and his father pulls him into a bone-crushing hug.

“Lance, you’re back.” Three words, but the weight of them is spectacularly heavy. He hears his father say it into his hair-- Lance takes a mental note that his father is actually a giant if he manages to be taller than his beanpole of a son--and Lance is squeezing back, trying and failing to find words. “Jane would be so excited to see you.” His father says. Jane and Lance’s dad were always very close, much closer than Jane was with mom. It may have been because unlike Maria, who is a girly-girl to her very core, Jane is the sibling who loves hiking, and fishing, and hates cooking, and nail polish, and talking about boys. Lance was always more of a girly-girl than Jane
was, so his father was really the one who looked out for her more than anyone else. They understood each other.

“Where is she?” Lance mumbles, voice nervous.

“House searching.” His father replies. “She came back and crashed here for a while but she got a job in the city, so she’s been searching for a place up there.”

Lance pulls away from his father. “The city isn’t too far.” He says quietly, a million more words weighing on the phrase.

His father smiles sadly. “No, not too far at all. She may still be coming home tonight to pick up some things.”

Lance nods. His heart is still in his throat. He’s got about five pairs of eyes on him now--waiting for some version of an explanation, some reason for why he showed up out of the blue with no warning. Lance doesn’t know why they aren’t mad this time. It makes him wonder if they ever really were mad, or if he was just so mad at himself that he couldn’t tell the difference. They’re family, Pidge had said, and she was right. Because now there is silence all around him, but it isn’t tense. It isn’t awkward. It warm, and buzzing, and excited. And Lance probably looks like a wreck right now; eyes puffy from weeks of crying, hair a matted mess, loose hoodie and ripped jeans. But with the way his mother is looking at him, you would actually believe that the sun is shining right out of his ass.

And Lance doesn’t know if it’s because they’re all older, or because Maria is more mature now, or because he has grown a lot on his own, but he’s got this strange feeling that the phrase “Time heals all wounds” is actually quite applicable in this situation. And for some reason, the words that he never wanted to say, the words that he always skirted around and never once uttered out loud, are now a lot easier to say than he thought.

“I’m sorry.” He says, and it feel like a million tons lifting from his chest. He sniffs and wipes his nose on his sleeve. “It’s so good too see you guys. I’ve missed you so much I’m--” His voice cracks and Maria inches forward placing a hand on his forearm. “I’m sorry I didn’t call, and stopped visiting. I don’t even know why--”

His mother pushes Maria out of the way and, to Lance’s surprise, smacks him in the chest. “We aren’t talking about this when you haven’t eaten, mijo.” She says sternly. “Let’s get some food in you and we’ll talk later.” And then she gives him her warmest smile and it’s so familiar, and comforting, that he just feels himself nodding and following his family to the table.

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The night is unexpectedly, strangely, and blissfully anticlimactic. Lance doesn’t really know what he expected, but it definitely wasn’t this.

They have a meal. As a family. And Hunks cooking is fantastic but there is something about his mother's cooking that you can't get anywhere else, even if it is just re-heated leftovers. Maria rants on and on about the colleges she applied to, trying to fill Lance in with all the details as if he just went in vacation for a few weeks instead of six years. He supposes that this is what family is all about--or maybe he’s just lucky enough to have a family like this. His father talks on and on about
Jane; her new job, what she did after college, what she ended up deciding to study. Lance has to blink a few times to try and connect the siblings he sees in front of him to the siblings he knew four years ago, but that’s really just in appearances. Because almost everything about them is recognizable. Everything about them is still so familiar. Sitting at the kitchen table, in a spot he always used to sit in, is both surreal and so very grounding. There’s a reason that going back to your roots makes you feel so...rooted, he presumes, shoveling another forkful of rice into his mouth.

And there is still a tension in the air, but it’s not a bad one. It’s the tension of words stories that are yet to be told. Years and years of stories.

Once they have all finished, Lance’s father goes upstairs with his siblings to help them with their math homework because “as exciting as it is to have Lance home, a math test is a math test.” Almost as if he never left, Lance automatically stands up to help clean; clearing the table and wiping down the surface of it. He can feel Maria and his mother watching him strangely, and when their glare becomes too much, he clears his throat and turns to look at them.

“What?”

“It’s just so weird to see you here…” Maria says, a little cautiously, like she's venturing into dangerous territory. “I mean, it’s been since Christmas...four years ago.” His mother nods in agreement, tears still in her eyes since before dinner.

Lane swallows hard. “Yeah...yeah I know. It’s been a really long time. I’m sorry.” He stares down at the dishrag in his hands.

“Did something happen?” His mother asks quietly. “Are you sick? Are you dying? Please no, mijo don’t tell me you’re dying Dios Mio is that why you’ve come back--?”

“Mamá, no, I’m not dying, I…” He looks between his mother and his sister as they wait patiently for his explanation. He sighs a little sadly. “I just missed you guys so much. And things...have been a little rocky so…”

“You came for more money?” His mother suggests, sounding a little disappointed.

“What? No! No no no I have enough money. No it’s not money it’s just…” He pulls out one of the chairs and flops down into it, tiredly. “Just personal...stuff. I mean--” His mother and sister pull two chairs out and sit across from him. “It's just been too long. There’s so much stuff.”

“Duh.” Maria says flatly.

Lance sighs. “You guys aren’t mad?” He asks, voice small, and he sounds like a child again. But he just needs to know what is actually happening. He needs to finally address the issue, and bury the hatchet, after all these years.

His mother opens his mouth to probably say something way too kind, but Maria cuts her off.

“Dios, Maria, you might be even more mature than me.”
“Mmhmm, well, women mature faster than man.” She says smugly.

Lance frowns. “That’s definitely not a thing.” He deadpans.

“Totally is.”

“Nope. No way.”

“Yes it is! My genetics teacher told me—”

“I bet your teacher is a woman that’s why!”

“Is that a challenge—?”

“Alright, enough you two.” His mother says, rolling her eyes, and for a moment Lance is transported back to the sixth grade. The she levels Lance with an unnerving stare. “Lance. I was never angry with you.” She says sternly. “I was worried. I was sick with worry from the moment you stepped out of this house. You were so young-- you still are. And I was frustrated, yes, that you wouldn’t accept my help.” She shakes her head. “Do you know how hard it is? To let your child go and then know nothing about where they are?”

“Mamá... lo siento mamá I’m so sorry…” Tears fill Lance’s eyes for the millionth time. “I didn’t come home because...I felt like you didn’t want me here.” He says it with a shaking voice, because it wasn’t something he was expecting to admit out loud. “It was so tense, before.”

“We were hurt, Lance.” His mom tries.

“So was I.” Lance replies.

Maria hugs her arms around herself. “You can only be angry at someone for so long before you just miss them.” She says, eyes glassy.

Lance swallows, an image of Keith flashing through his mind with very inappropriate timing. “I...get what you mean. I missed you too. The whole time….even when you were still doing the ‘angry’ thing.” Lance’s lip twitches into a shy smile.

“You could’ve texted.” Maria says.

“I know.” Lance nods, some of the tears dripping as he blinks. "But I promise I can fill you guys in now. And I'll tell you everything you want to know..." And it seems like that answer was sufficient enough, somehow, because Maria is smiling back at him.

“Lance.” His mother says, bringing his attention back to her. “You did leave...But you made it on your own. And I learned...the hard way, that you are stronger than I had ever known you to be. So although we were hurt, we still couldn’t be more proud of you.” Her voice shakes. “Your father, and your brothers, and Maria, and me. We are so proud of you.”

The floodgates break and Lance buries his face in his hands, trying not to be overly dramatic but failing because that’s just who he is, alright? His mother doesn’t even know where he’s been-- she doesn’t ask what he has accomplished, or how his grades are, or how much money he is making. She doesn't even know that he made the team. But she's proud regardless.

Of all the things his mother could have told him, the last thing that he expected was this. He’s spent so long trying to convince himself that he was proud of his accomplishments, but hearing it from his family was entirely different. The fact that still support him, after all this time. The fact
that they still want him to be happy. He feels so blessed, and so grateful, and his heart feels like it’s about to burst. He decides to save the Team Altea announcement for another day, and instead, just settles for sobbing pathetically into his hands as his mother rubs his back.

“Good to have you back, ya big baby.” Maria says, clapping Lance on the shoulder, and when Lance looks up, he sees tears in her smiling eyes too.

***

Keith and Shiro are in the movie room, flopped lazily onto the couch. Shiro flips through the channels and Keith scrolls through Facebook on his phone. He’s been hanging out with Shiro a lot since his fight with Lance, because being alone is not a very good idea for him. He’s not necessarily depressed-- he just isn’t quite sure what to do with himself. He started looking at apartments in various different locations and researching what garage businesses are like in different areas. He keeps telling himself to go see Coran again but he has a feeling that being on that side of town again will tear apart the little healing that he has already done.

His parents have been more supportive than he thought. It’s been two weeks since he spoke with his (drunk) father about things and he can already tell that an effort is being made to be different than before. He can tell that at times it is hard for them, but they suggest things to him and research with him, and when they’re not doing that, they are acting like normal parents. Keith sees this as a tremendous improvement, and if he wasn’t so hung up on Lance then he’d say his life is significantly better.

“How about Seattle? I hear that the apartments in the city are gorgeous.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “There are gorgeous apartments everywhere.”

“Yeah but Seattle has more cars...to fix.”

Keith snorts. “And what is the source of this information?”

Shiro swallows, lips twitching upwards. “Uh...roads?”

Keith laughs and Shiro continues clicking through the channels in a fast, rhythmic fashion, and Keith returns to his phone screen, typing “apartments for rent in Seattle” into the search bar because hey, why the hell not? Then from the TV screen he hears the fragment of words between channels-- “new members of Team Altea--”

“Hey, hey, woah! Go back!” Keith scrambles and wrenches the remote from Shiro’s shocked hands.

“What? What’s going on? It’s just the local news--”

“Just hold on.”

The news anchor is sitting across from a burly man in a tux, and the headline on the bottom of the screen reads “New Members for a New Season: Team Altea”. Keith’s heart rate begins to pick up as he turns up the volume.

The anchor is listing off credentials and Keith realizes she’s introducing her guest, who appears to
be the coach of Team Altea. After her spiel, she turns to him and asks, “Your team had even less positions open this year than usual. What can you say about the men you chose to fill those spots?”

“Well Karen, I couldn’t be prouder of the decisions we made for the team this season. We had some surprises along the way-- and we think some of our opponents will be surprised by us this season as well. The new members are incredibly dedicated and I’m sure they won’t disappoint.”

“Keith, what is this--” Shiro cuts in.

“Shhhh!” Keith swats at him.

The news anchor laughs cheekily at the coach’s words. “College basketball is going to be a riot this year, I presume!”

“Well we aim to represent this small town well.” The coach says, smiling. “And we wouldn’t want to do any less.”

“Those new slots were hard to fill, I bet! What was the selection like for you this time around?” Karen asks.

“We had...I want to say around 180-190 people try out this year.” The coach nods to himself. “Filled six positions. So, that should give you some idea.”

Keith swallows. Holy shit.

“And are we going to get the names of these brilliant six?”

“Well Karen, I think they’re just about to list them on the screen!” The coach responds in a corny voice.

“Well, you’re right, Coach Jim! Ladies and Gentlemen, the new promising members of Team Altea!”

Keith’s grip tightens on the remote. A boy’s face appears on the screen. “Sam Wentworth, 19. Biology Major.” His face fades into a new one. “Anthony Vince, 19, Advertising Major.” Keith leans forward as the face fades into another, into…into--

“Lance Sanchez, 22, Marketing and Sport Journalism Major.”

Keith literally leaps from his chair and screams. “Oh my god! He made it!” The picture is quite professional, with a solid blue background and good lighting. Keith can see the collar of an expensive suit, and it looks like the one he got for him. On Lance’s face is a breathtaking, crooked smile, and Keith’s heart melts at the sight of it. It sucks all of the oxygen out of the room and leaves his breath stuttering. “He made it.” He says again, this time quieter.

“Uh...What is happening?” Shiro adds unhelpfully from behind him.

Keith whirls around. “Lance made the team! He’s been trying to get onto it for years. I...wonder when it happened? He was probably so ecstatic.” Shiro is giving Keith a suspicious, knowing look. Keith swallows, frowning. “What do you want?”

“Oh nothing. Nothing at all.”

“Shiro.”

“You just have this look on your face.” Shiro says, smiling. “Not used to seeing it on you. I think
“It’s called ‘happy’?”

“I mean… I’m happy for him.” Keith’s heart clenches. “You know, he’s got a plan now.”

“And you’re not even the least bit curious to get some closure with him before he’s a big basketball star and gone for good?”

Keith scowls. “You’re evil.”

“I’m just trying to be real with you, Keith.” Shiro says softly. “One of the things about… taking charge of your own life is realizing what is most important to you.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Well that’s the hard part.” He says, although Lance’s crooked smile is already somehow burned into the backs of his eyelids. “There are so many options and I just don’t know.”

“It’s not that you don’t know-- it’s that you don’t care. You don’t care about nice apartments or big cities. You’ve always been a simple person, Keith. You don’t want fancy and you never did. You want a small car garage, a few friends, a cozy house…” He trails off and Keith wraps his arms around himself, heart almost hurting at the thought of such a simple life.

“…and someone you love.” Shiro finishes. Keith just stares at him, a mixture of anger and realization swirling in his chest.

“I…”

“So, in terms of ‘finding your happiness’, I think you could start with at least one of those things.”

Keith sniffs. “It’s not that easy.” He says, shaking his head.

“No.” Shiro agrees. “But what’s the point if you don’t at least try?”

***

Lance looks around at his old room, heart clenching in his chest. He has so many memories from with place. The small, twin bed. The faded, dark blue paint of the walls. The various basketball trophies form his high school days and the stacks of worn out notebooks on his desk. The air is a little musty and the bed looks like it’s been untouched for years, and when he looks into his bathroom he smiles at the small bottle of coconut shampoo still sitting on the ledge of the tub.

Sighing, he sits down on the edge of his bed and tries to take a few steadying breaths.

If he never let Keith into this bed, then maybe the whole “soulmate” thing is still up for grabs.

It’s strange, being on a bed that doesn’t even have a hint of Keith’s lingering scent clinging onto the pillow. Lance had gotten so used to it that he almost forgot it was there, but now he misses it so much that his head is spinning.

Keith is getting married, you idiot. Let it go. Please. Lance flops down onto his back, legs still dangling over the edge of the bed. It’s already 2AM and this whole day has been so emotionally exhausting. He just really needs to get some sleep.
The door bursts open and Maria runs into his room, jumping onto his bed with a loud creaking noise and landing in a sitting position, with her legs crossed and a huge smile on her face. Lance notes that her braces are gone now, and her teeth actually look quite nice.

“Hi Maria?” Lance says suspiciously.

“Enough with the emotional talk. You’ve got six years of gossip to unload on me, I just know it.”

Lance laughs. “Hmmm, definitely thought you would've grown out of this by now.” He says jokingly, and Maria reaches across the bed to shove him. This is something they always used to do—just sit across from each other on Lance’s bed and take turns talking about their friends, their crushes, their teachers. Their mom would always come in and shush them, but if she didn't, Lance had a feeling they could've gone on for hours.

“Come on, Lance! Let’s hear it! You said things were rocky. I want to hear rocky!”

Lance giggles a little sadly. “That sounds like something my roommate Pidge would say.”

“Great! You can start with your roommates!” She claps her hands together.

Lance sighs. “It’s... kind of a long story.”

She shrugs. “We’ve got all night.”

Lance smiles, and starts by talking about Hunk—how he took him in under very sketchy circumstances but treated him like family. He tells Maria about his cooking, and how he always makes food for more than one people just in case anyone would want some. He finds himself laughing at some of the stories that he didn’t even think he remembered, and she would laugh too. He tells her about Pidge, and how she would get along so well with her because they are both sassy and mature and intelligent. He tells her what it’s like to work at the gym, what it’s like to go to college classes. He tells her about most (not all, because that would be excessive) of his hook-ups and some of the funniest stories from them. She laughs until she cries. When he finally mentions Keith, it’s actually an accident. He genuinely doesn’t mean to say it, but he says, “Then I met this guy Cody and he was literally gorgeous, I even managed to make Keith jealous.” He pauses after he says it, stilling the hand that was previously tapping a rhythm onto his knee.

Maria raises an eyebrow. “Keith? That’s a new one.”

“Uh...yeah. Well. That’s...the rocky part.” Lance clears his throat. “But it's late, so we should probably call it a night.”

“Wait! Who is Keith?”

“No, it's literally four AM, go away.”

“Lance.”

Lance groans. “Just this guy that I’m pissed at. Not a big deal.”

“Lance.”

Lance sighs. He knows that Maria isn’t going to give up. “It’s nothing really.” Lance says, aiming to shorten the story and tell it as casually as possible. “We met at a bar and hooked up for a while.” Okay, cool, still sounds casual enough. “Well, longer than a while. I mean. We hooked up for about five months. But we were just friends with benefits! That’s it.” You’re losing your cool,
“Then we got into a fight….” Lance swallows. “Well, Keith’s parents don’t like that he’s gay, and so… okay well maybe I should start with the fact that his family is loaded? I don’t know where to start. I….” This isn’t really going as casual as planned. “Anyway, long story short, he’s engaged now to some girl he doesn’t know, and I’m pretty sure I love him but it’s too late. Also, I punched him in the face and I think I broke his nose.”

Maria blinks at him. “Nothing in that story made any sense.” She says bluntly. “You’re going to need to start over. And this time, tell me everything.”

Lance sighs defeatedly. “I mean…” The more he thinks about it, the more upset he gets. “We were friends with benefits...for a long time. He kept us a secret from his family. He always does everything they say. He works a job that he hates because it’s what his parents want. It’s like they have him on a ball and chain. He was miserable for as long as I knew him, and I hated seeing him like that. Because I lo-- cared about him.” Lance clears his throat. “So...sparking the details...when his family found out about us, it was a disaster. And then he didn’t talk to me for a month and when we met up again we got into this huge fight. He told me his parents set him up in a marriage and he was going to go through with it. And...I mean, I never told him how I felt but I always assumed...somewhere in the back of my mind, that maybe he felt the same way. But then he pulled that shit, and how do you do that to someone you care about?” Lance sighs shakily. “So I got really frustrated and punched him in the face. Because...I don’t know. It’s funny because the reason wasn’t even a malicious one, or anything, it was just. You know. Like, ‘be happy, you asshole!’ That type of thing.”

