**Hearts Don't Break Around Here**

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**Hearts Don't Break Around Here**

*by [klancekorner](http://archiveofourown.org/users/klancekorner)*

**Summary**

Lance and Keith have been best friends since first grade. Lance’s brain is always on overdrive and Keith’s blunt, realistic ass can never keep up. They both come to realize that sometimes you can learn a lot about loving yourself by loving someone else.

**Notes**

Named after the Ed Sheeran song—because I am ed sheeran trash. I just love that line so much.

I picked this idea from quite a few, it's something very near and dear to my heart, so as cliche as the “best friends before lovers” trope is, I couldn't bring myself to write anything else until I got this out! Not only is this trope my favorite trope of all time, but i’m writing this fic for
myself and my own slightly damaged heart, as well as for you guys. For all of you who came here from some of my other fics, you are absolute gems and i will love you until I die. Thanks so much for clicking and giving this a chance, love you all <3

They are 23 years old in this--so about a year or two out of college...just an fyi :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Nobody believes Keith when he tells them that Lance's hair used to be wild when he was younger. Like, crazy wild. The curls were untamable. They fell into his face and bounced and tangled and grew at an alarmingly fast pace. They were more golden than brown, more frizzy than tight, and got caught in his eyelashes. Keith's hair was always short and choppy, cropped very close to his hairline, so he was fascinated by the creature that seemed to be sitting atop Lance's tiny head. Lance was always self conscious about his hair. One time, when he was six, he gave his older sister twelve cents to straighten the curls down, and was thoroughly disappointed when it didn't turn out how he wanted it to. It stuck out in every direction and completely covered his eyes like a shaggy carpet.

Keith remembers it like it was yesterday. The constant struggle with that wild, bushy mane of hair. Of course as Lance grew older, the hair eventually straightened out. He got it cut differently throughout the years, naturally. And now, Keith is scrolling through his phone and sitting on his bed while Lance runs a comb through his short, wispy brown hair for the thirtieth time, nervously biting his lip and trying to get it into place.

“Lance.” Keith says, throwing his phone to the side and watching Lance's worried face in the mirror. “Lance, your hair looks fine.”

“No! It doesn't!” Lance pouts. “It always looks the worst when I have somewhere important to go! God, I hate it.”

“I'm telling you it looks fine.”

“Well I don't believe you.” Lance snaps back. “And besides, even if it did look good, which it doesn't, I still wouldn't be worthy of this girl.” He groans frustratedly and chucks his comb. It clatters as it hits the mirror and falls to the counter.

“She's not that hot.” Keith says. “You guys are like, both eights.” A pause. “Eight point fives.”

“Eight point--did you see her?” Lance whirls around, flabbergasted. “I accept that I'm an eight but her? I don't even know why she agreed to go out with me! I can't screw it up.”

“You won't. You literally never do. There has been a girl here, like, every weekend for the past year.” Keith says, rolling his eyes.

Yes, he lives with Lance. He wishes he could say that it was a complete coincidence, ending up in the same city after college. But it wasn't completely a coincidence, because Keith deliberately applied to jobs where Lance would likely be. Lance doesn't know this, of course, because even after all these years of being best friends, Keith will never admit to him that he is one of the most important people in Keith's life. It's just that Lance has so many...friends. So many important people. But Keith really only has Lance. So, it's not something that he likes to advertise, his complete dependence on this stupid, annoyingly charming boy. But yes, they share an apartment, and yes, they have never gone more than three months without being in the same place. But that's just how it is between them, how
it always has been. And there's never been a problem with it before.

Their apartment isn’t anything to write home about. They did just graduate from college after all, and both of them have entry-level jobs with little pay, so it’s not like they were expecting royal treatment. Keith loved it just as it was when they moved in two years ago; white walls and beige carpet and dim lights with very little room for anything else. Lance, however, was horrified by it, and spent the first six months of their time re-painting the entire living room and buying cheap prints from Target to hang on the walls. He once visited a thrift store and came back with a rug to “dress up the space” that ended up being infested with bed bugs. They had to live at Lance’s parent’s place while their entire apartment was quarantined and cleaned out.