Maria just looks at him for a very long time. Then asks, “Is he cute?”

Lance laughs. “He’s beautiful. You’d literally drool if you met him.”

“Hm. Beautiful. Interesting. I mean, I just asked if he was cute but…” She smirks. Lance shoves her. “So, what are you going to do about it?” She asks.

Lance shrugs. “Nothing. He pissed me off. And...broke my heart. It’s over. What more is there to say?”

Her smile falters in sympathy. “So, is that why you came home?”

Lance swallows. “I came home for a lot of reasons, Maria. But...he’s definitely one of them.”

Maria leans forward and wraps her arms around Lance’s neck, pulling him into a hug. Lance falters a little, unprepared for the intimacy, but then deflates and wraps his arms back around her. “Wow, it’s amazing.” She says into his neck, a little sadly. “You finally fall in love with someone and you end up punching him in the face.”

Lance laughs. But then Maria continues. “But you did it out of love.”

Lance rolls his eyes. “That sounds...so cheesy.”

She pulls away. “Mom always says that the biggest fights she has with dad aren’t even fights at all. It’s just two stubborn people who only want the best for each other.” She smiles. “I think that’s what love is.”

Lance’s heart lurches in his chest. “Well, you might be right.” He says sadly. “But I think my choice is long gone now.”
Lance wakes up at noon the following morning with a warm, comfortable feeling settling in his stomach. It’s noon and he has nowhere to be. The smell of pancakes wafts into the doorway and he can hear his mother bantering with Maria downstairs. Slowly, he crawls out of bed and brushes his teeth, before sauntering down the stairs and joining them.

“Good morning, mijo!” His mother says tearfully, and jeez, Lance knows where he gets the excessive crying from now. “I made you pancakes! Sit, sit. It’s already on the table.”

Lance giggles and plops down next to Maria. She smiles kindly at him and Lance feels his cheeks warm when he remembers their conversation. He starts to dig into his pancakes as his mother frantically relays the plans for the day, as she used to do every morning when Lance was in high school.

“Alex and Benny only have a half day today, so I am going to cook a huge lunch and we will all eat together when your father comes home with them. What were you thinking for food? I’m thinking empanadas and rice, maybe some baked chicken and oh! Let’s not forget the spiced beans I made yesterday night, I can still reheat those!”

Lance glances at Maria and she rolls her eyes fondly. He giggles. They finish up their breakfast and his mother sends them to the store to buy ingredients for the meal. Lance can’t help but feel nostalgic-- the whole thing is something he’s done about a thousand times before. But now he cherishes every single moment, because he knows how special they are. How rare they are. And going to the store isn’t just “going to the store”, it’s a part of his life that he will remember no matter how many years go by. He walks close to Maria and listens to her laugh. For the first time in a while, he feels like there’s some sun peeking through the clouds.

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“What the fuck are you doing here?” Pidge spits, and damn, Keith was expecting hostility but didn’t realize someone so tiny could emit so much burning hatred. He takes a deep breath.

“Is Lance here?”

“No. Go away.” She starts to slam the door.

“Wait! Wait, please. Is he actually not here or does he just not want to talk to me?”

“None of your business.”

“Pidge, please let me in, I need to talk to him.”

“Well he doesn’t need to talk to you. So fuck off.”

Hunk shyly walks up from behind Pidge, into the open doorway. “Pidge, what’s going on--” His eyes harden as they fall on Keith. “Hey man, you...should probably leave.”

“Come on, you guys. Look, I know I hurt him. Please let me just explain to him--”
“We really don’t think it’s a good idea for you guys to talk anymore.” Hunk says, sympathetic yet stern. “Lance has been a wreck.”

Keith swallows. “So have I.”

“Good!” Pidge snaps, but Hunk holds up a hand to quiet her down.

“Well, then you both have some moving on to do. So...go do that.” He says sadly, beginning to shut the door again.

Keith’s hand shoots out, stopping the door. “Please, I’m in love with him.” He stutters as he says it, a little shocked by the admission out loud. “And I don’t...I don’t want to move on.”

“Oh well then, in that case, great! Go kiss and make up and be happy forever and oh, wait--you’re getting married, you dick.” Pidge growls sarcastically.

“No! No, not anymore!” Keith glances pleadingly at Hunk, who looks like he’s starting to wear down. “I called it off, I...No, I’m not engaged anymore.”

Hunk raises an eyebrow. “Well...that’s great for you. But uh...still. Stay away from Lance.”

Keith frantically runs his fingers through his hair. The frustration is building. “Look, I’m sorry. I screwed up. I never meant to hurt him. I just need to make it right.”

Hunk and Pidge both falter a little, but hold their ground. Pidge shakes her head. “We bandaged your face! And made you breakfast! I let you play my nintendo! Then you just fucked off and got engaged and never showed up again! Do you even know what happened to Lance? He was a disaster!”

Keith sighs shakily, deflating like a balloon. He isn’t going to let it end like this. He needs to talk to Lance. “I know.” he says, voice cracking. “I know because I was a disaster too. Let me fix this, please. I just need to say sorry. I won’t even say anything else. Then I’ll be out of his life forever I promise.”

Hunk and Pidge glance at each other, debating the option.

“Look, Keith.” Hunk starts, face softening. “We’ll tell you where he is but...be careful this time.” He says. “Because he’s already got enough shit on his plate, and you were one of the good things. So don’t...just don’t fuck up again.”

Pidge nods solemnly, looking down at her feet.

Keith swallows. “I swear I won’t.”

Hunk gestures for him to come inside and Keith picks at the skin around his nails nervously, before taking a deep breath and walking in. Pidge glares at him the whole time, eyes burning into the back of his head. But he get’s a tiny slip of paper with an address on it, and suddenly it all feels worth it.

***

Lance’s mother was not kidding when she said “big lunch”. She ended up inviting some of Lance’s
cousins in the area, who apparently have been dying to see him for years, and his aunt and uncle. They all gathered around the tiny kitchen table, using extra fold-out chairs and pushing together couch cushions to make room for everyone. There are easily more than seven platters of food scattered around the table, and Lance has gotten so many kisses on his face from so many different people that he actually feels like he is covered in lipstick. They all say grace, which is something Lance has not done, quite literally, in years, and then they dig in. The air is hectic, filled with loud, Spanish screaming, relatives trying to talk over one another. His brothers are laughing loudly and stealing food from each other’s plates. Maria is rolling her eyes at them and trying to sneakily check her phone. Lance’s mom and dad are frantically running back and forth, delivering drinks and making sure everyone is comfortable. Lance always makes fun of his mother for never actually sitting down and eating when there is company, and it looks like she hasn’t changed a bit.

He’s definitely not used to this, but as the same time, he is. And as he stares around at all of the familiar faces, something in his heart starts thawing at an incredibly fast pace and he finds himself standing up and clearing his throat. “Hey. Hi everyone!” He announces over the shouting, trying to get everyone to quiet down. “I just want to say something.”

About two dozen eyes turn to look at him and he blinks, trying not to lose his nerve. “Well...As you all know, I’ve been away from home for a while.” He says nervously. “But I’m actually back with an announcement. Uh…”

Maria gives him a questioning but encouraging look. He forges on. “As most of you know, I used to play basketball a lot in high school. And, well, I didn’t want to stop, in college...so I’ve been playing a lot over the years.” He glances at his dad, who has a mildly stunned look on his face. “The team at Altea University is one of the best in the nation, so that’s why I moved away. To… you know… try to get on that team so I could play professionally.” His father nods slightly in acknowledgement. Lance sighs. “And, well, I just found out a couple weeks ago that I finally made the team. So I wanted to share that with you all--”

He hears the harsh sound of a chair being tossed to the side and then he is being crushed in an embrace that could only be from his father, who is-- is he crying?-- into Lance’s shoulder.

Everyone around him is gasping and giggling, clearly impressed. He hears his mother screaming all kinds of congratulations in Spanish but all he can hear after that is his father mumbling into his shoulder. “I knew you could do it, miyo. I knew it. I’m so glad you didn’t give up.” The words are private, and just for him to hear. And it’s crazy to think that after years of practicing with his father in the abandoned court by their neighborhood, he would now be one step away from playing professionally. He really has his dad to thank for everything he accomplished and he barely knows how to do it.

Lance hugs him back with the tightest embrace he can manage, and his siblings are all exclaiming happily and trying to tug his father away so that they can hug him too. They’re shouting questions about the team and about the sport and how much Lance had to practice and Lance’s insides feel gooey and warm and fuzzy all at once as his two brothers tackle him to the floor and Maria kicks them off and pulls him into a choking hug. His cousins are all around him and his family’s laughing sounds like music and how did he end up being so blessed with such amazing--

The whole room pauses in silence as a soft knocking noise comes from the doorway.

“Did you hear something?” Maria asks, pulling away from Lance.

Lance glances around at his family, who all look very curious and cautious, with their arms raised in mid-celebration.
Another knock.

“Did someone order pizza?” Benny asks, mostly joking. Lance’s mother makes a tutting noise with her tongue and smacks him upside the head.

“Maybe it’s a delivery.” Maria says, walking towards the door. “Yeah, it’s just some random guy. Probably a package.”

She opens the door and the entire family crowds around it, trying and failing to hide their curiosity. Lance lags behind them, trying not to get caught up in the situation. Don’t wanna make it worse for the poor bastard who decided to show up during family lunchtime.

Then the stranger speaks, and Lance’s heart catches in his throat. His blood runs cold and he stops dead in his tracks. There’s no way. There’s no way, how is this possible? Is he hallucinating? Is this real? Has he officially gone insane?

Because the voice drifting through the living room, low and cautious and raspy and so familiar, is definitely not one of a stranger.

“H-hi. Um. My name is Keith. Is...Lance Sanchez here?”

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr: dimplesandcurlss
my art insta: allscribbledup

<3333
Twelve

Chapter Summary

starts off right where the last chapter cut off :)

Chapter Notes

hello everyone!!! im stuck at home with a 101 degree fever and I was going to wait to put his up but i have nothing better to do so...yay!
a little delirious rn, not gunna lie. But i really hope you guys like this chapter. this week has been stressful af so it was hard to get it out, but ur girl tried her very best.
I just want to say that I'm planning on starting my next fic very soon-- and i asked you guys for ideas and i was flooooorreeedd by the creativity like, why am i the one writing when youre all so amazing? idk man. Anyway, i can only do one fic at a time, unfortunately. but there are a couple ideas that you guys have given me that i will definitely keep in the back of my mind for future fics down the road. For now, I still only have about 37% of an idea for my next fic, but we'll...see what happens? im a mess im sorry omg this is so long ive been typing for year, if youre still reading this then....wow okay youre golden

Lance watches in complete horror as every individual person in his family turns to look directly at him. He can hear Keith's voice again. “I’m a...friend.” He says shyly, clearing his throat to fill an awkward silence. “Just need to...run something by him if he’s not busy?” They all shuffle cautiously to the side, creating some kind of absurd pathway to the door, and it’s almost funny-- like a cliche scene from a romantic comedy. Except this isn’t...romantic. And definitely not a comedy.

And then he sees Keith standing there, with his stupid expensive maroon polo and his stupid black jeans and the godforsaken mop of unruly thick hair and those piercing, gorgeous eyes. He has a terrified look on his face, eyes wide like he’s just seen a ghost. Lance himself is probably pulling a similar expression. His heart is doing backflips and before he can open his mouth to say anything; before he can object, or tell his family to send him away, his mother is pushing through the crowd with a large grin on her face.

“Hi! Hello!” She bursts excitedly. “Are you a friend of Lance’s? Come in, come in! You must’ve been on the road for quite a while, it’s a good thing I’ve just made lunch!” She reaches out her hand. “I’m Lance’s mother, so nice to meet you!” Keith blinks owlishly at her hand, as if he’s trying to understand what it is.

“Hi! Hello!” She bursts excitedly. “Are you a friend of Lance’s? Come in, come in! You must’ve been on the road for quite a while, it’s a good thing I’ve just made lunch!” She reaches out her hand. “I’m Lance’s mother, so nice to meet you!” Keith blinks owlishly at her hand, as if he’s trying to understand what it is.

“It’s very nice to meet you.” Keith says, actually sounding quite gentlemanly given the circumstances. “But...actually, I don’t think...I can stay.” He glances over at Lance, who nearly suffocates when their eyes meet. It is almost physical sensation, seeing him. It’s not just a feeling. Lance’s body actually reacts ; breaking out in a nervous sweat and feeling wobbly in the knees.
“Just needed to pass along a message but if it’s not a good ti--”

“I insist you come in! Please, at least stay for lunch!” She grabs his wrist now and Lance watches in silent disbelief as the tension throughout his family completely dissolves, all of them falling into step behind her as she drags Keith to the table. Lance can barely make out Keith’s shoulders through the crowd of his cousins and siblings, but he can tell by the tension in them that he’s in full panic mode. He can hear Keith objecting, over and over again, as politely as possible. “Mrs. Sanchez, please, this really isn’t necessary. I really just--”

“There’s more than enough food to go around, don’t you worry!” She practically throws Keith into one of the fold-out chairs at the corner of the table and he stares down at the spectacle of food, stunned into silence. The rest of Lance’s family takes their previous places around the table, already starting to continue the conversations that were cut short beforehand, and Lance hovers next to his seat, finally making eye contact with Keith and raising an angry eyebrow as if to ask ‘what the fuck are you doing here?’ Keith just looks at him with panicked eyes and visibly swallows, as if to say ‘I didn’t expect this.’

The excited conversation around the table starts to return to it’s previous level of volume-- a mix of english and spanish talking over each other, chaotic and jumbled. Lance strains his ears to hear what his mother is saying to him over the noise.

“Lance, you didn't tell me you had a friend coming over!” Lance’s mother exclaims, like he’s still fifteen and no years have gone by. “I wish I had known so I could set up a space for him at the table!”

Lance sighs defeatedly, all kinds of conflicting emotions swirling in his chest. Because he’s angry at Keith. Keith broke his heart and Keith never called and Keith is getting married but now Keith is also in his hometown and sitting at a table with his family; and he looks good. He looks so fucking good, in a way that Lance didn’t even know he was craving. So he sits down in his seat, despite wanting to bolt out of the front door and keep running until he can’t breathe anymore. Keith has no right showing up here. He has no right showing up in Lance’s entire life, ever again. How did he even get this address without Pidge slicing his neck open with a steak knife?

“So, it’s Keith, right?” Lance hears his father say. “How long have you known Lance?”

Keith is still staring wordlessly at his untouched food, but then looks up at the sound of his name. He clears his throat. “Oh, uh, we’ve known each other for...a couple of months.”

His father grins proudly. “So you were there when he made the team?”

Keith is still staring wordlessly at his untouched food, but then looks up at the sound of his name. He clears his throat. “Oh, uh, we’ve known each other for...a couple of months.”

A strange look passes Keith’s face but then he smiles, dazzling and fond, and Lance nearly chokes on his food.

“Oh, no I wasn’t. But I saw it on the news! You must be really excited for him.” Keith says it nervously, but the tension is already seeping from his shoulders. Lance snorts, a little rudely, earning himself a nasty glare from his mother. Since when did Keith watch the local news? Obviously he’s lying.

“We are.” His father nods. “We are so proud of him. That team is going far this year.” He says happily.

Keith nods back shyly and returns his gaze to his food. Lance wonders how many times Keith has had to do this in his life; to sit down with a bunch of strangers and only exhibit his best manners and most polite attributes. Knowing Keith's parents, meeting new people in these formal situations
is probably something he can do in his sleep. And he’s clearly good at it. A proper gentleman, which kind of throws Lance off.

Lance opens his mouth to say something, like “didn’t you have an appointment you needed to get to?”, but then his mother has a hand on Keith’s shoulder.

“What do you do, Keith?”

Sighing, Lance looks back down and picks at his food, dread pooling in his stomach at the question. His mother doesn’t know it’s a sensitive topic, but it is, and he gets ready to cringe at Keith’s bitter, depressing answer.

But what Keith actually says is, “I’m between jobs right now...Last one wasn’t right for me. I’m thinking about engineering, though. I really like cars.”

Lance jerks his gaze upwards, stunned. Wait...what? Keith...is unemployed?

“Oh an engineer! How exciting!” Lance’s mother exclaims, and Keith laughs nervously, looking away from her. Lance can see a blush in his cheeks and then feels his own face heating up as well. This is so fucked up. Why is this happening to him? Why? “Maybe he can fix that annoying humming in the van, Maria!” She turns to Keith. “Have you done vans before?”

Keith’s face lights up. “Uh, yeah. I could take a look later?”

“Wonderful! An engineer and a gentleman! What a nice surprise!” She turns to Lance and raises a subtle, suggestive eyebrow. Lance recoils like he’s been slapped, face burning furiously. But now that he has been acknowledged by his mother, he knows he needs to say something.

“Keith,” He says, finally addressing Keith directly. “It’s... really a surprise to see you here.” He tries his best to keep the anger out of his voice. Maria is looking back and forth between them, appearing to be biting down a smile.

Keith smiles lightly, but his eyes are scared. “Sorry to barge in.” He says, a little cooly. Then he stands up, clearing his throat. “Maybe I should just come back at a different--”

“Nonsense!” Lance’s mother tugs him back down. “You haven’t even touched your food!”

Keith smiles politely at her, but Lance can see right through it, and flops back down into his seat.

Maria leans over obnoxiously from across the table and extends her hand.”Hi Keith! I’m Maria, Lance’s sister who is much more mature than him.” A few of Lance’s cousins grumble as she towers over their food. Keith bites his lip and shakes her hand. “Are you Korean? You look Korean. Well not totally Korean but I bet you’re mildly Korean, right?” She rambles nervously, and Keith looks absolutely perplexed. “Because I had a friend who looked a little bit like you--not as good looking of course!-- not that you’re good looking, I mean you are but...anyway and he’s actually from Korea which is super cool but like also kind of mysterious! Which I dig, so--”

“Oh my god, Maria leave him alone!” Lance cuts in, rolling his eyes. He’s biting his lip to keep from laughing-- Keith looks honest to god terrified, and Lance knew Maria would find him ridiculously attractive. It’s been a few years and he totally thought Maria had grown out of her ‘obnoxious rambling’ version of flirting but it appears to not be the case.

Keith laughs, nervously running a hand through his hair. “Nice to meet you, Maria.” He says, cool as a fucking cucumber. Lance scowls and watches as Keith’s hair falls back into place. He’s so pretty. God he’s so pretty. His voice, his hair, his eyes. Lance wants to die. If there is any one
person who can suck all of the oxygen out of a room, it’s Keith.
And this fucking lunch needs to end so that he can breathe again.

***

Keith offers to help clean up after lunch, which makes Lance roll his eyes but also want to kiss him senseless. His mother looks at him like he’s the greatest thing since sliced bread, which he probably is, but Lance is too angry to care. He needs to get out of the kitchen as fast as possible to get his heart rate under control. He isn’t used to being ambushed like this. In the movies, they make it seem a lot more fun than it actually is in real life. And now Lance is scrubbing his face with cold water in the tiny, cramped guest bathroom underneath the staircase and desperately trying to think of an escape plan; because this whole “confrontation” thing really isn’t his style.

The door opens and shuts with a loud slam and Lance yelps, jumping slightly and whirling around.

“Jesus, Maria, you scared the shit out of me!” He shriek-whispers when he sees his younger sister scowling at him.

“*You* hooked up with *him*?” She asks incredulously, pointing to the door that ultimately leads to Keith. “*You* did?”

“Why is that so hard to believe?” Lance asks defensively, crossing his arms. “He’s not *that* attractive.”

Maria looks personally offended. “What the *shit* are you talking about? Are we talking about the same person?” Her face dissolves into a pout. “Is he even a *person*?”

Lance smiles slyly. “I knew you’d be into him.”

Maria shakes her head in disbelief. “How the hell this even *happen*? Goofy little Lance can’t pull a guy like that! Did you drug him? Oh my god you drugged him.”

“Are you ki--No! I didn’t drug him, you idiot! I’ve got game!”

“*Not that* much game!”

Lance sighs, rubbing his eyes tiredly. “I don’t know what to tell you. It was...a miracle.” He says. “Anyway, he’s not staying long. I’m going to tell him to leave.”

“What? No!”

“Are you forgetting the whole, ‘he broke my heart into a million pieces and is engaged to another woman’ thing?”

Maria visibly swallows. “But...he’s so pretty?”

Lance smiles sadly. “Yeah. I know.”

“Well if you don’t want him then I call dibs! He can break my heart I don’t care.”

Lance laughs. “He might be a little too gay for you.”
“We can work around it.”

“I’m leaving now.”

Maria grabs his wrist. “Wait. I…” she sighs. “Look. He may have done some horrible things to you, but look at where it got you. You came home. After so long— something finally inspired you to come home. Lance, you’ve been through shitty things in the past but never once came back because of them. Why is it that this shitty thing brought you back here?”

Lance frowns slightly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m saying you didn’t come here to get away from Keith. You came here because of Keith. Because whatever the hell you went through with him...whatever the hell he said to you that broke you so much...it ended up forcing you to make the right choice after such a long time.” She lets go of Lance’s wrist, sighing. “So maybe he went about it wrong, and said some things that might've been hard to hear...but, if you ended up here, then how bad could his intentions truly have been?”

Lance searches her eyes, stunned by the implications of her words. This girl was twelve when he left. Twelve. And now she is smarter than he will ever be. “I...don’t know...what to say.” He says quietly. “Or do.”

“Well, he’s here, isn’t he?” She smiles softly. “So I think the message is clear enough. Don’t you?”

***

Keith is up to his elbows in soapy dish water and Mrs. Sanchez is talking his ear off about all of the different kinds of pinto beans and this really was not at all how he thought he would be spending his Friday. He actually thought he was going clinically insane when he got into his car and put Lance’s address into his GPS. He hadn’t even debated it until he was already four hours into the car ride-- the adrenaline started to wear off and he realized just what he was doing. What the hell was he thinking? Ambush Lance during the only week he will ever get to spend with his family, and then what? Beg for forgiveness? Cry at his feet? Sing a song? Confess his feelings like in those romance flicks from the eighties?

Well, turns out he’s doing none of those things-- and instead, he is washing dishes with Lance’s mother while the boy in question hasn’t been seen for an hour. It's not that he minds doing chores. In fact, it gives him a perfect excuse to avoid confrontation. So he just buries his arms into the sink and takes his sweet old time, scrubbing every dish within an inch of its life and then handing them off to be dried.

Mrs. Sanchez bears a startling resemblance to Lance that Keith wasn't prepared for. Keith could tell that Lance gets his height and his long limbs from his father, but his eyes? His freckles? His smile? Definitely his mother. Her eyes are the same crystal blue that shifts to teal when bathed in sunlight, and her smile reveals the same small, endearing dimples that fall into a similar place on Lance’s face. It makes Keith’s heart melt, seeing the resemblances; seeing where Lance came from and why he is the way he is. From the moment Mrs.Sanchez grabbed his wrist and tugged him inside, Keith had already come to understand more about Lance than he ever would have back at home.
Now Mrs. Sanchez is humming a soft tune and picking up each of Keith's dishes, one by one, drying them with care and attention. Keith hears Lance's voice in his head again, echoing off the walls of the tiny hotel basketball court. ‘My mom...she's my best friend.’ He sighs shakily and finishes scrubbing the mug in his hands before handing it off.

“You are such a hard worker! So helpful today. Your parents must have raised you well.” She says, breaking the silence as she continues to dry the mug.

Keith chuckles nervously. “Thank you. You fed me so… it's the least I can do.”

She hums, grinning. “This family can be a little overwhelming but you handled us well. Even Maria! She gets a little loca around gorgeous boys.” She twirls her finger next to her head in the “crazy” gesture.

Keith grins, flattered by the casual use of the word ‘gorgeous’. “It was sweet.”

“Lance is the same way. Always has been. He knows about two smooth lines and the rest is useless blabber. When he was in high school, he’d bring dates home and I could hear him talking a mile a minute, all the way from the basement.”

Keith laughs out loud, the image of a smaller, nervous Lance going on and on excitedly pops into his head, and he ducks his face slightly to hide his blush.

“He's gotten better.” Keith replies, completely unaware of what he is implying. “But I still think the rambling is...endearing.” His hands slow to a stop on the dishes and it hits him that he might've said too much, and when he looks over at Mrs. Sanchez his realization is confirmed. She is staring at him with one eyebrow raised expectantly and a hand resting on her hip.

“Endearing. Hm. Interesting.” Is all she says, before returning to her task. Keith clears his throat.

“I just mean that...it’s not annoying, or anything.”

She is smiling. “Of course.”

“You know, we’re friends, so I see his rambling when he talks to other people.” He tries to reason.

Mrs. Sanchez hums. “I see. You said you've known Lance for a few months. Are you a work friend?”

“Uh, not really. We actually live pretty far from each other. We sorta met...by accident.” Keith says, trying to keep it as vague as possible.

“Oh.” She replies, a little distantly. Then she sighs. “What is he like, now? Taking on the big bad world all by himself?”

Keith's heart lurches a little at the question, and he'd really rather do anything other than answer it honestly, but of course his mouth betrays him, as it tends to do. “He’s crazy strong.” The words tumble out. “He...works incredibly hard. Before he got on the team he was practicing for hours everyday. And no matter how exhausted he was, he never took it out on anyone else. He was never bitter about it. Just...excited. And kind. And self sacrificing. A-and, um…” He feels Mrs. Sanchez’s eyes on him. “Also could make any situation funny. You know, he's a goof. Great sense of humor.”

Mrs. Sanchez has an incredibly warm expression on her face. “Sounds like Lance.” She says fondly.

“Yeah.” Keith chokes out. “And he's got these roommates who love him to pieces-- they're willing
to do literally anything for him. And you've gotta be a really wonderful person for those two to like you so...that says a lot about who Lance is now. He’s...wonderful.” This earns him a tearful smile from Mrs.Sanchez.

“Thank you.” She says softly.

He nods slightly and turns his attention back to the sink, feeling almost winded from the long, nervous answer. They scrub in silence for a couple of minutes. Mrs.Sanchez is humming so quietly that it is barely registering in Keith's ears, so he just lets himself fall into the sound of the running water, the clanking of the silverware, the fizzing of the bubbles. He wonders how many times Lance had to stand here and do the dishes. How many memories are floating around in this space just waiting to be discovered? How many can he learn before he leaves? He swallows and attempts to shake himself out of...whatever this is, and reaches blindly into the bottom of the sink for the stray utensils.

“So, how long?” Mrs.Sanchez asks, after a while.

“How long what?”

She sighs a little tiredly. “I've barely seen or spoken to my son in four years. And now he shows up out of the blue after so long and then you follow him a day later. I haven’t been around so I need to know how long it’s been.” She places the mug down and turns to look at Keith, but Keith keeps his eyes trained on the sudsy water.

“I don't understand what you're asking…” He says, and it's halfway true.

“How long has my son been in love with you?”

Keith pauses, stunned. A burning blush explodes across his face as he whips his head around to look at her. Because she didn't ask “how long have you been dating” or “what's going on between you two” or “is he your boyfriend”. She asked, “How long has my son been in love with you?”

And it's a question that throws Keith completely off guard because…

“...He...isn’t. He’s not in love with me.”

She raises an unconvinced eyebrow. “Oh please, I know my son.” She says. “From the moment you appeared I could tell. It's all over his face.” She snorts. “He thinks he’s being subtle. Bless his soul. He was never very good at lying.”

Keith clears his throat, looking away. “It's a bit more complicated than that.” He admits, voice low.

She hums sarcastically. “I'm sure it is.” She says, smiling. “But I'll tell you this. Lance loves the drama, always has. He’ll never admit that what he wants is actually...quite simple.” She folds up the towel and puts it away. Then she looks at Keith with knowing eyes. “I take it you'll be sticking around for dinner?”

***

Keith really and truly did not plan on staying this late. All he wanted to do was apologize. He was kidding himself with the whole “confess his feelings” idea but he really did want to tell Lance he
was sorry. Lance, however, has been avoiding him. He can’t find him anywhere. It’s a tiny house, so he wonders where he could possibly be hiding. He really just needs to say what he needs to say and get the fuck out of here before they rope him into spending the night—which he knows they will do. So he thanks Mrs. Sanchez again for lunch and sighs, waddling awkwardly up the stairs. “Lance?” He calls quietly. No answer. “Lance?”

He hears soft music playing from the door at the end of the hallway and slowly approaches it, knocking softly. “Lance?” He says. The volume of the music decreases slightly. Keith takes a deep breath. “Look, I come in peace, okay? Just wanna talk.” He tries to sound as casual as possible. There is a long pause, no movement happening on either side of the door, before the knob starts turning slowly and the door creaks open.

Butterflies explode in Keith’s chest as Lance appears in the doorway, looking as stunning as he always does. His hair is a bit of a mess and he’s got small bags under his eyes but they are still glowing blue against his unfairly tan skin. He’s shirtless, because the universe just loves laughing at Keith, and the endless expanse of smooth, exposed skin just reminds Keith of what he has been missing. What he has been craving. Black sweatpants sit low on his hips, revealing the familiar strip of his classic blue briefs. And that stupid, stupid deodorant swirls around him, somehow comforting him while painfully pulling him apart.

Keith feels like his heart is so far up in his throat that talking is probably impossible. He tries to swallow it down but it stays put. Lance is staring down at him with several different emotions fighting for a place in his eyes. His thin, perfect lips are turned slightly downwards. “Keith--”

Keith pushes past him and into the room, refusing to just stand in a hallway when he has this conversation. Lance makes a small noise of protest but doesn’t try to stop him. The door shuts behind him.

Immediately, Keith reaches downwards and tugs his shirt off in one swift movement, tossing it to the side. Lance squeaks. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Well if you get to be distracting then I do too.” He lifts a hand to smooth down his ruffled hair. “See? Now we’re equal.”

Lance looks like he’s biting back a smile as he glances down at himself. “Sorry, I didn’t even realize--”

“Yeah you did.”

Lance actually smiles now, but it looks reluctant. “Maybe.”

They both stand in awkward silence, facing each other with their arms crossed. Keith knows he should probably talk first but now that Lance is in front of him, looking as dazzling as ever, he can’t seem to find any words to say.

As if Lance remembers what the current situation is, his smile melts into a frown. “Why are you here, Keith?” Lance finally asks tiredly. “What do you want from me?”

Keith can see the exhaustion in his eyes. Is it possible that Lance has been thinking about him, too? It makes his heart nearly burst as he remembers the conversation he had with Mrs. Sanchez only a few minutes ago. He takes a steadying breath, ready to reply, but then Lance is talking again.

“How the hell did you even find me? Don’t you have a fiancé to go shower with affection?” It
sounds irritated. Keith’s heart clenches.

“I’m...so sorry .” Keith finally says. “You were right, okay? About everything. And ever since...we fought, I realized that things needed to be different for me.” He swallows. “I still have a lot of work to do. I mean, the truth is that the only reason I was willing to change anything is because my father finally gave me permission--so nothing I’ve done has really been that courageous. Because you were right, I only do things that people tell me to do.” His voice cracks a little as he says it, and Lance’s face softens a fraction at the sound. “But I'm working on it. On making my own decisions. And being happy. And maybe my next decision will be 100% mine, and not my father’s.” Lance looks surprised by the sudden outpour of words. “I’m taking baby steps...to change, I mean. And I hated fighting with you but you're the one who made me realize that I needed to. And that...means a lot to me. So that’s why I made this decision. To come here. And...tell you all of that.”

The tension in Lance's shoulders is loosening, slowly and carefully. He clears his throat. “You quit your job?”

Keith nods.

“And...your fiancé is...?”

“No longer...a thing.”

Lance nods slowly, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lip. “Wow, I really changed you life, huh? I should get a Nobel Peace Prize.”

Keith rolls his eyes, arms falling from across his chest. “Oh my god.”

“Sorry, sorry.” Lance chuckles dryly. “I say stupid things when I’m nervous.”

Keith smiles. “Your sister is...a lot like you.”

At this, Lance laughs. It sounds warm and open. “Maybe. But she’s way smarter.”

“Yeah, probably.” Keith smirks. A beat of silence goes by.

“It is courageous, Keith.” Lance finally says, voice serious again. “What you're doing. Even if your father gave you permission. It’s...hard to do. I'm really surprised.” He studies Keith’s face for a moment. “I'm...impressed.”

Keith hums, turning his face away to hide his blush. “Well, you actually came back home, so. You know. I’m impressed, too.”

Lance's blue eyes are kind-- much more open than Keith has seen them in so long. Looking at them makes Keith’s brain turn to putty. “I guess we helped each other, then.”

Keith's heart leaps. “I guess we did.”

Slowly, and very hesitantly, as if he doesn’t want to break the moment, Lance lifts a finger to poke Keith's nose. “I would've thought that I at least bruised you. Was my punch really that weak?”

Keith giggles, swatting Lance’s finger away. “I was bleeding for a while. Does that help?”

Lance narrows his eyes. “How long is a while?”

“I don't know. Like six hours?”
A hesitant smile. “Nice.”

The door bursts open and Maria saunters in. “Lance, mom wants you to help cook di--” Her eyes land on Keith, who just now remembers he’s shirtless, and she lets out a choked off squeak. “Actually, I’ll come back later. You know. When. Yeah. Okay bye! Have fun! Bye!” She scrambles out of the door and it slams behind her. Keith bursts out laughing.

“Okay nevermind, you are exactly like her.”

“Oh shut up.” Lance’s laugh rings throughout the room and Keith feels like his skin is on fire.

***

Keith insists on leaving before dinner but Lance’s family is...very difficult to reason with.

“It’s a seven hour drive. If I leave now I can still get home before midnight.” He tries.

“Nonsense. Just stay the night here and leave in the morning. It’s dangerous to be on the roads so late, anyhow.” Lance’s father says as he bustles around the kitchen, helping prepare dinner. “And besides, you can’t go seven more hours without a meal! That’s insane.”

“I don’t want to impose.” Keith attempts again, uselessly. He really shouldn’t stay. He really shouldn’t stick around Lance for much longer, it’s making him feel way too many things. He didn’t come here to do anything too risky after all. He just wanted...to say sorry.

“You’re not imposing at all!” Mrs. Sanchez appears from literal thin air. She levels Keith with a knowing look, practically blocking him from the door. “It’s probably better for everyone if you stay.” She says gently. But it seems that Keith is the only one who picks up on what she is implying.

“Mrs.Sanchez, as much as I would like to believe that, I don’t think you understand the whole situation…” He clears his throat. “It really is better if I go.”

“Keith!” Maria’s voice calls from the hallway and then she is bounding down the stairs. “Keith wait.” She says, a little breathlessly. “You’re leaving?”

“Oh...yeah.” Keith says, now with three people looking at him disapprovingly. These people have only known him for about five hours, why do they care so much?

“Please don’t.” Maria says, sounding extremely concerned.

“Why not? You guys should enjoy your dinner.” He smiles. “It's family time, after all.”

“Any friend of Lance's is a friend of mine.” Mrs.Sanchez says earnestly. “Especially when they've proven to be...so important to him.”

Keith swallows. “Just had to clear something up with him.” He says defensively.

“Yes, but you drove seven hours to do so.”

“Keith…” Maria chimes in, sounding nervous. She glances back at the stairs to make sure Lance isn't coming and lowers her voice. “Lance came home after four years, and I have a funny feeling
that it has something to do with you. And he just got here. So, please don’t leave...Because if you leave then he might leave and--”

“What’s going on down here?” Lance’s voice startles him, sending a shiver up his spine. Maria jumps too, whirling around to face Lance, who is casually walking down the stairs.