Needless to say, Lance was not as happy about the apartment as Keith was, because Lance has always been somewhat of an ‘extra’ person. Beige is his sworn enemy. It’s been almost two years now and their apartment barely looks anything like it did when they moved in, thanks to all of Lance’s obnoxiously hard work. But the bare bones of the shitty architecture are still there; a tiny kitchen with cracked, ceramic tile, a living room with space for only one fold-out futon and a coffee table that used to be a cardboard box. A cramped, musty bathroom and two very pathetic bedrooms. Keith actually thinks his room is supposed to be a closet, but his bed fits in there just fine. He doesn’t need any extra stuff anyway. Besides, in college, their shared dorm room was much, much worse.

Lance lifts the tip of his nose with his finger and examines his nostrils in the dirty mirror. “Ew. Look at all of my gross nose hair. Do you think I should get it waxed?”


“But it's so gross!” He leans closer into the mirror. “Oh my god! Ewww.”

“Would you stop looking at it please?”

“I'm making an appointment.”

“Oh my god.” Keith rolls his eyes. “You are ridiculous.”

“What if Nyma leans it to kiss me and then sees my nose whiskers and runs off?”

“They're not whiskers.”

“They're long enough to be!”

“I can't even see them.”

“You don't pay enough attention, Snickers. I bet you have disgustingly long nose hair too.”

You'd think that after 20 years, stupid and childish nicknames would be obsolete. But not with Lance. He's been calling Keith ‘Snickers’ since third grade. The reason isn't even a cute one either. Their class had gone on a field trip to the Natural History Museum and Keith bought a Snickers bar at the gift shop. He had left it in the back pocket of his khakis and forgotten about it, and by the time they got back to the school it had melted all over the back of his pants, making it look like he...for lack of a better term, shit himself. Lance had laughed so hard that Pepsi squirted out of his nose.

“Snickers!” He had shouted. “You have Snickers on your butt!” The rest, evidently, is history. At first, it annoyed Keith to death, but now it's so natural he barely even notices it.

“Oh my god she's going to be here in twelve minutes. Help me!”

“You don't need help. You're going to have a good time.”
Lance sighs and plants himself on the edge of the bed, next to Keith. He’s looking dapper in a light blue button-up and dark wash jeans. Whenever Lance wears blue, it really enhances all of his good features. That's why Keith has noticed he only wears blue on dates, no matter what. He barely wears it in his day to day life, but for dates? He's got a whole closet of blue shirts. Keith had told him once, in high school, that blue brought out his eyes. Apparently that's not something friends say to each other, because Lance had blushed furiously and frowned at him, saying “that's weird, man!” But since then, without fail, Lance has worn blue on every single date. Keith is much better with social cues now than he was in high school, thank god, and hasn't really said anything embarrassing since then.

Lance runs a hand through his hair, effectively destroying all of the effort he put into it. “Where should I take her?”

“You don't have a plan yet?”

Lance shoots him a worried look. “No, I usually do something spontaneous! But now I'm too nervous.” He says defensively.

Keith sighs. “Well it's a Saturday night so...you probably need to make a reservation.”

“Fuck.”

“You could do the deep dish pizza place next to the park?”

“Deep dish isn't sexy, Snickers.”

“Does it have to be sexy?”

“Of course.”

“But it was so good. She'll associate delicious food with your face.”

“I don't think it works that way.” Lance laughs. “Also wasn't that the place where the waiter gave you his number?”

Keith smiles. “Maybe.”

“Well then obviously you're biased!” Lance shoves him. “We’re going to the new seafood place. It's decided.”

“Have fun spending way too much money.”

“Oh I will.”

Lance's phone chimes and he yelps. “Ah! She's early! Dammit!”

“Have fun.” Keith teases unenthusiastically, standing up and pushing Lance out of his room. “Use protection. Goodbye now.”

“I fucking hate y--”

Keith shuts the door in his face but can hear Lance chuckling softly on the other side.

xxx
Keith's face is sticky with tears as he clings onto his mother's skirt. “Please no, mommy.” He mumbles, tugging helplessly. “I wanna go home.”

The classroom is large and daunting, far too threatening for Keith's tiny brain to comprehend, and he just clings tighter to his mother when he sees another woman approaching.

“Hello, Mrs. Kogane!” The woman introduces herself and Keith shrinks further into the ground. “I'm Mrs. Patty, and this must be Keith!” She turns her gaze downwards and her smile is toothy and wide. Keith wrinkles his nose.

“Mommy…” He croaks, tears filling his eyes again.

“He’s a little nervous.” His Mom says gently. “He was like this at his kindergarten as well.”

“Well we’re going to have so much fun, Keith!” Mrs. Patty assures. “Don't be scared!”

Keith scowls at this, letting go of his mother's skirt. “M'm not scared.” He squeaks through clenched teeth.

“Well great! You're already so brave! Come on, let's meet the other kids.” Mrs. Patty says. And Keith isn't sure why he does it, but he lets go of his mother's skirt, rather reluctantly, and follows his new teacher.

His mother says goodbye to him and he is suddenly standing in front of a circle of other kids, looking at him with wide eyes and raised eyebrows. Keith pouts at all of the unfamiliar faces, but he already told Mrs. Patty that he wasn’t scared so he can’t act scared anymore. He clenches his tiny fists and faces the class, tugging at the bottom of his worn, old t-shirt.

“Class, this is Keith, our newest friend! He just moved here all the way from Texas. That is so far! Let's be on our best behavior for him today, okay?”

A course of nods moves through the circle and Keith lifts his arms to hug himself, feeling very nervous. Texas is so far away, and he misses his old room. And his neighbors. And his kindergarten teacher. The tears are filling his eyes and he feels silly because he’s embarrassing himself, but his mommy always tells him that it's okay to cry. He looks down at his shoes to stop the tears, but then sees a movement from out in front of him and snaps his head back up again. There is a thin, tiny boy with his hand in the air, waving it back and forth. He's got a mop of curly hair and darker skin than Keith's, and on his face is a large, crooked grin with a few missing teeth.

“Yes, Lance?” Mrs. Patty asks.

The boy, Lance, looks at Keith, “I like your shirt, Keith!” He says is a squeaky voice.

Keith looks down and sees his red Pikachu shirt looking back at him. “Oh.” He says. “Thank you.”

“Is Pikachu the same in Texas? Or does he wear a cowboy hat?”

Mrs. Patty laughs. “Lance, that's a good question. But we have to start our reading circle! You should talk to Keith during recess!”
Lance pouts and Keith sends him a small smile, which makes his face light up again.

x

They spend all of recess on the swings talking about Texas and Lance smiles so big Keith doesn't even feel sad about it.

xxx

Present Day

The door bursts open and Lance tumbles in, face flushed with what appears to be the after effects of alcohol. He's giggling wildly to himself and Keith startles at his grand entrance, nearly falling off the couch. It's way too late for Keith to be up, but the last time Keith fell asleep while Lance was out, Lance had to go to the emergency room because he cut his hand on a rusty nail in a shady bar and had to get stitches. This was before the days of Uber, so Lance had nobody to call and slept in the hospital overnight. Keith had felt incredibly guilty, and since then, he doesn't like falling asleep until Lance gets home. His father says that Keith inherited this anxiety from his mother. But Keith has never really thought of himself as an anxious person.

Lance’s eyes go wide when he sees Keith sitting on the couch in their living room. “You're still awake, Snickers?” He hisses loudly, clearly not sober. “Don't you have work tomorrow?”

Keith chuckles. “Could'n't sleep.” He sits up, fixing his ruffled hair.

“Was it the cheese ‘n the pasta? I told you not to eat it! Your tiny, lactose intolerant tummy cannot handle it!” Lance slurs, shaking a scolding finger in front of Keith's face. “Don’ worry, ‘ve got Tums in my room.”

Keith shakes his head. “No, I feel fine. Why don’t you--” Lance stands still for a moment and then sways as if he's about to fall over. Keith stumbles forward to catch him. They end up crashing onto the carpet in a painful, messy pile. Keith groans. “Get off of me, Lance.”

Lance sighs fondly and wraps his arms around Keith’s waist, head falling onto his chest. He is typically this cuddly when he's drunk. Sometimes he even goes as far as to wake up Keith when he comes home drunk just so that he has someone to cuddle with. Keith, being quite shy, took a while to get used to how touchy Lance is. But now he doesn't mind it anymore.

“I think I’m in love.” Lance says dreamily into Keith’s shirt. Keith rolls his eyes.

“You said that last week.”

“But this time I mean it.”

“Oh yeah?"
He feels Lance swallow. “She beat me in a drinking contest.”