Don’t look at him. Don’t look at him. Just put on a brave face and leave. Don’t look at--

“You going somewhere?” Lance asks suspiciously, eyeing Keith’s keys in his hand and then looking back up to meet his eyes. Keith drinks in the smooth skin and the sharp jaw that he’s gotten so used to touching. Lance’s hair has gotten a little longer and now curls attractively against the nape of his neck. Keith wants to trail his mouth along the skin there. He wants to taste it again. He wants to run his fingers along the rises and dips on Lance’s lips. He wants to just look at him, and look at him, and look and look and he never wants to have to look away, ever again.

“Yeah, Lance.” He says, looking away painfully. “I mean, you know how long the drive is...and I gotta get home at a reasonable hour. I wasn’t expecting to be here so late.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “At least stay for food?” He says, and it sounds hopeful.

“Food! It’s empanada night!” Maria encourages clumsily. Keith can see the desperation in her eyes. He chances a glance at Mrs. Sanchez, who has a soft, pleading expression on her face that just reminds him so much of Lance that he feels his willpower breaking.

If this family truly believes he is the reason Lance is here, then how can he take that away from them?

Sighing, he drops his keys onto the side table. He sees Lance’s face dissolve into a grin, eyes bright and twinkling. “Hell yeah!” He says cheerfully. “Come on, I’ll show you the lay of the land.” He grabs Keith’s wrist and a jolt of electricity shoots up his arm, short and giddy. You’d think that after sleeping with someone over a dozen times, simple touches like this don’t feel like much anymore. But Keith disagrees, because in this moment, he is convinced that a shockwave just passed through his chest.

“So this is where the magic happens.” Lance says, letting go of Keith’s wrist and stopping in front of the kitchen counter. There is a large bowl of filling and a few plates around it covered in small circles of dough. Lance is standing so close that his shoulder presses against Keith’s, and Keith wonders if he’s doing it on purpose. He wonders why they are sitting here making empanadas as if their entire friendship wasn’t in shambles five hours ago and there is nothing complicated at all happening between them. “It’s a good thing my mom already made the stuffing, so all we really have to do is fill these circles. It’s really easy after that. Here, watch me do it.” Lance takes a spoonful of the filling and plops it onto the center of the dough in his hand. Then, with skilled, quick fingers, he folds it over and twists the top delicately. “Then you just pinch it here...” He says, “then fold this part over so that nothing falls out of the side. And then voila!” He holds it out in front of Keith’s nose in presentation. “One empanada!”

Keith grins. “That was actually pretty impressive.”

“Nah, it’s easy. I used to do it all the time. You gotta try now.”

Keith glances at the bowl. “I’m gonna fuck this up.”

“Probably. But it’ll be super fun to watch.” Lance holds his palm open and places a circle of dough flat against it. Keith stares down at the slight brushing of their fingers and feels heat rising to his
face. Lance has got to be doing this on purpose.

***

Lance's heart is soaring.

Keith isn't getting married. Keith *isn't getting married.* It repeats over and over again like a song that's stuck in his head and he wants to shout it from the rooftops, and write it in the clouds, and spin around in happy, dizzy circles until he's out of breath. And now he's being too touchy, too affectionate, and he knows he is, but he doesn't want Keith to leave. He doesn't want to let this slip through his fingers again because Keith is *here,* right in front of him, close enough to smell and to touch and he's going to do it *right* this time. He's not going to fuck it up anymore. And how does one do it *right?* By flirting, of course.

Sleeping with each other the first night you meet really eliminates the need for small touches and lingering glances, but now Lance is just a guy with a crush. A super, mega, all-encompassing crush. And he's going to flirt his ass off, even if it kills him. He has been given a second chance, and he's never letting go this time.

Keith is giggling, a small blush dusting his cheeks as he tries and fails to wrap the empanada in his hand. “How did you make it look so easy?” He mumbles, leaning in closer and sticking his tongue out adorably as he concentrates on fixing it.

Lance reaches in and pinches one of the ends. “Your filling is falling out.”

“I’m trying my best!”

“Jesus, Keith, have you ever cooked anything in your life?”

“What part of *private chef* doesn't make sense to you?” Keith snaps back, raising an eyebrow.

“Almost all of it.”

Keith bites his lip and returns his attention back to the mess in his hands. “Then allow me to explain it to you.” He says. “I have *never,* within the last *fifteen years* of my life--” He pokes the side of the pocket of dough and it crumbles in his palm, “-- touched any of my meals before eating them.” He pouts despairingly at the deflated mess in his hand. Then he holds it out to Lance, eyes desperate. “Fix it?”

Lance smiles, “Okay.” He says softly. “Looks impossible, but I *do* have superhuman skills so--”

“Lance! Check on the rice! Turn the heat down!” Lance hears his mother barking commands at him and rolls his eyes.

“I’ll be right back.” He says, chuckling.

As he stirs the rice, he hears Maria babbling to Keith about the first time she ever made empanadas and how great she used to be at it, and Keith is chuckling uncontrollably as she tries to teach him step by step. Empanada filling ends up all over the floor and Keith apologizes a thousand times, saying over and over again “I'll clean it I'll clean it I promise!”
"How can someone be so astronomically horrible at this?" Maria asks snarkily. Keith is blushing.

“I feel attacked, I’m getting out of here.” He mumbles, smiling crookedly.

“How about you empty the dishwasher?” Lance asks. “Because my mom is going to ask me to do it in like three secon--”

“Lance!” His mother calls from upstairs. “Please remember to clear up the dishwasher!"

Lance grins, pointing to the stairs. “Yup, right on time.”

Keith shakes his head in disbelief, leaning over and opening the dishwasher. “Is every meal here like this?” He asks incredulously.

Lance nods. “Pretty much. Pidge and Hunk were pretty shocked when I first moved in because I made a spectacle out of every sandwich. I think it was some absurd form of culture shock.” Lance pauses, looking down at the rice swirling in the pot. “Also...I think we’re just really glad to have company.” He sends a smile Keith’s way and his heart flutters at the sight of the blush on Keith’s cheeks. Keith clears his throat, clearly flustered.

“Well...glad I could be here.” He says back, turning his attention to the dishwasher. It takes every ounce of strength in Lance’s body to look away.

Once the rice is done cooking, Lance begins to help Keith with the remaining dishes. Maria casually saunters out of the kitchen when Lance asks her to help out too, making up some bullshit excuse like “oh man I wish I could but my friend is calling me!”, which makes Lance roll his eyes. But it also means he has the kitchen alone with Keith...not that he cares.

Keith wipes a small sheen of sweat from his forehead. “Okay, I think just the silverware is left.” He says tiredly.

Lance chuckles. “You're not very used to doing chores, are you?”

Keith frowns at him. “You've been to my house. You tell me.” He crosses his arms over his chest.

Lance shuts the dishwasher and then turns to face Keith, trying to memorize everything about what he sees because Keith looks so incredibly attractive without even trying. God, Maria was right. Is he even a person?

There is still a small sheen of sweat on Keith's face from having it so close to the steaming dishwasher. Lance wants to drag his fingers along Keith cheekbone and wipe it away. Keith is looking at him strangely. “What?” He asks, sounding self conscious.

Lance shakes his head. “Nothing, nothing. Do you want a change of clothes? To sleep in, I mean.” Lance asks, trying to gain some version of his composure back. “Because those pants look…” His eyes scan over Keith’s slender thighs and thin hips, “too tight for sleeping.”

Keith shrugs, but he’s blushing. “I mean...sure.” He says shyly.

“Okay cool, follow me.” Lance dries his hands and drops the towel onto the counter, turning around and heading to the stairs. He hears Keith following him, and is suddenly incredibly nervous about the idea of Keith being in the room he grew up in. He feels like he’s in high school again, bringing a date home and feeling self conscious about showing them his room. Keith doesn’t seem to phased though, and walks into the doorway casually, glancing around before his eyes fall onto a picture next to Lance’s bed.
“Oh my god, this can’t be you. No way.” He says, biting his lip like he’s stifling a laugh. He leans in closer and squints at the picture. “Is that a buzz-cut?”

“I was like, seven! Leave me alone.”

“Oh my god. You were so pudgy!”

Lance leans over him, studying the picture. It was taken at a family picnic, years ago, and Maria has her arms around him. He was pudgier back then--before he got into sports for real.

“Do you have any idea what it’s like growing up with this family? It’s like a ticket to being stuffed with food until you die! And this was before I started playing basketball. All I did was play my gameboy and eat rice.”

Keith laughs. “So adorable, Jesus. You’re killing me.” It comes out gentle. Lance swallows.

“Stop looking at embarrassing pictures and change your clothes. Here,” He throws a shirt and a pair of pants at Keith’s face. “These are a little small for me so, they’ll fit you.” He smirks.

“Excuse me?” Keith snaps. “What are you implying?”

“That you are a tiny, small, miniscule, ant of a person.” Lance says teasingly, listing the words off with his fingers.

“You’re not much taller than me, asshole.”

“I think I am.” He says, taking a few steps into Keith’s personal space. He looks down at the boy’s angry face. “Yup, looks like I am.”

Keith scowls, standing up straighter. “Like two inches!”

Lance hums. “Or three.” He tilts his head to the side. “And a half.”

“That’s an exaggeration.” Keith says flatly.

“Well why don’t you put on my pants and we’ll see for ourselves?”

Keith grumbles indignantly as he shucks off his pants, not even being a little cautious that Lance is right there. Lance swallows dryly as he scans over the strong, pale thighs and small, tight black briefs. Jesus it’s been so long. Too long. His skin is buzzing and all he can think about is slamming Keith onto his bed and making him moan until they both can’t breath anymore and okay cool now he can’t think about anything else.

Keith is in his pants now. Like, his literal pants. And Lance tears his eyes away from Keith’s...ass area to look back up at his eyes, which look thoroughly disappointed. “They’re not...that much longer?” Keith tries.

Lance glances at Keith’s feet, which have been completely swallowed up by the navy blue pants, and bursts out laughing. “Oh my god!”

“Okay, fine, shut up.”

“Oh my god!” Lance laughs.

“Alright! You win! I’m...smaller than you.”

Lance steps forward, still chuckling. Keith pouts but doesn’t step away. “So much tinier.” He says
Keith familiar cologne is suddenly invading all of his senses and he clears his throat, heat rising in his face as he remembers the small, tight briefs covering Keith’s stupid, attractive ass. “Let’s try the shirt now, shall we?” He says, voice suddenly a slightly different tone. Keith raises an eyebrow at him and Lance sees him visibly swallow.

“It’s going to be long, too.” Keith mumbles.

“Well let’s see.” Lance reaches forward and tugs at the bottom of Keith’s polo, hiking it up to reveal a sliver of Keith’s pale skin. “First we gotta take this off…” He says slowly. His eyes dart up to Keith’s face to gage a reaction, and Keith looks back at him with a questioning expression. Lance takes it as a green light and tightens his grip on the hem of the shirt.

Keith is leaning in closer but it doesn’t look like he realizes it. Their faces are suddenly only a few inches away from each other. “Pretty sure I can take off my own shirt.” He says teasingly, but he doesn’t move Lance’s hands away.

“I’m not sure about that…” Lance says, voice quieter. He hikes up the shirt even more and flattens his palms onto the smooth, warm skin of Keith’s stomach. “Your arms are much too short.” He feels the muscles jump beneath his touch.

“Fuck off…” Keith says, and it sounds distant.

Lance lets the shirt fall back down momentarily before sliding his hands back up again. His fingers tingle and burn when they come into contact with Keith’s skin. A feeling that is so familiar in practice but so foreign at the same time. Screw flirting. This feeling is too strong, too engulfing, too intense for some high-school level flirting. Lance knows Keith. He knows what he likes. He knows what gets him off, what makes him scream, what makes his toes curl. And their relationship has never been about doing things halfway, anyhow.

He lets out a shaky sigh, falling forwards and jerking away slightly as their noses brush together. He slides his hands further up Keith’s torso and he hears Keith take in a wobbly breath as his hands run lightly over his nipples, then back down again.

“Lance…” Keith says weakly.

“Is this okay?” Lance whispers, watching as Keith’s eyes flutter shut.

“I...don’t know…” Keith mumbles.

“Do you...want me to stop?”

Keith takes a deep breath and tugs his shirt over his head, tossing it to the side. “No.” He breathes. And then he’s leaning forward and pressing his lips to Lance’s so quickly that Lance actually stumbles backwards slightly, electricity crackling across his skin at the feeling of Keith’s lips on his again after so long.

He pushes his tongue into Keith’s mouth eagerly and they stumble backwards, finally falling onto his bed, where Lance climbs on top of him and straddles his hips, pushing them together. Keith whines shakily into his mouth and then breaks slightly from the kiss. His lips brush against Lance’s as he speaks, hands roaming up his thighs and lightly over his pants zipper. “God, you’re so hot, so fucking hot I miss touching you --”

Lance literally can’t handle the sound of Keith voice, low and raspy like this, and crashes their mouths together again. He’s about to lose it. He’s about to slip into a dangerous, dangerous place that he worked so hard to get out of, but he doesn’t care because Keith’s lips are almost boiling hot.
against his and Keith’s fingers are teasing at the button on his jeans and the whole room feels like it’s spinning and Keith is in his bed-- the ‘soulmate’ bed-- that he tried to keep empty for so long. And even if Keith isn’t the one, he doesn’t care. Because this moment would be worth it. This feeling would be worth it.

A knock on the door startles both of them and they jerk away from each other. Lance clumsily falls off of the tiny twin bed as his mother’s voice comes through the door. “Dinner is ready!”

He can hear Keith panting, still laying on his bed, and he stays in his place on the floor, afraid to move.

“Oh man.” Keith says, voice rough. And then he is laughing. “Oh man, that could’ve been bad.”

Lance starts laughing too, a warm, affectionate feeling filling his chest as Keith’s laughter fills the room. “Yeah, thank god she knocked.”

“We should probably...not do this. While your family is around.”

“Maybe not.”

Keith stands up and shakes his head roughly, trying to fix his hair. He runs a couple of fingers through it, then picks up Lance’s shirt from the floor and slips it over his head. Surprisingly, it fits him quite well in the chest area, but the length goes past the small swell of his ass and to the back of his thigh.

Lance snorts a small chuckle and Keith flips him off.

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After Lance and his two brothers argue about what to watch for about twelve and a half minutes, they all settle for Food Network. Keith is sitting with his shoulder and thigh pressed against Lance and his face is still burning with the memory of what happened before dinner.

He really should've stopped Lance. He should've stopped...whatever it was, because they could both go for less things to complicate their relationship. But Lance’s hands just felt so comfortable, so familiar, and Keith wanted it more than he has wanted anything in a long time. Lance has a way of getting under his skin. He has a way of making Keith feel completely powerless, completely unable to make his own decisions, and it’s terrifying but also highly addictive and...Keith really shouldn’t have agreed to spend the night here.

Now, almost all of Lance’s family is crammed into their tiny living room. He’s sharing a small, yellow floral armchair with Lance, who is almost on top of him, and trying very hard to control the lower half of his body because there are children here, dammit. Every now and then Lance will lean over and say something about what’s on TV. His breath tickles Keith’s neck and send sparks up his spine. Everyone else in the rooms seems incredibly exhausted. Lance’s mother and father are already staring at the TV with drooping eyes and Lance’s two brothers are almost fast asleep on the couch, despite the incredibly strong fight they put up to get what they wanted on TV. Maria is staring down at her phone, laughing at something that, according to Lance, is probably a stupid meme, and Keith is having trouble thinking straight because now, not only does Lance smell like Lance, but the clothes on his own body do too. And he can’t separate them. It feels intimate. It feels personal and it makes him feel so vulnerable. Because now he can’t breathe in without
smelling it, no matter where Lance is. It doesn’t help that in this particular situation, Lance is in his lap.

Maria looks up from her phone. “Ugh, I hate this show!” She says, throwing a stray sock at the screen. “Turn it off.”

“What? No way!” Lance exclaims. “Look, they’re making a dessert with edamame! How wild is that?”

She rolls her eyes. “I can’t believe it’s been six years and you still watch this trash.”

“This is not trash! This is a culinary fight to the death!”

Keith giggles. “Chopped is kind of trash, Lance.” Maria hums in agreement.

Lance whirls around to face him. “You’ve betrayed me!” He says dramatically.

Keith bites back a smile. “I’m just telling the truth.”

Maria sighs, long and loud. “Well, I’m going upstairs. There’s nothing else on anyway.” She gets up and slowly starts waking up her parents, telling them to follow her. Lance’s brothers stir awake at the noise and they get up, rubbing their eyes in a cute, sleepy way that Lance always does, which makes Keith’s heart warm significantly. He watches as they all get up groggily, waving goodbye to him and trudging up the stairs.

Lance sighs. “I’m actually pretty tired too…” He shuts the TV off and the whole room is engulfed in darkness. “We should probably go upstairs.”


“Uh...the guest room should have some new sheets. I’ll double check.”

Keith nods, a little disappointed. When he realizes it’s dark and Lance can’t see his reaction, he clears his throat. “Okay.” He stands up and then there is a pause. He can’t hear Lance moving. “Lance?” He asks, into the darkness.

A hand falls onto his shoulder. “Unless you wanna...come to mine?”

Butterflies swirl around in Keith’s stomach. “What do you mean?”

“I mean...I’m not sure if the guest bed is made and... it’s not like we haven’t done it before.”

Keith swallows. “Oh. Okay.”

“I mean, only if it’s okay with you.”

Yes. Yes. One thousand times yes. “No, it is. It’s...yeah.”

Lance breathes a little laugh. “Okay.” He whispers. “Come on, then.”