“I can see that.” Keith chuckles, finally letting his hands fall onto Lance’s waist. No use trying to lift him off right now. “Is she still alive?”

“We went to a club.” Lance says, completely ignoring Keith’s question. “We wen’ to a club n’ danced n’ shit. Then she kissed me first. Like, she did the firt...firs’ move…” A confused pause. “Made the first move.”

Keith nods slowly. “Sounds sexy.” He deadpans, lip twitching into a smirk. Lance whines into his chest.

“She was so hot. Our kids are gunna be so hot.”

“I think it’s time for you to sleep.”

“Snickers we’re gonna get married n’ you’ll be my bes’ men. Best man. The Best man. You will be.”

Keith is full-on grinning now, standing up and pulling Lance up with him. “Well, I’m glad you had fun. But we both have work tomorrow. And you’re gonna hate yourself.”

“Oh, Keith. Love takes sacf--sacrifs…..” Lance groans frustratedly, leaning all of his weight against Keith. “Sac-ri-fice!” He says loudly.

“It sure does.” Keith replies.

“I need to wash my face.”

“I think you should just get in bed.”

“Mmkay.” They make it to Lance's room and he flops noisily onto the bed. Keith sighs, fixing his shirt that Lance almost tugged off. He watches as Lance burrows himself into his covers, smushing his face into the pillow. Lance is going to kill him tomorrow for letting him go to bed without doing his “absolutely necessary” evening ritual; one which involves about three different lotions and two more serums. Lance takes his skincare very seriously, and never fails to let Keith know when he’s having a “bad skin day”. Tomorrow...Lance is probably going to have a bad skin day. And Keith is going to have to suffer through the consequences. He sighs.

“Goodnight, Lance.”

“Mmm. You leavin’ me?”

Keith smiles. “It’s almost three AM. I don’t like you that much.” He jokes.

A soft chuckle comes muffled from the covers. “Goodnight, Snickers.”

***

“I think I’m dead.” Lance says, trudging into the kitchen with messed up hair and disheveled work clothes on. “I think this is what dying is.”
Keith has already worked out, showered, and made coffee. He glances up from his phone when Lance clumsily falls into the chair across from him. Lance looks devastatingly exhausted—the bags under his eyes are almost black and his typically smooth skin is covered with creases from the pillow. He rubs his eyes rather aggressively and groans in frustration. “You didn’t make me put my lotions on last night! Now look at me! I’m a dull, dry mess!”

“I’m sorry,” Keith says, fighting to roll him eyes. “You couldn’t even walk to your bed alone.”

“How many times have we talked about this, Snickers?” Lance runs his hands down his face. “You know I need my night time routine!”

Keith wants to laugh but bites his lip because he knows how serious this is to Lance. “You don’t look...that bad.” He tries. Then he promptly gives up, a laugh bursting out of his mouth.

Lance scowls at him, looking mildly shocked. “You’re laughing at me? This is your fault!”

“You’re the one that got wasted last night!”

Lance hums. “It was so worth it though.” His nose twitches as he tries to suppress another yawn, but the tears in his eyes give him away. A small, tired whine escapes his mouth. Keith sighs.

“I made you breakfast.”

“What?”

“I made you breakfast because I knew you’d feel like shit. It’s on the counter.”

Lance looks at him with wide, happy eyes. “Wait, really? Is it--”

“Green eggs and ham? Yes.”

“Oh my god! I love you!” Lance scrambles out of his chair and runs up to the counter.

Keith laughs. “Green eggs and ham” has been Lance’s favorite breakfast concoction since he was fifteen. It’s pretty much exactly what it sounds like. Well, sort of. The eggs aren’t green but they’re scrambled with chopped up green peppers. And ham, obviously. Lance had started calling it green eggs and ham a few years ago because “why miss out on such an amazing opportunity to immortalize the legacy of Dr. Suess?”.

Keith hates green peppers but Lance can’t eat pizza without them. They always used to fight about it, until they decided to just never order pizza together or else their friendship would eventually fall apart. It was an executive decision and they’ve gotten along much better since then, so the sacrifice was worth it.

“Dude, you make it even better than my mom does.” Lance says appreciatively, sitting back down with the plate in hand. “I don’t know how you do it.”

“It’s like the easiest thing in the world.”

“I always burn it.” Lance shovels a forkful into his mouth. “I get too distracted.”

Keith smiles a little to himself. “Yeah, I know.”

“What time is-- fuck. Holy fuck I’m late.” Lance shoots backwards and stands up, throwing his coat on even though it’s probably seventy degrees outside. He’s literally always cold. “Allura is going to kill me. But like, actually kill me this time.”
“Probably. But Isn’t she getting married in like, four seconds? She has other things to worry about.”

Lance works at an event planning company. He’s always had a knack for the dramatic and manages to pull together the most beautiful, unique celebrations for people. Keith has no idea what goes on in that boy’s brain, but his parties aren’t ever really just parties, they’re experiences. And Keith only knows this because he’s been to a few of them. Lance has only been in the field for a short time but he has very quickly caught people’s attention. He studied hospitality in college and worked as the receptionist at a hotel for about a year. Then he somehow scored an entry level position at Altea Event Planning, which is where he is now. His boss, Allura, is quite terrifying. But in a powerful, admirable way. She wears pencil skirts and high heels and her voice never wavers and she takes bullshit from no one. Keith would genuinely fear her if he didn’t meet her on a more personal level when she started dating his older brother, Shiro, four years ago. Now, there are only about three months until the wedding, and the entire company is in chaos.

“Why did I agree to help plan this wedding?” Lance asks incredulously. “It’s more stressful than all of my work combined and I’m not even getting paid for it!”

“Oh come on, I know she’s your boss, but she’s also a friend. Plus you’ve known Shiro literally your entire life? He’s practically your brother too.” Keith says. “You’d probably ask them to do the same for you.”

“You kiddin’ me? I want full control over planning my wedding. It’s going to be my most epic creation.”

“Okay, Lance. You should probably go.”

Lance grabs his bag from the ground next to the door. “See ya, Snickers! Thanks for the breakfast.”

Keith chuckles. “Anytime.”

The door slams shut and Keith shakes his head. Will there ever be a day when Lance isn’t a hot mess?

Eh. Doesn’t matter. It works for him.

3rd Grade

“This is it! This is it!” Lance bounces excitedly, walking into the thick bushes behind his house. Keith stands, dumbfounded, arms crossed over his tiny chest.

“What? It’s just the woods.”

“No! It’s adventure island!”

Keith pouts. “No it isn’t! It’s your yard.”

Lance rolls his eyes, scoffing. “Come on, Snickers. At least try to use your imagination?”

Keith clenches his fist, watching a dandelion puff land in Lance’s short, frizzy hair. When the curls grew out, they didn’t really grow out all the way. They left a thick, frizzy mess in their place. “I don’t get it, it’s just a bunch of trees.”
“Nope!” Lance’s thin, scrawny hand grabs Keith’s wrist, pulling him into the woods. “This is where the aliens crash landed! And we’re going to have to find them and see if they’ll help us off the island. We’re stuck, by the way.”

“How did we get stuck?” Keith asks, genuinely curious.

“Well, our parents wanted us to clean, so we had to sneak out of our houses to get away. And then we were kidnapped!”

“Kidnapped?”

“By the president!”

“Why?”

“We have something super secret.”

“Well, what is it?”

Lance shrugs. “I don’t know. You think of this one!”

They stop walking and stand in a small opening in the forest, trees towering over them and blocking the sunlight. A spot of bright sunlight still hits Lance’s face though, and he squints through it at Keith’s confused expression. The sounds of bugs and birds are floating through the air around them. The smell of dirt and mud is strong and makes Keith wrinkle his nose.

“I don’t know. A vase?”

“A top secret vase! It contains all of the world's secrets!” Lance finishes dramatically.

“It doesn’t have any secrets.” Keith grumbles.

“What? Yes it does, Snickers!”

“No, it’s just a vase.”

“Well then why does the president want it?”

“I don’t know!” Keith responds, starting to get frustrated.

“It’s just a game, jeeeeeze. Let play, come on.”

“Fine.”

Lance jumps, excited again. “Okay! So we’ve been kidnapped. Here, you carry the vase.” He holds an empty hand out to Keith. Keith stares down at it.

“Uh. Okay.” He says, grabbing the nothingness very nervously. “Like this?”

“Right! And now we have to run! The president is chasing us!” Lance shrieks, grabbing Keith’s wrist and bursting into a sprint. Keith yelps and trails behind him, tripping over his ripped sneakers and feeling mud splash all over his ankles.