They make their way to the stairs and Keith’s heart is dangerously close to exploding, because there is no way he can actually handle this. As a human being, he is not strong enough. And Lance was right, because they have laid in beds together and they have spent entire nights together, however they’ve never done those things at the same time. They have never spent an entire night lying in bed together. And this….this is actually, truthfully, going to kill Keith. He isn’t going to wake up tomorrow.
Lance strips off his shirt and Keith feels like it’s only fair if he does the same. Lance turns on the small lamp on the side table and it fills his bedroom with a dim, orange light that just makes his skin look even more soft, even more deep and irresistible, and Keith feels dizzy with the desire to press it against him. To feel every inch of it.

Lance sighs and crawls into his bed, which happens to be the tiniest bed Keith has ever seen, and Keith just kind of stares at him, probably making this situation a whole lot more awkward than it needs to be. Lance peeks his eyes out from under the covers and raises an eyebrow at Keith, hair a ruffled mess and cheek squished by the pillow. “You coming?” He asks, voice muffled into the covers.

I love you. I love you. Oh my god, I love you. Keith’s heart is racing, threatening to burst out of his chest. I love you so much. “Yeah, sorry.” He says, clearing his throat. “I am.”

Lance chuckles. “Didn’t know my body was that distracting.” He jokes, and Keith shoves him as he climbs in.

“Don’t flatter yourself.”

“Hm, I’ll try not to. But you were the one calling me hot last time I checked.”

Keith flushes, burying his face into the pillow. “You know I think you’re hot.”

“Well now I just think you’re annoying.”

“I’m so hot that it annoys you. I get it. Happens to most people when they meet me.” Lance jokes.

“Oh my god. Where is the guest room again?”

“Oh shut up.” Lance chuckles, swatting at Keith’s shoulder.

The silence that fills the air is surprisingly a comfortable one. Keith finds it so strange that after everything that has happened, there is very little awkwardness between them right now. He doesn’t know what that means, but the heat in his chest leads him to believe that it might be a good thing.

Lance turns around to face Keith, who is still looking at the ceiling. Keith can feel Lance’s breath tickling his ear. “My family really likes you.” He says softly.

Keith snorts. “I don’t know why. I showed up here unannounced and ate all of your food.”

Lance chuckles. “That’s the secret, though. They love it when people do that.”

“Well, I’m honored.”

“Maria has a huge crush on you. I knew she would. It’s hard not to.”

Keith grins. “You calling me hot too?” He can hear Lance’s smile.

“I mean, I’m not calling you ugly.”

Keith finally turns around and faces Lance, because he can only handle not looking at him for so long, especially when he is right there. “You look a lot like your mom.”

Lance bites his lip. “I get that a lot.”
“But you get your freakishly long limbs from you dad. Your brothers do too, apparently.”

Lance pouts. “They’re not freakish!”

“Hmm, hold out your hand.” Keith says, smiling. Lance lifts his hand from under the covers and Keith gently grabs his wrist. “I’m about to do a scientific experiment so watch closely.” Keith says in a low voice.

Lance has a small blush in his cheeks. “Okay.”

Keith uses his own hand to uncurl Lance’s fingers and spread them out. He presses their palms together and aligns every knuckle, brushing lightly with his fingertips as he straightens out Lance’s long fingers. Lance’s fingertips tower over his. Keith loves how pale his hand looks against Lance’s dark skin.

“See? Freakish.” He says softly.

“Are we having a Tarzan moment?” Lance whispers.

“I think we are, Lance...I think we are.”

“This is magical.”

“You’re changing the subject.”

“Is the subject that you’re fingers are insanely stubby and mine are a completely normal length?”

Keith muffles his laugh into his pillow. “Fuck you.”

Lance giggles and Keith watches him as he stares at their hands, pressed together between their bodies. Lance’s features are soft, sleepy, and so inviting. Keith never noticed the small freckle Lance has on the corner of his right eyelid. He never noticed that Lance a crescent shaped scar next to his hairline. He never noticed that there is a tiny patch of Lance’s left eyebrow that is missing hair--so small that you’d never be able to notice unless you really, really looked.

I’m in love with you. I’m in love with you. Keith thinks it over, and over, and over again.

Lance shifts his hand so that his fingers fall between Keith’s, and then he slowly intertwines their fingers together. The movement is light, and hesitant, as if Lance think’s he’ll break something that isn’t there. Keith continues to stare at the small gesture, heart pounding wildly and heat spreading like wildfire throughout his entire body. Lance is holding his hand. Lance is holding his hand. The boy that he spent five months fucking is now intertwining their fingers and holding on for dear life and Keith has never, ever, felt anything like this before. He feels the overwhelming sensation of fear throbbing in his gut but it’s somehow overshadowed by the undeniable affection that has his chest hurting and his fingers twitching out of place, letting go of Lance’s hand. Keith very urgently pushes himself out of the warm bed starts pacing wildly across the room, running his hands down his face. “Okay. Okay, I can’t-- I need to tell you something.”

Lance sits up in bed, eyes wide and a little frightened. “What is it? I’m sorry, I shouldn’t--”

“No, it’s okay.”

Lance continues looking at him, raising an expectant eyebrow. Slowly, he climbs out of bed and walks towards Keith. “Are you alright?” He asks.
Keith swallows hard as Lance gets closer. He can’t do this anymore. *Say it. Just tell him.* But now Lance is standing in front of him, so close that Keith can feel his breath on his lips, even if only a little. And his heart is pounding and he feels like he’s seventeen again, sitting with Shrio in his car and dying to say how he feels. But this is different. Because this isn’t Shiro, it’s Lance. And Lance has always been different, ever since day one. Ever since Lance poured him a glass of lemonade after they hooked up, he’s been different. Lance let him stick around at the gym and doodle on blank membership forms and Lance went to his *business conference* and Lance asked about his family and woke him up every two hours when he had a concussion and made him breakfast in the morning and Lance made him a better person. Now when Keith looks at himself in the mirror, he sees someone who is *trying*. And he never did that before. He never *tried* to be happy before.

So when Keith opens his mouth, expecting to hear himself say, “I have feelings for you.,” the nerves take over, shaking him to his core and completely wiping all logic from his mind. Feeling dangerously frightened, what he ends up blabbering is quite different from what he planned.

“L-look, you were my soulf**k. Well I mean, that’s what I *thought*— I mean I initially had spelled it S-O-U-L you know like heart and soul and all that? Like soulmate except soul *f**k* but—maybe I got the spelling wrong because, well, you know, sole like S-O-L-E is… I'm not talking about like ‘sole of a shoe’ I’m talking sole like ‘solo’ like ‘only one’ and maybe that’s the spelling I was looking for because you’re the *sole* f**k, like ‘only-one f**k’ meaning you’re the only person—“ Keith swallows. “—that I want to f**k.”

Lance blinks at him. Then blinks again. “What the *hell* are you talking about?”

Keith clears his throat. “Um.” He says nervously. *Say something else, dammit—* "Do you...like lobster?”

“Lobster?”

“The shellfish? The...red one? I mean it’s kind of pricey but you know...rich family, and all that.”

Lance’s eyes widen as he raises an eyebrow. “Are you...asking me out?”

Keith swallows, a furious blush burning it’s way onto his face. “No. That would be weird. Wouldn’t that be weird? That would be weird, right?”

A slow smile spreads across Lance’s face. “Oh my god, Keith, you’re *asking me out.*”

“No! No, I just—“ Keith groans in frustration and buries his face in his hands. “ *God* I’m just—“

“Just what?” Lance says, stepping in closer. Keith feels a hand on his cheek, warm and gentle and so achingly familiar. Lance’s face is a breath away, close and tempting. “You’re just *what* , Keith?”

Keith swallows hard. “I-I’m just...” Fears claws at his chest, making it difficult to breathe, and Lance’s smell fills all of his senses and he’s so dizzy and how is it that this boy makes everything in his life so fucking *overwhelming*?

Lance’s hands move, fingers lacing into the hair on the back of his neck. He nudges their noses together. “What is it?” He asks again, voice softer.

Keith’s eyes flutter shut and he shakes his head slightly. He can’t do this. He came all this way and *he can’t do this-*

“Just say it, Keith.” Lance whispers. And Keith can feel the heat rising around them. He can feel
the hurricane in his chest and the thunder in his head and Lance’s lashes flutter lightly against his
and he just fucking loses it.

“I’m so in love with you.” He finally breathes, chest aching. "I just don’t know what to d--mph!”

He feels Lance deflate against him and then Lance’s lips are crashing into his, firm and hot and so
desperate that Keith almost feels like he’s suffocating. They stumble backwards so that Lance has
him against the wall, pressed so tightly together that Keith can’t move, and Lance’s hands are all
over him, digging into his hips and dragging up his thighs. Keith gets lost in the sensations-- the
taste of his lips and the feeling of his hands and the smell of his clothes. He is gasping for breath
when Lance separates their lips for just a moment, nudging forwards and breathing heavily into his
mouth like he’s counting down before he can close in again. He gathers up Keith’s hair in his fists
and buries his face into Keith’s neck, leaving rough, open-mouthed kisses along the bottom of his
jaw and panting against his collarbone and Keith is shaking at the intensity of the moment and it’s
so good but so much and he places a hand in Lance’s hair, pulling him back slightly. Lance stares
down at him, looking thoroughly offended. His lips are red and bitten and his face is bright pink.

“Lance.” Keith says, voice rough. “Maybe I should--”

“I love you too.” Lance says, urgently nudging their noses together. “I love you too, of course I
love you too. Jesus Christ, Keith, at least it took me less time spit it out. Now please shut up and
kiss me.” He grabs Keith’s face again and Keith feels like he’s floating, like none of this is real
and this is all just a dream because there's no way that someone can make him feel this good. This
happy. There's no way that Lance loves him-- that out of all of the people in the world that Lance
can love, he loves Keith. Keith, who can’t cook, and can’t stand up for himself, and sucks at
networking and lived his entire life hiding behind people to avoid being himself. Lance loves
him. Saw him for who he was and loves him just like that. And Keith is drowning, and melting, but
somehow feels like he can breathe for the first time in such a long, long time.

Lance is kissing him like his life depends on it, and Keith can’t help but feel like it does. He falls
into it, into Lance, and then to his surprise, Lance breaks away from him, whimpering slightly.
“Okay wait. Just wait.” He says, putting a finger to Keith’s lips. “I just have a question.”

Keith swallows hard, suddenly panicking. “What? What is it?”

Lance’s grin spreads across his face, breathtaking and slow. “Soulfuck ?”

Keith’s face burns. “Can you please forget you heard that?”

“Absolutely not.” Lance says, giggling, but Keith is already tugging him back in again, and this
time Lance doesn’t pull away.
Chapter Summary

sex! and fluff! and closure! yep that's about it. some veryyy light bondage. like im not even sure if it counts as bondage. and yeah!

Chapter Notes

WOW Im sorry this is so fucking late, my life has been in shambles lol. but here it is! I.dont even know what to say about it! wow, okay!

You have all been so amazing--i really did not expect the amount of love that i ended up getting when i first posted this fic. truly, i have been touched by all of your words and your support means so much to me, as i continue on this "improving my writing and myself" journey. i love you all endlessly. wow, we made it! what a freaking rollercoaster omfg. hugs <3

oh and BAM here i go being trash again with my new Klance fic! If you give a shit, the link is here! ---> http://archiveofourown.org/works/12402426/chapters/28220805

xoxo

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance wakes up with burning hot weight on his chest and hair sticking to his forehead with sweat. He cranes his neck downwards, hearing it crack slightly, and lets out a long breath of relief when he sees Keith draped over his torso, sound asleep.

He can’t believe it. In all honestly, he can’t believe that any of this has happened to him. He doesn’t know what he did right to deserve this space heater of a boy pressed against his middle. As the memories from the night before come crashing into him, one by one, he feels the heat rising in his cheeks and has to bury his head into his pillow to hide the idiotic, painfully large smile that is blossoming across his face. He is so in love. Holy shit, he is so in love. And Keith is here, looking as beautiful as always, even with the puddle of drool forming on Lance’s shirt and the small little crusties in the corners of his closed eyes. Lance feels like his head hasn’t stopped singing for hours. He reaches a finger down to Keith’s bottom lip and swipes across it lightly. Keith’s eyebrow twitches, irritated by the touch, but he stays asleep. Lance stifles a giggle.

“Keith.” He whispers. “Keith. Wake up.” He shakes him lightly. “I have something important to tell you.”

“Mmmm?” Keith mumbles, stirring against him.

“There's something I need to tell you.”

Keith stirs, groaning.
“Wake up, you grump.”

A tired sniff. “Right now?”

“Yes. It's urgent.”

“If you say something corny I swear to god--”

“It's not corny it's a big deal.”

“Better be important.” Keith drawls lazily.

Lance bites his lip. “I still have you under ‘hot guy from bar’ in my phone.”

Keith's head lifts from his chest, tired eyes looking even darker than usual. He raises an eyebrow. “Are you kidding me?”

“Kinda wish I was.”

“Oh my god.” Keith grins, sleepy and warm. “Oh my god I hate you.”

“I just never changed it! And I don't think I ever will so. Just thought I'd tell you.”

“You put me in your phone as ‘hot guy from bar’?”

“I mean, it was an accurate description at the time.”

“What the fuck time is it? This couldn't wait ?”

“When love comes knocking, you gotta answer, my friend.”

“Get me out of here.” Keith giggles, squirming off of Lance, but his attempt to leave fails as he is pulled back down.

“Okay, okay I'll stop talking. Just don't leave!”

Keith bites his lip, nuzzling his face into Lance’s chest. “I won’t.”

Lance can hear signs of life in the kitchen; Maria’s loud complaining and the smell of his mother’s signature omelettes float through the small opening in the doorway.

“Smells really fucking good.” Keith mumbles into Lance shirt.

“Mmhmm.” Lance replies, carding a hand through Keith’s thick hair. “We should get up and eat.”

“Yeah, that’s...a plan.”

Neither of them move. Lance chuckles.

“Well, so much for that.”

He can hear Keith pouting. “I’m so hungry.”

“Dilemma of the century.”

“How about we just lay here for like...a little longer.”
Lance smiles to himself. “Yeah, okay.”

***

When they finally go downstairs, Maria looks back and forth between Lance and Keith like she’s just discovered a gold mine. She turns to her mother and they share an annoyingly smug look. Lance blushes furiously and Keith pretends not to notice.

***

Keith tosses his barely packed duffle bag into the car. After a very large breakfast, he feels like he’s going to fall asleep on the road. But with breakfast he also had about two gallons of coffee to try and avoid that feeling, so now his fingers are jittering and his eye is twitching ever so slightly.

He really doesn’t want to leave, but deep down he knows that Lance deserves some time alone with his family after all they’ve been through. Maria looks at him with a petrified face when he opens his arms to hug her, as if she’s afraid to touch him. Lance teases her about it for twenty minutes after it happens, claiming that he missed out on years of teasing Maria about boys and now he’s gotta make up for it. Lance’s mother gives him a hug as well, urging him to come back soon and giving him an expectant, happy look. Keith’s heart feels too full as he watches them walk back into the house, leaving only Lance outside with him.

“You gonna be okay driving alone?” Lance asks, sounding oddly shy as he stuffs his hands into his pockets. “You sure you don’t wanna call me from the road?”

Keith smiles, warmth pooling in his stomach. “I don’t know. We’ll see.”

Lance sends him a soft look. “I’ll keep my phone near me.”

A silence settles between them that isn’t entirely awkward. Keith watches as the slight breeze blows Lance’s long bangs out of his eyes, which are an unapologetic teal in the afternoon sunlight. *You’re so beautiful. So fucking beautiful*, Keith thinks. And then he realizes he can say it. He can actually *say it* this time and he opens his mouth and his cheeks are burning and Lance speaks first, cutting him off.

“Are we…” He clears his throat and laughs nervously. “God, I don’t know why I’m nervous to ask this. I mean, I... Jeez .” He shakes his head. Keith raises an eyebrow.

“What is it?”

Lance reaches forward and covers Keith’s entire face with his hand; long, slender fingers brushing at his hairline. “I can’t ask you anything remotely logical when you look this pretty. Ew, listen to me. I’m a mess.”

“What is it, Lance?” Keith muffles into his palm, heart threatening to burst out of his chest at Lance’s stupid adorableness.
“Are we...like...dating?”

Keith snorts into Lance’s hand, which has Lance yanking it away and yelping in disgust. “Ew, the fuck, Keith?”

Now Keith is laughing out loud, trying to control it but failing miserably. Every time he looks at Lance and sees his mortified face it just makes him laugh harder.

“What? Why are you laughing?” Lance shrieks, clearly offended. “Come on, man!”

Keith finally starts to calm down now, rubbing the tears from his eyes and blushing like an idiot. “Lance. Yes. Of course we’re dating. Seriously?”

“Well I don’t know!” Lance says defensively. “In case you haven’t realized, our relationship has gone through a lot of phases! One of them being ‘business associate who I dry hump in hotel showers!’”

Keith giggles again. “Well, no more phases.” He says, sounding way too soft for his own good. He sees Lance swallow, then a crooked smile spreads across his face and he steps in closer to Keith.

“Well thank god for that.” He responds quietly. Then he is holding Keith’s face in his hands and kissing him with purpose, lips pressed together firmly and nose pressed into Keith’s cheek. Keith sighs, long and relieved, and pulls him closer. Why has he spent so long trying to manufacture his own happiness, trying to force it, when it was right here the whole time? Right here, in Lance; in his lips and his waist and his short, wispy eyelashes. How is it that the answer could have been so simple after all of his unnecessary suffering?

Shiro was right-- Keith never cared about the fancy things. Happiness for him is pure and simple. And he loves it that way. He loves Lance and it’s just like that; pure and simple.

Lance separates from him with a long breath and doesn’t pull back any further. Keith lets the words tumble out of his mouth. “I love you.” He says. And he’s going to say it all the time, no matter how scared he is.

“Hmm, you’re alright too I guess.” Lance says through a smirk, and Keith swats him upside the head.

“I’m outta here.” He scoffs, playfully pushing Lance away.

“Bye darlin’!” Lance says in a poorly executed southern accent. “Call me from the road! Oh, and text me when you get home!”

Keith grins. “Yeah, yeah whatever.”

As he pulls out of the driveway, he sees Lance waving wildly from the porch with a breathless grin on his face.

Honestly, even if he falls asleep at the wheel, this was so worth it.

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Allura is the one who answers the door. “Keith!” She says, in an exciting greeting. “You’re home!
Come in, come in. Shiro’s in the living room.”

Of course Keith stops by at Shiro’s place before heading home. He’s excited to tell Shiro that he finally did something right in his life. Also, he feels like he’s going to explode if he doesn’t talk about it. So he doesn’t even give Shiro a chance to say anything before his ass is on the couch and his face is all up in Shiro’s personal space. “Hi.” He says shyly.

Shiro smiles knowingly. They’ve been friends long enough for Shiro to understand Keith’s not-so-subtle body language. “Hey, Keith.”

“So I went to Lance’s house.”

Shiro nods slowly. “Yes...and...?”

“Oh. His sister is really funny. But like also very nervous...like, as a person.” Allura chuckles softly as she sits next to Shiro on the couch.

“Very interesting.” She says expectantly.

Keith clears his throat. “And his mom made empanadas.”

“Astounding.” Shiro replies, starting to grin slightly.

“We watched...the Food Network.” His voice cracks slightly.

“Always a good time.” Allura nods.

“And...he let me borrow his clothes. And...uh...”

Shiro and Allura share a look, raising their eyebrows and smiling at each other. Then Shiro turns back to Keith, and in a soft, gentle voice, he asks, “And he loves you too?”

Keith can’t even control the smile that breaks across his face. Heat springs to his cheeks. “And he loves me too.” He repeats, letting it go like a breath that he’s been holding, and he bites his lip as he watches Shiro and Allura as both of their faces light up at the same exact time--a little creepy, to be honest-- and Shiro claps him on the back.

“Oh course he does! What did I tell you?” Shiro shouts happily. “I’m proud of you, man.”

Allura nods. “We both are. You are going to be so happy with him! I just know it.”

“Oh! Shiro, we should go on a double date! You know how much I have been wanting to do that! But none of your friends ever want to.” Allura says, pouting. Then she looks at Keith. “We can go to the most exquisite places, you’ll see! Oh, it’ll be so fun!” She slaps excitedly at Shiro’s shoulder and Shiro clears his throat, grinning and rolling his eyes slightly.

“We’ll think about it, princess.” He responds, using the nickname that he always uses when Allura gets really excited about something. Then Shiro stands up, dusting himself off. “So, what now, then?” He asks, holding out a hand. Keith takes it and let’s Shiro pull him up. He looks at the face that he knows so well; the jagged scar and the kind eyes that used to make him cry into his pillow for hours and hours-- and he feels relief. He feels joy. He feels love.

“Now I guess I just...” Keith shrugs. “Live?”
Shiro nods, a smug smile plastered onto his face. “Well, I don’t usually like swearing...but fucking finally, Keith.”

***

“So it looks like I have about two games a week, starting tomorrow.” Lance says from Keith’s bed, where he’s laying on his stomach and jotting notes down on a printout of his basketball schedule. He puts the tip of the pen in his mouth and speaks around it. “So tomorrow is my first game, and then I have another one on Friday.”

Keith finally finishes brushing his teeth and flops down onto his back, falling next to Lance. It’s been about two weeks since Lance came home from his family’s house and he’s already spent a lot of time at Keith’s place, which is something very foreign to both of them. Keith can tell that his mother is still very uncomfortable with their friendship, or rather, relationship, but she has slowly been showing Keith more signs that she is trying her best; a hesitant smile at Lance when he passes her in the living room, a quiet “next to the sink” when Lance couldn’t find the forks. It’s like a block of ice that is slowly thawing, and although the air is still quite tense, Keith’s parents are definitely making an effort and Lance is as well. Maybe it will never be perfect, but Keith is grateful and refuses to take even the smallest actions for granted anymore.

“Wow, first game.” He says. “You nervous?”

Lance scoffs. “Nervous? Me? You’re joking, right?”

“I mean, I would be.”

“I’m excited, Keith! This is my first big game! It’s college basketball! It might even be on the local news channels.” Lance scribbles an wild patch of swirlies into the margin of his very organized schedule. “Gah! So excited!”

Keith turn his head and looks upwards slightly, in order to see Lance’s face from where he’s laying. “I’m excited for you, too.” He says. “You worked hard for this.”

“Hell yeah I did!” Lance says through a smile, drawing a little happy face next to the words “Home Game #1” on his schedule. “And practices haven’t been easy, either!”

Team Altea has had practice for four hours every day during the past two weeks. It’s apparently how the team is always does it. They open the season with two weeks of rigorous practice before the first game. They are able to do this because they start during the end of the summer, before classes start, so the students still have time to be practicing for half the day. Lance has already registered for his next round of classes and Keith has sat with him, helping him pick them out. It’s so weird to Keith, having someone to do such boring things with, but then somehow those things aren’t boring anymore. They had spent five hours looking at classes and Keith didn’t even check the time on his phone once. At first he thought he was losing his mind, but then Shiro clarified that yes, that’s one of the side effects of being hopelessly in love with someone. Keith reaches out a finger and pokes Lance’s cheek. Lance raises an eyebrow at him.

“Can I help you?”

“Just...poking.”
Lance’s lips quirk upwards. “Is this your way of telling me to pay attention to you?”

Keith frowns. “No...I have other ways of doing that.”

Lance turns back to the schedule, still very absorbed in his note-taking, and doesn’t pick up on Keith’s suggestive tone. He just snorts. “Oh yeah?” He says, not taking his eyes off the paper.

“Yeah.” Keith says, sounding a little confused. Should he be more obvious? He reaches his hand out and lets it slip beneath Lance’s shirt. “Yeah, I do.” He rubs small circles onto the smooth skin of Lance’s hip with his fingertips and sees Lance’s eyes unfocus, staring blankly at the paper.

Keith smirks. Too easy. “If you’re not going to pay attention to my poking then I gotta do something else.” He mumbles.

Lance sighs, but it sounds more like a laugh. “I have to plan this out...” He says, voice a little distant as he nibbles on his pen. Keith rides his hand up further.

“Right now?” He asks quietly, leaning in closer to Lance. “You have to finish it right now?”

Lance visibly swallows as Keith’s fingertips trail over his nipple. “Yes.”

Keith hums lowly, in a way that he knows Lance loves, and moves his hand down again. “That’s a shame.” He says, voice already dropping. He slips his hand underneath Lance’s briefs and squeezes one cheek hungrily. Lance lets out a shaky chuckle.

“Keith...”

“Come on, Lance.” He says. “You really wanna be one of those couples that just never has se--”

Lance pushes his papers off of the bed and rolls onto Keith, straddling him. “Don’t you dare finish that sentence.” He says. Keith bites his lip.

“See? I’ve got your attention now.”

“How very dare you.”

“I don’t even regret it.”

“How could you possibly insinuate such a horrific--”

“Okay, alright, enough with the drama.”

Lance chuckles. “Alright, so you’ve got my attention. Now what?”

Keith places his hands on Lance’s slender things and tilts his head to the side. “I mean...whatever you want.” He says in a low voice.

Lance bites his lip, smirking slightly. “Well...I wanna kiss you.”

“That’s a good start.”

Lance falls forward and their lips practically melt together in a practiced motion that has been done so many times. Lance’s deodorant smells like comfort. Lance’s lips feel like home. Keith runs his fingers up Lance’s smooth arms and actually feels every memory written across the rises and dips of his skin. He has memorized the pattern of slender muscles in Lance’s thighs. He recognizes the soft sound Lance makes when his hands slide higher and higher onto them. Everything about
Lance is so sweet, so familiar, and so inviting. Keith falls into it, heart reeling and head spinning. Even the safest kisses feel reckless, wild, and uncontrollable. Keith always loses half his mind when Lance touches him like this.

Lance hums into his mouth. “Love kissing you.” He mumbles.

Keith hums back in acknowledgement, pushing forward and throwing Lance off balance. Lance falls back against the cushions and Keith climbs on top of him, reversing their position and straddling his hips. Lance raises a questioning eyebrow at him, face flushed. “Problem?”

“You were taking too long.” Keith says, suddenly very impatient and very turned on. He grabs Lance’s wrist and holds them over his head, against the headboard. “Now hold still.” He says. Lance swallows and nods, eyes a little wide.

Keith pitches forward and nuzzles his face into Lance’s neck, leaving hot, open-mouthed kisses along his jawline and beneath his ear. Lance squirms underneath him, making a small, helpless noises and his wrists flex under Keith’s grip. Keith clenches his fist tighter around them, biting down on the base of Lance’s neck.

Lance groans in frustration. “Keith...come on man.” He says gruffly. “I really wanna touch you.”

Keith smirks against his neck and ignores him, now moving back up to attach their lips again. Lance tastes like salted caramel. He smells like Christmas morning. Keith feels intoxicated, slipping his tongue into Lance’s mouth and pushing in even closer.

Lance always makes these small, soft noises when they’ve been kissing for a long time; like he’s tired but doesn’t want to stop. Keith loves the sound of them, so gentle and full of desire. He breaks away from Lance for a moment, glancing around him room frantically to find--

“What? What is it?” Lance asks, voice already wrecked and all they’ve done is make out.

“I need something to….” Keith clears his throat. “Bind your wrists.”

Lance’s eyes widen. “You’re gonna tie me up?”

“Oh… I was planning on it. Why? Do you not want to?”

“You kiddin’ me? Go for it, man.”

Keith grins, eyes falling on a belt that he’d discarded on the floor yesterday. “That’ll do.” He climbs off of Lance and Lance hurriedly strips off his clothes and Keith takes time to do the same. He gets back onto Lance as quickly as possible, weaving the belt around and through his wrists and finishing it off with a tight knot behind Lance’s back.

Lance moves his arms slightly and his face turns bright red. “Holy shit...this is...uh…”

“A really expensive belt. So don’t struggle too much.” Keith says with a smirk, and before Lance finishes what he was going to say, Keith scoots even closer so his ass is in Lance’s lap, and then moves in for a kiss again.

This kiss is much sloppier. Much needier. As if they are both starting to lose their patience. Lance already seems to be having trouble with the knot behind his back, because Keith is trailing his hands all over Lance’s body and Lance can’t do the same. He bites Keith’s lip out of frustration but Keith just bites back, which elicits a small, low laugh from Lance.
Keith starts to rock his ass back and forth on Lance’s lap and Lance detaches their lips, gasping slightly. “Ohh man…” He says appreciatively, hips shifting slightly under Keith.”Oh man, your ass.”

Keith chuckles from somewhere deep in his throat. “What about it?” He says, starting to grind down harder. Lance whimpers and Keith can see his arms squirming against the tied belt.

“Jesus, Keith. Please…”

“Please what?” Keith picks up his rhythm. He can feel Lance getting hard through his briefs and it sets him off too, warmth beginning to pool between his legs. The small amount of friction is getting to him a lot more than he thought it would. He’s supposed to be the one in control right now but Lance bucks his hips upwards to meet Keith’s and suddenly he feels a lot less powerful, letting a small gasp fall from his lips.

Keith almost can't handle the way Lance sounds. It's too much for him. He loves it too much. He loves the familiar weight of Lance in his hand and he loves the rhythmic way his hips twitch and jump when he’s getting close. He loves all of it. And it's almost too much.

Lance’s breathing has picked up and Keith can feel his own heart rate elevating too. The room gets warmer. Lance makes an encouraging noise and Keith takes a shuddering breath.

“I’m going to ride you.” Keith says, voice raspy, as he lifts off of Lance’s lap slightly and slips his hand underneath his waistband. Lance makes a whining noise and arches his back upwards when Keith wraps his fingers around him, stroking him lightly. “I’m going to ride you…and you can’t touch me.”

Lance buries his face into Keith’s neck and moans brokenly and Keith quicken his pace, stroking faster and harder. “Please let me touch you.” He says, sounding desperate.

“Not until I tell you to.” Keith mumbles, voice rough.

Lance mumbles something low and filthy in Spanish, starting to pant into Keith’s shoulder as Keith slows his pace again, making the strokes painfully slow.

“Keith--” Lance rasps.

Keith has done this to himself a thousand times but never in front of anyone like this. Lance looks genuinely shocked when Keith reaches back, slipping a finger into himself and rocking onto it.

“Mmmf.” The noise involuntarily falls from his lips. “You can’t open me up so I gotta do it myself.”

“Holy shit, Keith.” Lance tries and fails to yank his arms out of the belt. His voice is strained. “You’re going to kill me.”
Keith ignores him, a light smirk on his face. His knees are on either side of Lance’s thighs and he
leans backwards, giving Lane a full view of his thighs and his torso as he fingers himself. Another
whimper escapes his lips and he pumps his finger faster, feeling his thighs begin to shake.
“Fuck…” He says, eyes fluttering shut. “Fuck, Lance. Feels so good…”

“Keith…” Lance’s voice cracks.

“Imagine if it were you…touching me.” Keith mumbles, voice surprisingly gravelly. Lance makes a
choked off noise.

“You’re so fucking hot. Please--”

Keith pumps his finger faster, curling it the way he usually does when he touches himself. It sends
a violent shudder down his spine.

“Shi-shit…” He’s starting to lose his composure and he hasn’t even put in a second finger yet. A
sudden wave of pleasure hits him and he collapses onto Lance, not prepared for it. Lance
immediately rolls his hips upwards at the contact, making a very appreciative noise. At the feeling
of their cocks rubbing together through their briefs, they both take a long, ragged breath.

“Keith, come on. Ride me already.” Lance whimpers, straining against the ties on his wrists.
“Please.”

Keith leans forward presses his lips to Lance’s in a hot, wet mess of a kiss as he adds a second
finger, moaning into Lance’s mouth and increasing his pace. He finds the sweet spot and hits it
every fucking time. He can feel himself loosening. He can feel Lance’s body jerking slightly
underneath his, desperate for any kind of contact. A shiver runs through him and he knows that if
he doesn’t stop, he’ll come.

“Mmk. You done begging?” He says into Lance’s ear, biting it hungrily afterwards. Lance makes a
downright pathetic noise that sounds like a sob.

“How are you so hot?” He asks distantly. Keith glances over Lance’s shoulder and sees red chafing
around his wrists from all of his straining. It makes him blind with arousal.

Slowly, he strips off his briefs and throws them aside. Lance lifts his hips hurriedly so Keith can
take his off as well. Keith grabs the bottle of lube and settles onto Lance’s lap, squirting some into
his hands. Lance watches him slick himself up and his ragged, short breaths fill the room.

“I haven’t been this hard...in...such a long time.” He says desperately. “Keith, come on--”

Without warning, Keith lines himself up and sinks down onto Lance. They both hiss loudly at the
feeling.

“Holy fuck--” Keith chokes out brokenly.

“O-oh my god. Keith…” Lance’s voice has dropped a whole octave. It’s scratchy and pleading and
Keith wants to hear it scream. Lance’s shoulders tense and loosen, lean muscles fluttering under
his skin as his hands attempt to grab at the sheets, at anything, but they are still bound tightly
behind him. Keith begins to move, starting at a painfully slow pace. He watches Lance’s bronze
skin flush a deep, beautiful scarlet. He watches a bead of sweat fall from Lance’s hairline. Sex with
Lance will never be boring. It will never be underwhelming. Their bodies fit together in an
astoundingly sexy way--like they were made to.

Everything about them is in sync; their breathing, their small noises, their loud moans, all fitting
seamlessly together, weaving through one another and creating something that can only truly be described as really, really good sex. It comes with practice, of course. But they’ve done enough of that.

Keith moves his hips hungrily, grinding down onto Lance with an increasing pace that has Lance pushing upwards, meeting him halfway with every thrust. The sound of skin slapping skin fills the room. Lance is shaking beneath him, struggling against his confines, panting deliciously as Keith falls forward, pressing their foreheads together. Lance smells sweet, and musky, and so fucking delicious. They breathe each other in, like they’ve done so many times before. Keith runs his hands down Lance’s smooth stomach, revelling in the jumping and rolling of his abs before digging his fingers into the warm skin there and increasing his pace even more.

Their lips meet again for another sloppy kiss, but it doesn’t last very long this time. Lance mumbles delicious noises against Keith’s mouth—small broken whimpers getting higher, faster, more pleading, and Keith loves it. It goes right to his dick. He’s committed these noises to memory. Nothing could ever make him forget.

Keith slows down slightly, pushing down painfully hard, tantalizingly slow, and he bathes in the way Lance seems to be unravelling. He goes on like this for a while, losing track of time and watching Lance’s face dissolve. Watching his muscles melt and then tense up, again and again and again.

He slams down against Lance particularly hard.

“Ah!” Lance’s whole body jerks upwards, back arching upwards, rubbing deliciously against Keith. “K-Keith—Not gonna last much longer.” He says quickly, head falling backwards and hitting the bed frame painfully hard. Keith can feel the heat collecting in his stomach, quicker than it ever has before. The muscles beneath his belly button jump, contracting painfully quickly. The edges of his vision begin to blur, thrusts getting sloppier, hands getting shakier, and he watches Lance’s face crumble into one of pure pleasure and holy shit Lance is shivering and he’s so close, and Keith is so fucking close—

Lance comes first, shaking violently and shouting Keith’s name, which makes Keith follow not soon after, jerking forward and spilling all over Lance’s dark, smooth stomach. He collapses onto Lance, feeling very weak and heavy-limbed. His heart rate is skyrocketing, pulsing through his ears. He can feel it in his fingertips. He can feel Lance’s pulse too; in his forehead, his wrist, his chest, his throat. Keith takes a very broken breath climbs off of Lance’s face, still tight behind his back. They sit in silence for a while, completely dazed. Keith feels like he’s floating. Lance’s voice, as usual, is the first to break the silence.


Keith chuckles into his neck. “I think you like being tied up.” He says.

“Holy fucking shit!” Lance says one more time, voice cracking. “What the fuck did I do to deserve you?”

Keith lifts his head, finally looking at Lance. He bathes in the afterglow. Post-sex Lance is easily Keith’s favorite thing in the entire world. His dark skin, smudged and flushed with reds and pinks. The light sheen of sweat that covers his whole body, making the high points of his face shimmer. The blown out pupils and the bitten lips and the wild hair and the smell of sex. Keith can’t get enough. It’ll never be enough.
“Don’t even say that.” He mumbles. “You’re amazing and you know you are.”