“Lance! Slow down!”

“No way, Snickers! The president will catch us! We gotta make it to Rossway Cliff!”
“What? Rossway Cliff? Why?” Keith shouts, suddenly panicking. He’s technically not allowed to go to Rossway Cliff without his parents permission, and he’s only ever heard stories about it. But it’s very high up, above a creek, and according to his parents, very dangerous. Shiro hasn’t even gone there, and he’s almost a teenager. But Lance is still running, and he doesn’t even look scared. Lance doesn’t even slow down. He speeds up.

Keith grabs onto Lance’s wrist for dear life and they weave through the trees together, moving higher and higher as the flat ground turns into a hill and the hill gets steeper and steeper. Lance is shouting things like “Oh no, Mr. President, you’ve got the wrong guys!” and Keith is lost, but doesn’t let go. He wonders how on earth Lance isn’t even being careful as they move further and further from ground level. He sees the sign-- a big, red, wooden sign with peeling paint that says “Rossway Cliff” in a very pretty, cursive font.

“Almost there!” Lance shouts giddily, and Keith holds his breath, seeing the trees open up to a small patch of grass and then beyond the grass there is the sky, and nothing else, and they are running closer and closer to the edge of it and--

“Lance!” Keith yells, panicked, as he yanks out of Lance’s death grip. “We can’t!”

Lance stops running and turns around, face coated with sweat and flushed a deep pink. He’s panting and looking at Keith with offended eyes. “What’s the problem?”

“We were about to go over the cliff!”

Lance scoffs, rolling his eyes. “I was gonna stop. Duh.”

Keith shakes his head. “I don’t wanna play this anymore.”

Lance’s face falls, and he looks down at his hands, picking at his bitten down nails. “There’s nothing to be scared of.” He mumbles.

“What?”

“I said, it’s not scary. I’ve been here before.” He holds out a hand. “Come on. Trust me.”

Keith looks at his hand like it’s a monster. “No.”

“Please?” Lance whines.

Keith takes a breath, rolling his eyes. His heart thuds as Lance pulls him a little further up the hill, closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. He can see where the grass starts to disappear over the end of it.

“Lance...Lance! We’re really high up!”

“Calm down.” Lance says, but he doesn’t sound angry. “It’s cool, trust me.”

Keith tries to pull back but Lance pulls him forward, and before he can try to get away again, they are standing on the edge.

And Keith...has never seen anything like this before.

The small creek below is shimmering and the grass is bright, growing wildly long on the rolling hills. The trees surrounding the water are tall but they are so high up that Keith can see the tops of them. He’s never...seen the top of a tree before. It looks like broccoli.
“Isn’t it pretty?” Lance says, bringing Keith back to reality. Their hands are still clasped tightly between them-- neither one wanting to let go because they could fall.

“Yeah. It is.” Keith says quietly.

“See?” Lance bumps their shoulders together. “You can trust me, Snickers.”

Keith nods, heart rate finally starting to slow down. “Yeah.” He says. “And the best part is that...the President can’t even reach us up here so...the secret vase is safe.”

Lance’s face breaks into a grin, crooked teeth and all. “Now you’re getting it!”

Present Day

Lance is swamped. He’s never had this much work to do in one day. It’s true that he loves Allura to death and would probably die for Shiro, but this is a little too much for three months. Allura had said, “You can do it, Lance. I believe in you!” and planted a sloppy kiss on his cheek. But Lance doesn’t agree. He really doesn’t think he can do it. Because on top of Allura’s wedding he is also planning two more-- and then a quincinera. All in the same time frame.

Lance wrings his hands anxiously in his lap. He tries not to let his brain fall into that dangerous place where the stress causes his head to spin. He’s been better about it lately, but sometimes the stress gets to be too much. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, counting to ten. It’s something Keith taught him when they were in college. Well, Shiro technically taught it to Keith first. Keith uses it to get his temper under control but Lance uses it when he starts getting too anxious. Nine times out of ten, it calms him down. He lets his eyes flutter open and looks back down at the mess of receipts and papers on his desk. He has to order from four different catering companies today but he lost the notes he took about what they want. He knows one of them doesn’t want meat. He doesn’t remember which one. The mess on his desk is really starting to get on his nerves, but he doesn’t have time to clean it.