Lance grins. “Hmmm…” He says, looking like he’s holding back a laugh. “Yeah, no, I’m sorry. I can’t take anything seriously because my wrists are still bound behind my back like we’re in some BDSM leather bar.”

Keith snorts a laugh, leaning over Lance’s shoulder and untying the knot. Lance sighs with relief as he brings his red, chaffed wrists into his lap, rubbing them gently. “Holy fuck…I didn’t even realize…”

Keith bites his lip. “Yeah.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him, holding his wrist up between them. “This turn you on?”

Keith flushes, feeling ashamed. “...yes.”

At this, Lance smirks. “Well good. Same.”

Keith’s stomach flutters at that and he chooses to ignore the already resurfacing arousal. He hops off the bed and searches the floor for his briefs. Lance sits up, still rubbing his wrists, and looks down at his stomach.

“Damn, Keith. You made a mess.” He says, in reference to the cum still splattered above his waistline.

Keith clears his throat, flushing again, “S-sorry.”

“Dude. Stop. You kiddin me? This is the hottest shit ever.”

Keith bites back a smile. “I can help you wash it off. You know. If you want.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “In the shower?”

Keith nods, already walking to the bathroom. Lance has things to do, so he really shouldn’t be distracting him this much. Her hears Lance following behind him, and makes the executive decision that yes , he will just wash Lance off, so that Lance can get back to work. It’s not fair for him to be all over Lance all the time. They have other things to do, ya know?

Keith turns on the water and steps into the shower. Lance follows close behind, sweeping the shower curtain closed and pushing Keith up against the wall. He kisses him tantalizingly slow. Electricity crackles across Keith’s skin.

*

They fuck again in the shower.

***

Lance can’t sleep. He’s sitting in his completely dark kitchen and happy-dancing in the dim refrigerator light, because for once in such a long, long time, he finally feels like things in his life
are falling into place. He’s never been so happy that he couldn’t sleep, but hey, there’s a first for everything, right?

His first basketball game is tomorrow. His dad said that he’d drive down to see it. Lance’s nerves are jittering and he can’t seem to sit still. The nervousness isn’t bad. It’s not anxiety, it’s pure excitement. And every time he closes his eyes he sees himself, alone and lying in an abandoned parking lot with scrapes across his body. He remembers that heavy feeling-- the feeling of wanting to give up. The feeling of hopelessness. Holy shit, he’s glad he didn’t. And when he compares that feeling to the light, fluttering one in his chest right now, he can honestly say that he might be flying.

Damn, when people tell you that things get better, they’re really not kidding.

“Lance, what the hell are you doing up?” Pidge’s exhausted voice fills the kitchen. “I’m the only person who should be awake at this hour.” The light flickers on and Lance screeches, covering his eyes.

“Jesus, Pidge!”

“Will you quiet down? Hunk is sleeping.” Pidge says, rolling her eyes and hoisting herself into a chair. She opens her laptop and the blue light of the screen glows onto her face. “So, what’s up? Couldn’t sleep? Are you nervous about the game?”

Lance shrugs. “Nope. I’m just pumped. The team is great so I really don’t see us flopping or anything.” He smiles a little to himself. “They are the best of the best, after all.”

Pidge chuckles. “You’re fishing for compliments, aren't you?”

“Yes, and I would very much appreciate you complimenting me instead of observing my insecure need for validation.” Lance flashes her a dazzling grin. Pidge bites her lip and she looks like she’s trying not to laugh.

“Okay fine.” She clears her throat dramatically. “Of course you made the team Lance. You are amazing. Congrats on the sports. And the sexy boyfriend. Your majesty deserves none other than the best.”

Lance hums. “I don’t appreciate the sarcasm, but eh, close enough.”

Pidge giggles and shakes her head, returning her attention back to the computer in front of her. “I really am proud of you though.” She says quietly. “And happy for you.”

Lance slaps a hand to his chest. “Awww! Pidge! You are so fucking cute ahhhg.”

“Stop it, seriously. Pretend I didn’t say anything.”

“Oh ho ho no, my heart is bursting and it’s because of you, my friend.”

“Please leave now.”

“I will not, because clearly you love me and can’t stand it when I’m not arou--”

“Lance, jeez, stop shouting!” Hunk is suddenly standing in the doorway, looking very disgruntled. “I heard you in my dreams. It’s 3AM!”

Pidge grunts, kicking Lance underneath the table. “Told you.” She says.
“You guys are both awake now! It’s a party!”

“I have two quizzes tomorrow.” Hunk says, unamused.

“Hunk.” Lance gasps, mock offended. “Is my happiness a burden to you?”

“Have you even gotten one hour of sleep since you started dating Keith?”

“He can’t help it. He’s wired to be controlled purely by his emotions.” Pidge deadpans.

“I have slept! Very well, in fact!”

“Well thank god for that. Wanna return the favor and let me sleep now?” Hunk says, rubbing his eyes. Lance chuckles softly, dropping the act.

“Sorry man. Yeah, I’ll head to bed now too.”

Hunk sends him a smile. “Great. Thanks.” He starts to walk back into his room and then sighs, turning around. “And Lance?”

“Yeah, Hunk?”

“I’m really happy...that you’re happy.”

Lance grins widely. “Yeah. I know you are.”

***

Keith walks into the empty warehouse. The air is stale. It smells like dust and rotting wood. The walls are made from a brick that looks like it’s decaying. The floors are a cracked concrete with dead grass peeking out in the gaps. When he rented it out, the floor looked a little better in the pictures. In reality, it’s a little worse for wear; but it’s his. It’s all his.

He takes a deep breath.

It’s perfect.

Keith has been researching properties for weeks, and this was the first one that caught his attention. The garage he wants to open is going to be very simple-- just like he is. No bells and whistles. Nothing selling it except honest hard work and good company. When he told Coran about his plan, the man was ecstatic. “Looks like we’ll be in competition!” Coran said, to which Keith replied, “Nah you’ll always beat me out.” Because it’s true. The people going to Coran’s garage have been going there for years and years. Keith wants to tap into a whole new market. Coran agreed to help him out.

It’s location is great; about a twelve minute drive from Altea University’s main campus, fourteen minute drive to Lance’s apartment, and on the edge of a large shopping Plaza that is always filled with people. The traffic around this area is probably insane, and the space looks like it would be very easy to work with. All he needs is some paint. Maybe some sand paper. Some wood planks….and lots of Lysol wipes. The best part about it is the small hallway that leads up the stairs to a loft. An apartment. A small collection of rooms with brick walls and exposed piping, but an apartment nonetheless. Garage on the first floor, living area on the second. What more could he
want, really?

A soft knock echoes through the empty room. “Damn, is this the place?”

Keith turns around and grins smugly at Lance. “Yup! Isn’t it great?”

“Hmmmm…” Lance looks around critically, stuffing his hands into his pockets. “Yeah. I think I can work with this.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “What?”

“The front desk can go...right here.” Lance walks over to the small opening on the side of the building. “And we can put the bin with all the tools right here.”

Keith crosses his arms. “You’re helping me?”

“Of course I am.”

“But your game is tonight. Don’t you need to like...save up energy or something?”

Lance scoffs. “Not if it means I miss a whole day that I could be spending with you.”

Keith flushes. “Jesus. You sound like you’re in love with me or something.”

“Ew, that would be weird.” Lance says with a smirk.

Keith giggles, running a hand through his sweaty hair. “Yeah. So weird.”

Lance’s hands drop from his pocket and he walks up to Keith, casually slinging his arms around Keith’s waist. “So?” He asks. “Where do we start?”

Keith looks up at the ceiling. “Hmm.” He hums. “We can start with all the junk in the loft. There are like twelve torn-up tires in there.”

A nod. “Alright, let’s go then!”

***

They are actually making progress, which is a good thing because Keith is absolutely exhausted, sore, covered in dirt and sawdust, and dripping with sweat. Lance, on the other hand seems to be faring just fine. He’s only got a couple small stains on his sleeveless hoodie and a thin layer of sweat covering his face. Keith wonders how rigorous Lance’s training must be, for him to be so energetic after hours of moving car parts and sanding down walls. It turns him on, okay? It really does. But they have work to do and he needs to stay focused.

Lance wipes his forehead with the back on his hand. “Man! That one was especially heavy!” He says. Taking a deep breath. “Okay, so I think I’m going to go start putting primer on that wall I sanded down. It should be smooth enough.” He scratches his cheek and leaves a smudge of dirt on it. Keith’s eyes focus in on it--a smudge on Lance’s otherwise perfect complexion. “I mean, I can always sand the primer down, to make it extra smooth before the paint, so I really--”

Keith grabs Lance and cuts him off with a kiss. Lance makes a garbled noise against his mouth and
then pulls back, eyes bright.

“Uh. Okay.” He says happily.

“Sorry…” Keith says, biting his lower lip. “Just. You look cute. And thank you. For, ya know.”

To Keith’s surprise, Lance blushes. “Jeez, Keith. Warn a guy.” He says, scoffing and trying to play it off. Keith grins.

“Sorry.”

Then Lance’s arms are around him, tight and practically suffocating in a very genuine hug. Keith returns it with equal amounts of strength. “Glad I could be here.” Lance muffs into Keith’s hair.

Keith nods into his chest. “Same.”

“This place is gonna look wicked cool when we’re done with it.”

“I sure hope so.”

“You doubting my interior decorating skills?”

Keith snorts. “Heavens, no.”

An alarm on Lance’s phone goes off and they step away from each other. Lance’s face is already lighting up as he fishes his phone out of his pocket. He slaps Keith’s shoulder excitedly. “Ahhh! Game time! Game time!”

Keith rubs his shoulder, surprised at how hard Lance can hit. Yet another little something he’ll file in the back of his mind…for a different time.

He grins at Lance. “God ahead. I’ll start cleaning up--”

Lance sprints out the door so fast that a gust of wind actually hits Keith in the face.

***

There is an actual crowd at this game. The bleachers are full in the small stadium. The bleachers. Are. Full. If someone else tried to get in, there wouldn’t be any more room for them. That’s how full they are. Lance’s whole body is on fire. He can’t remember the last time he was this excited for anything. He’s in the locker room with a few of his teammates, which is wild because he’s never had the luxury of being part of a team. They get along really well, to his surprise. Turns out that when you share a passion with someone, becoming friends with them is a whole lot easier.

He sees himself staring back from the mirror in front of him, and can’t seem to shake himself out of what can only be a day dream. But it’s not. It’s real. The baggy, reflective light blue jersey is real. It says ‘SANCHEZ’ on the back of it in bold, white letters. Now everyone will know who he is. Everyone will learn how he got here.

Lance can hear the music blaring outside. It’s the first two songs on their “warm-up” playlist. Usually by the fourth song, they make a big entrance on the court and begin running through some of their practice drills. That means there are only about four minutes left until they have to start
lining up. Which means there’s only three minutes until--

“Alright, boys! Let’s circle up!” Lance hears his coach say. “Listen, this may be our first game, but I don’t want you guys tripping over yourselves with nerves. We already know that we’re better than those guys out there. Let’s play a good, clean, tactical game. Got it?”

They all nod, determined.

“Good.” His coach grins. “Now go crush ‘em.”

*

This is really only Lance’s fourth week playing basketball on an actual basketball court, so he’s a little stunned when the doors open and he sees the large, polished, wooden court with bright lights blaring overhead. Deafening screams fill the air and Lance glances around anxiously, adrenaline on overdrive, as he looks for his father. When he spots him, he waves a little idiomatically, high on the feeling that the crowd is giving him. His father grins big and waves back, but he’s not the only one.

Lance’s heart nearly explodes when his eyes slide to the left and he sees Pidge. And Hunk. Looking flushed and happy and waving obnoxiously to get his attention. And then there is Keith, looking a little stunned with a glorious rosy tint to his cheeks, waving shyly. They’re only a few rows up-- very close to the court. Lance’s heart is hammering and he doesn’t even have time to process it before the whistle blows, signaling the beginning of drills.

He takes a deep breath, attempting to calm down, and picks up a ball.

***

They win 112-82. Lance helps lift the gatorade tub and pour it over his teammate Jared, who made the winning basket. He is ecstatic. He’s only ever seen people do that on TV but doing it in real life is a completely different story. He thinks he’s screaming but he feels so high that everything around him is kind of a blur. The cheering is making his ears ring and the feeling of all of his teammates, patting him on the back and tackling him from behind and shouting “Hell yeah we did it!”, is making him so giddy that he’s dizzy. He looks up to try and see where his friends are, but then the coach is beckoning them all back into the locker room. He follows his teammates, remembering that he should probably shower before getting remotely close to anyone he cares about.

In the shower, hot water pours over sore muscles and Lance lets his eyes fall shut. After helping Keith in his new garage all day, and then playing two hours of basketball, he feels the exhaustion start to take hold. Stepping out of the warm shower and changing into his fluffy, soft sweatpants and hoodie, has officially become his new favorite feeling. He towel-dries his hair, leaving it a little shaggy because he can’t be bothered to care, and bolts out the door as he waves goodbye to his team.

His dad is the first one to find him in the crowded stadium entrance. When he spots him, Lance can see tears brimming his eyes, but he quickly blinks them away as Lance gets closer.
“Dad! Wow, I’m so glad you could make--”

Lance’s dad engulfs him in a hug. Keith may have been right about the ‘freakishly long limbs’ thing because those arms could probably circle around him one more time. “You were brilliant.” His father says. “I can’t believe how good you’ve gotten. I’ve never seen anyone play like that before.”

Lance chuckles nervously, like he always does when someone compliments him for real. “Thank you, dad.”

“I’m so proud of you.” His dad pulls away, smiling gently at him. “There’s no way this team can lose, with you on it.”

“I hope you’re right.” Lance says, swallowing hard. Jesus, why does he feel like crying? Get it together, Lance.

“I know I’m right.” His father nods back. When Lance opens his mouth to answer, he promptly gets the wind knocked out of him by a very, very heavy force of nature who tackles him from behind.

“Lance! Laance! Oh my god!” He hears Pidge and Hunk’s voices in his ear, in his hair, in his back, as they all stumble forward clumsily at the impact of the hug.

“Holy shit you were on fire! Holy shit have you been that good this whole time?” Pidge is screaming. Lance has never heard her talk so loud.

“I mean, I did practice every morning--”

“No. But dude. Seriously.” Hunk says, in a level tone. “You blew me away.”

Lance swallows again. No tears, Lance. This is a happy moment! No tears! “Really?”

“Yes!” Pidge shouts. “All that practice really paid off, oh my god!”

Lance’s father interjects into the conversation. “Hunk and Pidge were telling me how hard you worked, over the past few years.” He says. “By the way you were playing, I’m not at all surprised. It was incredible.”

Lance takes a second to absorb the fact that Hunk and Pidge have officially met his father, which freaks him out a little, but then all thoughts come to a halt when he feels arms circling his waist from behind him; hot and shy falling onto his hips purely from muscle memory. Keith’s spicy cologne invades his senses, and he already feels himself flushing embarrassingly fast.

“Oh my god.” He feels Keith rumble into his back, just between his shoulder blades. “Oh my god.” He says again.

Lance chuckles a little breathlessly, turning around in his arms. When they come face to face, Lance can see the intense blush on Keith’s cheeks and his dark eyes are wide, like he’s seeing Lance for the first time. “Oh my god.” He mumbles again, ducking to hide his deepening blush.

Lance hears Pidge say, “hey guys, let’s go get some hot dogs, sound good?” To which his father and Hunk both replied “yeah, yeah oh of course of course” and they hurried away in the direction of the concession stand, leaving Keith and Lance to their own devices.

Keith’s thick black hair is falling into his face in such an attractive way that Lance, in his head, is
battling whether or not to brush it away. Keiths skin looks pale and smooth underneath the fluorescent lights. The dark strokes of his eyelashes contrast beautifully against his skin, and the swirling purples and grays in his eyes have Lance absolutely speechless. Lance doesn’t think he’s ever held anything more breathtaking in his life.

“Did you like the game?” Lance asks, suddenly feeling very shy under Keith’s gaze.

Keith swallows, falling forward and nuzzling his face into Lance’s neck. Lance shivers, feeling Keith’s hair tickle his jaw. “You were amazing.” Keith says finally, voice cracking. “You were so amazing. Oh my god. I couldn’t even believe--” He sighs shakily onto Lance’s skin. “Like, wow. I get to have sex with you.”

Lance laughs out loud, pushing Keith away slightly to look at him. “Yes, you do.” He says, feeling warmth curling in his chest. “You really do.”

“I’m just.” Keith puts his face in his hands, letting out an embarrassed groan. “Oh my god I don’t even know what to say to you right now.” His voice is muffled by his hands. “I feel like my brain just melted for two hours and it’s not back yet.”

Lance bites his lip, trying not to die on account of Keith’s adorableness. “I didn't think you were coming.” He says honestly. “Thought you’d get caught up cleaning or something.”

Keith drops his hands and looks at Lance, completely shocked. “Are you fucking kidding me? I would have never missed this!”

Lance sighs happily, slinging his arms behind Keith’s neck and interlocking his fingers, pulling him closer. “Yeesh, Keith. Clam down. It almost sounds like you're in love with me or something.”

A slow, laughing smile spreads across Keith’s face, reaching his eyes and making them crinkle adorably. “Nah, man. That would be weird.”

Lance snorts, unable to keep the grin off his face. “Yeah. So weird.”

***

Keith watches Lance’s chest rise and fall in the car ride home. This boy must be exhausted, Keith thinks, reaching out and running a hand through Lance’s short, soft hair. Hunk is driving and Pidge is asleep in the passenger seat.

Lance is snoring softly with his head in Keith’s lap. Keith can feel his warm breath hitting his thigh, ever so slightly, and wow. He’s really gone for this boy. He feels like he hasn’t breathed the same way since he met him. The tight feeling of sadness that used to clench his heart for so long started disappearing the minute they started talking.

Lance is the reason that Keith just bought a car garage. Lance is the reason Keith can talk to his parents without wanting to die and Lance is the reason Keith isn’t curled up in bed, kissing a woman he doesn’t love. Keith will never have to go to another networking event again. He’ll never have to down four glasses of red wine just to get through a conversation. He’ll never have to feel afraid of going after what he wants; of showing anyone who he really is. Every discomfort he has felt over the years has been effortlessly eliminated by the boy in his lap, who is fast asleep and completely unaware of what he’s done.
Keith’s not sure about what his future holds in terms of a career, or a house, or anything in between. The one thing he does know is that what he wants, more than anything, is to continue making Lance Sanchez as happy as he is in this very moment. Out of everything that can happen to him in this life, that’s really and truly all he wants.

And this time around, he isn’t going to be afraid to get it.

Chapter End Notes

My New Klance Fic:

http://archiveofourown.org/works/12402426/chapters/28220805

My tumblr: dimplesandcurlss
my art insta: allscribbledup
Keith laughs as they all attempt to pile into Shiro’s tiny car. Pidge climbs on top of Hunk and Lance get squished somewhere beneath Allura’s thigh and Keith is being crushed underneath it all, somehow. Bringing only one car to Lance’s graduation ceremony really wasn’t the best idea, but Hunk didn’t feel like driving and Keith’s car is currently undergoing some major construction (courtesy of himself) so Shiro was really the only volunteer. And nobody is really complaining, because they are all too happy to care.

After eight long years at school, Lance has finally graduated. Keith can’t even find it in himself to feel annoyed at Pidge’s bony elbow, digging into his thigh. Because Lance is grinning so brightly that it’s contagious. It fills Keith with warmth and pride blooms in his chest.

Lance has spent the last two years as a player on Team Altea at his university. After he started playing for them, he quickly became the most well known player on the entire team. His success was unparalleled. He continued to practice, even outside of normal games and practices. Keith would sit with him in the court for long hours—over weekends and late into the night, watching him play. Watching him improve. Most importantly, keeping him company. By the end of last year, Lance had already been featured on the local news three times. The points that he alone gathered were already enough to push Team Altea to number one in the region. The team was undefeated all year. It was everything Lance had wanted, and more.

And now that Lance has somehow managed to pass all of his classes too, he’s pressed up against Keith in the back seat with a bright blue cap and gown on and a huge, proud smile plastered onto his beautiful, beautiful face.

“That ceremony was great, right?” Lance says excitedly. “I mean, I was the oldest person there by like four years but it was still awesome!”

“Dude I can’t believe you finally did it!” Hunk says. “No more classes! No more paying for classes! No more studying for classes! You’re an adult, now!”

“Does that mean I have to join you in the workforce?” Lance asks. “Because your job looks exhausting. And horrible.”
“Being a nurse is awesome, man. I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Hunk says. “Bartending, however, was exhausting and horrible.”

“I resent that” Keith muffles from behind someone. Hunk laughs.

“I’m kidding, Keith. If I didn’t bartend then we never would’ve had out spontaneous heart to hearts.”

“More like not-so-spontaneous shit talking sessions.” Pidge chimes in.

Keith laughs. Shiro joins in. “Speaking of the workforce…” He starts, looking at Lance in the rearview mirror. “What are you planning on doing now?”

Lance hops excitedly in his seat. “Oh, I’m glad you asked. There was a scout at the last game. You know, the one at that school down south of here?”

“A scout?” Allura asks, though the pain of being squished.

“Yeah! Like a recruiter. Anyway, I totally didn’t know he’d be there. But then I get this call from an unknown number yesterday--”

“Isn’t that something you should know before the game?” Hunk asks, confused.

Lance sighs tiredly. “Obviously they told us but I wasn’t paying attention. God, Hunk. Keep up. Anyway, so I get this call from a unknown number and I answer it and boom! It’s the scout! And he tells me that he’s got me a slot in tryouts for the state team!”

“The state team?” Pidge asks, incredulous “Like, professional basketball?”

“Yes!” Lance shrieks, dancing in the seat despite the lack of room. “I might be going pro!”

The only reason Keith isn’t freaking out is because Lance told him this yesterday. He showed up at his apartment and didn’t even say hello before tackling Keith to the floor and kissing him all over his face, screaming “I’m going pro I’m going pro I’m going pro!”

“Doesn’t that mean you’ll be travelling a lot?” Allura asks.

Lance shrugs. “Well, yeah, but only for a few days at a time. I think most of the games this coming season are home games anyway. But I have to make the team first, obviously.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “You’ll make the team, Lance.”

Lance grins for the millionth time. “I think I will, too.”

They arrive at the restaurant, where they are having dinner to celebrate, and promptly tumble out of the car when the doors open. Keith is the last to stumble out of the open door, being pulled against his will by everyone he was glued to during the ride. He almost falls onto the pavement but Lance catches him around his waist, pulling him into a hug.

“Hello.” He mumbles into Keith’s hair fondly. “I haven’t gotten to hug you yet today.”

Keith blushing, rolling his eyes because sometimes Lance is so sweet that he doesn’t know how to handle himself. He presses his nose and lips into Lance’s chest, humming.

“I’m proud of you.”
“You better be. I worked my ass off.”

Keith snorts, stepping away from him. All of their friends have disappeared into the restaurant, leaving them by the car. After two years of dating, their friends and family kind of know when to leave before the PDA gets too unbearable. Keith has never been one for PDA but for some reason, when he is with Lance he barely realizes he’s doing it. They’ve just always been drawn to each other like that. And now, their relationship is approaching two years, and Keith still isn’t tired of burying his face into Lance’s neck and hugging him tightly in every public place they manage to find themselves in.

It’s disgustingly cliche. But Keith has been through too much shit to not relish in the simple happiness he feels around this boy. So fuck it. It’s corny and he loves it.

They intertwine their fingers together. Lance smiles softly at him.

“Ready to face your family?” Keith asks, mostly joking. Lance’s family is at the restaurant already, and Keith knows, from getting to know them over the past two years, that they are most likely going to cause a massive scene upon seeing Lance in his grad robes.

Lance sighs, rolling his eyes fondly. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

Keith tugs his hand and they walk forward, pushing through the front door. He can already hear Maria screaming before he sees her. He smiles.

It’s going to be a long afternoon.

****

After an enormous amount of hugging, screaming, and the shedding of numerous buckets of tears, dinner starts to come to a close. Keith always loves the time he spends with Lance’s family. He barely got a word in, with all the screaming. But that’s how it usually goes, even if nobody is graduating and he’s just spending the weekend with them. He’s a quiet person, and always has been, so just merely observing their family dynamic is enough to keep him engrossed for hours. He watches Lance’s face light up as he laughs. He loves how Lance looks when he is happy; when he thinks nobody is watching him. Keith doesn’t think that Lance realizes how much Keith looks at him. It’s been two years but Keith is still a little shocked whenever he looks at Lance. He can’t believe that something so beautiful is his. And when Lance is smiling and laughing hysterically, with a happy flush on his cheeks and his family by his side, Keith thinks it’s even more unbelievable. He couldn’t be more thankful.

He knows that if Lance goes pro, he will be out of the state a lot. But somehow, it doesn’t seem like something that will change anything. Because he feels like he and Lance have been through worse. He feels like there isn’t really anything that can truly mess them up. And it’s a scary realization as much as it is a comforting one; realizing that no matter what, he’s willing to make it work. That nothing could possibly tear them apart. It reminds him how serious he is about Lance. It reminds him how vulnerable he is.

But it’s also a really nice concept to him. Like an embrace. Like falling into a warm, puffy mattress; the one Keith used to have in his parent’s house, before he moved it to his new apartment above his car garage.
Lance and Keith get up, waving goodbye to their friends. Lance’s mother agrees to drive them to Keith’s place. She’s been around a lot; always finding reasons to visit Lance now that the family drama has decreased significantly. Keith doesn’t ever grow tired of her though. And he likes her car; it smells like Lance’s house did when Keith first visited. When he barged through the door with his nerves in a bundle and his heart on his sleeve. The seats in her car are worn and soft and it just makes Keith think fondly of Lance and his family. Everything about them tells their story. They may not have all the fancy things, but Keith admires the history and preciousness held in everything Lance owns.

Of course, Lance will very soon be able to afford all of the fancy things. The roles will be reversed, someday. Keith will be the humble pedestrian living in an apartment above a garage and Lance will be a sports celebrity; making thousands upon thousands of dollars and modeling for athletic apparel. But Keith doesn’t mind, because with all the work Lance has done? He deserves it.

They walk into Keith’s apartment, tired but still buzzing with happiness from the exciting evening. Keith thinks about texting his parents and letting them know how it went. They were both really curious and told him to congratulate Lance. Keith’s parents have come a long way since they found out about Lance two years ago. His father has really proved to be a kinder, more understanding man with every month that passes. He invited Lance over for dinner at their first month anniversary. He made lobster. Lance loved every bite of it and Keith loved the feeling of his family, finally together, walls down, with Lance somehow being included.

His mother has been harder to convince, but she is coming around, slowly. She speaks with Lance about business and the weather. She smiles brightly when she sees him, instead of the strained, polite smile she used to sport when they met. Keith can see that she has thawed, almost completely. Because how can someone meet Lance and not love him?

Lance immediately walks into Keith’s room, like it’s muscle memory. Keith hears him flop onto the fluffy mattress. He follows him inside and lays down next to him.

“My hat is in the way.” Lance mumbles sleepily, turning towards Keith. “I can’t lay down all the way.”

Keith turns to him and raises an eyebrow. “Then...take it off?”

“Absolutely not. Do you know I happy I am to be wearing this thing? I’m never taking it off. I’m literally going to shower with it on.”

Keith laughs, “Fair enough.”

Lance sits up, adjusting his hat. “Oh my god, I totally forgot to open my grad presents!” He says happily. “Do you think people will mind if I open them without them here?”

“Nah, you’re good.” Keith sits up too. “I think I put them in the kitchen.”

Lance dashes out of the room and Keith shakes his head fondly. That boy has way too much energy right now. Keith feels like he’s about to collapse. It’s just been such a busy day.

Lance returns with a huge gift bag, panting because he ran up the stairs so fast. “Damn, this thing is heavy.” He says. “I wonder what’s in it.” He plops down on the edge of the bed next to Keith and rubs his hands together excitedly. “Okay. here we go.”

Keith nods. “Here we go.” He says teasingly. Lance rolls his eyes at him.

“I’ll just pretend you’re excited too.”
Keith laughs, shoving Lance’s shoulder. “Come on, open them already.”

Lance tears open the first box; a tiny little cube. “This one is from Maria.” He says softly. From the small box, he pulls out a thin, colorful bracelet made from yarn. Lance hums. “Aw. She made this. She’s always been so good at making these things.” He holds it up to Keith’s face. “Look at that detail!”

Keith smiles a little too softly, studying the bright colors weaved together. “Wow, it’s really nice.”

“Remind me to thank her.”

Keith nods, watching Lance smile gently as he puts the bracelet around his wrist. He looks wistful for a moment, with distant, blue eyes. Then he glances at Keith and his gentle smile turns into a bright one. “Next up?”

Keith hands him the next present. It’s from Pidge and Hunk. Lance gasps loudly when the ripped wrapping paper reveals a framed, professional photo of him at his first Team Altea game.

“Oh man! This is legit!” Lance shrieks. “It makes me look so important!”

Keith grins, crossing his arms over his chest. “You are important.” He says.

Lance flips the frame so Keith can see the picture. “Maybe. But this level of importance? Probably not.”

Keith scans the photo of Lance in his Team Altea jersey. “You look good.” He says, a little robotically, to avoid any meltdowns. Seeing Lance in his uniform does very embarrassing things to his brain. Lance knows this, too. Which is why he doesn’t push Keith to keep talking, and just laughs instead.

“Thank you for the high praise.” He snorts, pinching Keith’s cheek. Keith groans.

“Just keep going. Jeez.” He says shyly, still managing to blush after two years of dating this boy. “I’m growing old over here.”

Lance giggles, grabbing a handful of envelopes from the bag. “You are way too sassy today.” He says, biting his lip.

He receives money from a lot of relatives. There are a few envelopes with gift cards, a few with tearful, encouraging words, and a few with pretty impressive bundles of cash. Lance is almost vibrating with excitement. He smiles brightly at Keith and Keith is struck with the urge to grab him by the face and kiss him, so he does. Lance has gotten used to it by now. Keith is pretty reserved with how and when he chooses to touch Lance, but he is also impulsive enough not to stop himself when he really wants to; even if the situation doesn’t call for it. The first few times he did it, he was immensely self conscious about it. It always turned him into a blushing mess. But Lance assured him that it was “literally the cutest fucking thing ever”, which made Keith feel a little better about his surprise ambushes in the future.

After about half an hour of tearing open presents, the floor is littered with fragments of crumpled paper and Lance and Keith are laying back down on the bed again, with their heads turned to face each other.

Keith will never get tired of the smooth, dark skin of Lance’s face. He will never stop loving the blue of his eyes, the random spatter of freckles on his nose, the delicate bow of his lips. People have told him, time and time again, that love fades. That beauty fades. That the “honeymoon
phase” can only last so long. But Keith really doesn’t understand what those people are talking about. Because it seems to be going the opposite direction for him. Every day, he loves Lance more, and more, and more. Every day, he finds one more thing that is beautiful about him.

Lance blinks slowly at Keith. Sleepily. “And you?”

“Hm?” Keith mumbles back, happily.

“What is your gift for me?” Lance’s voice is soft. A little teasing.

Keith just stares for a little bit. He has a gift for Lance, but he’s far too nervous to present it to him. It a familiar nervousness, like when Keith first realized he loved him. It’s a vulnerable, aching kind of nervousness. “I have something for you.” He says gently.

“Is it a kiss?” Lance says, even more teasing. “Or are you going to tie me up again?”

Keith barks a laugh. “That escalated really quickly.” He says, through a grin. “Of course I’ll do that. But…it’s not your gift.”

Lance chuckles. “What could be better than that?”

Keith bites his lip. “Almost nothing. But…” He trails off, focusing on the nervous fluttering in his heart.

Lance raises an eyebrow, teasing expression fading as he reads Keith’s reaction. “What is it? You okay?”

Keith leans over lightly, brushing their noses together. He smells Lance’s familiar, unchanging deodorant. It fills him with warmth, and comfort, and hunger, and love. Sighing shakily, he leans away and then sits up, running a hand through his hair. Lance sits up too, looking concerned.

“Look, Keith. It’s totally okay if you didn’t get me anything.” Lance says, chuckling. “You’ve been so good to me. It’s all I could ask for, really.”

“I have something for you. I swear.” Keith scratches his neck nervously as Lance waits, expectantly. “It’s just a little...it’s dumb. I mean, not dumb, but--”

“Enough with the nervous rambling.” Lance says, rolling his eyes and grabbing Keith’s wrist. He hoists them both up into a standing position and steps in close, wrapping his arms around Keith’s waist. He lifts a hand and pokes Keith’s nose. “It’s not going to be stupid. Come on. I’m your soulfuck, remember?” Keith snorts, ducking his head. “There’s nothing you can’t tell me!” Lance finishes, holding back a laugh.

Keith sighs, planting a small kiss onto Lance’s neck before pulling away. He knows if he stays within that proximity to Lance for more than five minutes, they’ll be naked on the bed in seconds. Tossing a good portion of his inhibitions out the window, he reaches into his pocket and pulls out what he’s been trying to hide all day. He opens up Lance’s hand with his own and flattens the object into his palm.

A small, golden key.

Lance looks down at it, a little stunned. “What...what is this?” He asks, voice hesitant.

Keith clears his throat. “Uh…” Nerves twist mercilessly in his gut.
“Is it, like...the key to your heart or something cheesy like that?”

Keith frowns, crossing his arms over his chest. “I think I deserve a little more credit than that.” He says, a little bitterly. Lance smirks at him.

Keith sighs. “It's...you know. A key. For you to…”

Lance raises an eyebrow slowly.

“To. I don’t know. Live here?” Keith swallows. “With me?”

Lance blinks at him, a surprise flush dusting his cheeks.

Oh god, here comes the nervous rambling again.

“He, I mean, you’ve basically taken over my bathroom with all of your stuff, and like, you sleep here a lot anyway. And...I don’t know. I could learn to cook for you. And I know you’ll be out of town a lot and stuff but like, you know, having a place to come home to...with me ...and you know, we cant host dinners for Hunk and Pidge and do all that... stuff that I was always too rich to do and....”

Lance continues to stare, unmoving. “And I want to live with you.” Keith says, voice a little desperate. “I want to go to sleep with you. And drink coffee with you in the morning. So.”

Lance’s face melts, and Keith can’t read the expression. “If you don’t want to, you can just keep the key and like, come here whenever you want--”

“Keith.” Lance breathes. “Keith.” He says again, voice a little choked up. And then Keith is being gathered up tightly in Lance’s arms and he feels Lance’s face in his neck, breathing him in with a shaky, long sigh. “I love you.” Lance whispers into his skin. “I love you , I love you so much.”

Keith wraps his arms around Lance, tangling his fingers in Lance’s soft, wispy hair.

He laughs breathlessly. “I love you too.” He says softly, struck so fiercely with the feeling that he needs to grab Lance harder to stay standing.

“Of course I’ll live with you.” Keith can hear Lance’s smile. “That is the best gift I could’ve ever gotten...” Lance groans. “Even though you never clean your bathroom.”

“I do .” Keith mumbles. “Just not as well as my maid used to.”

Lance grins against his neck. “You don’t . But I’ll fix it, don’t worry.” He says softly.

Keith giggles and his knees feel weak as Lance holds onto him, even tighter. He almost feels the absurd sensation of happy tears, burning behind his eyes. He is overwhelmed with Lance’s smell, in his nose and on his clothes and permanently sewn into his bedsheets. He never wants that smell to leave. He never wants Lance to have any reason to not be here . To not feel at home here. And Keith doesn't really care where here is, because wherever Lance is, to him, feels like home.

And it’s so corny , but it’s so, so true.

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