“Lance!” Allura’s voice startles him.

“Hm?” He turns around, facing her. She looks stunning, as usual. All soft curves and dark skin and shimmering hair. Curse Shiro and his godlike good looks or else maybe Lance would’ve at least had a shot. But alas, Shiro’s perfect jawline and exquisite personality were bound to beat out his sarcastic, lanky ass any day. “All good?” He asks her.

“I may need you to run an errand for me.” Allura says. “It’s nothing too crazy. I was going to do it myself but I just got called into a meeting. Do you have time?”

Lance glances down at the mess of papers on his desk, hesitating to answer. “Uh…” Breathe, Lance. Calm down. “Yeah. I should...have time.” He lies.

“I may need you to run an errand for me.” Allura says. “It’s nothing too crazy. I was going to do it myself but I just got called into a meeting. Do you have time?”

Lance glances down at the mess of papers on his desk, hesitating to answer. “Uh…” Breathe, Lance. Calm down. “Yeah. I should...have time.” He lies.

“Great! Thank you so much. I just need you to go to this address and ask for Jared. Tell him I sent you. He just needs to give you a price quote for some flower arrangements. Okay?”

“Should be fine.” Lance lies again. Vague instructions are probably his worst nightmare. They leave so much room for things to go wrong. But he gives Allura his most charming smile and says, “Anything else?”
She smiles back gratefully. “No, that’s it. Thank you Lance.”

“It’s not a problem. Good luck in your meeting.” He says, waving goodbye as she scurries out of his tiny cubicle-like area. Sighing, he turns back to his desk. Maybe it was the blonde lady who wanted the veggie menu. Wasn’t her son a vegetarian or something? No, that can’t be right. There’s no way that’s right.

Lance gathers some of his things, along with the paper Allura gave him, and gets in the elevator.

He attempts to go through some of his recent phone conversations in his head. Alexa and James wanted the chocolate cake. Rose and Alena wanted to make sure that the fish was cooked with pesto, not marinara. And that blonde lady...that blonde lady wanted only veggies. He’s sure of it. Why does it feel incorrect?

As he climbs into his car, he finds himself punching in Keith’s number purely out of reflex. He typically doesn’t like to call Keith while he’s at work, but sometimes he slips up. Keith works in human resources for a small, local corporation-- which pretty much means he’s a recruiter. He looks for new people to hire for the company, and gets to go through hundreds of job applications every week, making the final decisions about whether or not they should be hired. Keith probably sends out twenty rejection emails every day. Lance can see why they picked him as the decision maker--he’s blunt, straight to the point, and confident in all of his decisions. He has no problem telling someone they suck. He also has no problem telling someone they are a perfect fit. It’s gotta be something in his blood. His genetics. Because Lance has known him for more than fifteen years and he still doesn’t understand it.

Whether or not he understands it isn’t important right now, because Lance needs help making a decision. And as usual, he knows the best person to call is Keith.

“Hello?” Keith’s deeply unamused voice sounds in his ear.

“Hey Snickers.” Lance says. “Apples, potatoes, or pesto?”

“Potatoes.” Keith says, not missing a beat.

“Cool, so the blonde lady. I was right.” Lance says. “Thanks.”

“Yep.”

“Bye now.”

“See ya.”

The phone clicks shut. Amazing. Keith is right every single time.

Of course this call was one of many, many others. Lance makes calls like this to Keith all the time. It started in junior year of high school, when Lance had to make a very difficult decision about who to take to prom. Three girls had asked him and he didn’t tell Keith about it. He didn’t really know how, and it didn’t seem like a problem Keith would bother himself with. After driving himself crazy with his own loud, intrusive thoughts, he still hadn’t come to a decision, and he was sick of torturing himself over it. He already tortured himself about everything else that he did, and he refused to let this make him miserable too. So as they got into Keith’s car, ready to drive home, Lance randomly asked, “Hey Keith. Sharpie, chair, or stuffed animal?” Without pausing, Keith just immediately said “Sharpie.” He never even asked for an explanation. He never even explained his own choice. It was all very random but yet seemed to make perfect sense to both of them. Lance ended up taking the girl equivalent to “Sharpie”, and it was an amazing, carefree night. It may not have been the most
respectable way to make a decision, but hey. They were high school boys. They didn’t know any better.

“Chair” girl ended up hitting her date with her car. “Stuffed animal” girl ended up ditching her date and making out with another guy in the back hallway.

Lance still doesn’t know how Keith manages to make the right decision, without wavering, without fault, every single time. It may have something to do with confidence. It may have something to do with luck. But whatever it is, Keith has always had it. And damn, Lance loves that about him.

He turns the corner into the crowded parking lot where apparently this florist, Jared, works. He parks in one of the only available spaces, taking a moment to collect himself like he always does before he has to meet new people. He glances at his scared eyes in the rearview mirror and takes a deep breath, forcing a smile onto his face and fighting down the urge to flee.

He can do this. It’s just a florist, after all. He’s made it through worse.
“Shit.” Keith hisses as his hand twitches, causing the razor to skid down slightly and nick him near his chin. “Fuck.” He literally cuts himself every single time he attempts to shave his face. It’s not like he has much to shave anyway, but sometimes he can see his skin attempting to do something that remotely resembles hair and there’s no way it’ll grow out to look decent, so he shaves it as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, it doesn’t happen very often, so he’s a little out of practice. And if there’s one thing that Lance knows about him that nobody else does, it’s that he’s squeamish as fuck, and hates the sight of blood.

He sees a small stream start to trickle down his wet chin, mixing with the water and making it look like there is more than there actually is. The sight of it makes his stomach turn, creating a queasy, unsettled feeling in the pit of his gut. Ugh. “Lance?” He calls from the bathroom. No answer. Oh man, he’s not feeling too hot. “Lance?” He asks again, much more panicked. He sees a droplet of blood fall and hit the corner of the sink. Ew. ew ew ew. Oh man, is it hot in here? He presses a small piece of toilet paper onto the cut to try and stop the bleeding, but the blood soaks through and Keith feels it on his fingers. “Lance!”

“What do you want?” Lance calls lazily from the living room.

Keith swallows, covering his eyes with his free hand. “I’m bleeding.”

“Again?”

“Yes, again, you asshole.”

“Just do the toilet paper thing.”
“It’s not working!”

“You’re probably doing it wrong!”

The queasy feeling intensifies. Keith groans in frustration. “Lance, come on.”

A loud, exhausted sigh comes from the living room and Lance walks into the cramped bathroom, crossing his arms and looking down at Keith. He looks like he’s trying not to laugh. “Keith, seriously? That’s got to be the smallest cut yet.”

Keith scowls. “It won’t stop bleeding.”

“One sec.” Lance sighs, leaving the bathroom and coming back with a tube of chapstick. He knocks Keith’s hand out of the way with his fingers. “I knew you were doing it wrong. You’ve really gotta push it into the cut—”

Keith shuts his eyes, groaning. “Ew, stop. Please.”

Lance chuckles. “Alright, hold still.” He reaches forward and scraps the bloody piece of toilet paper. Keith can feel the blood near his chin collecting again, getting ready to drip down. Lance sighs. “Jeez, Keith. How do you always manage to do this to yourself?”

“Please just hurry up and cover it.” Keith mumbles, having a million rebuttal argument but letting them die on the tip of his tongue. Lance is helping him, after all. Lance blots his chin a few times with a paper towel and then puts some chapstick on the tip of his index finger. “My dad taught me this trick.” He says. “To stop the bleeding.” He presses his finger to the cut, covering it with chapstick. It stings but Keith refuses to let Lance know that. Lance holds his face by the chin and then tilts it to the side, leaning in and examining the small cut critically. His face melts into an easy smile.

“There. See? All better.” He says, a little condescendingly, sending Keith a smug grin. “Want me to kiss it too?”

Keith scowls further. “Go away.”

“You’re welcome!” Lance calls behind him as he saunters back into the living room. Keith sighs, wiping the counter down before following Lance, flopping down on the couch next to him and staring at the wall where a TV should be. They keep meaning to get one, but every time they look at them online, they end up finding something else they want more. Like an expensive rice cooker. Or a Soda Stream. Or some other useless junk that their kitchen doesn’t have any room for.

“It’s a Saturday.” Keith says bluntly. “And we have nothing to do.”

“Speak for yourself!” Lance says. “I’m going out with Nyma!”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Really? Again?”

“Well don’t sound so surprised.” Lance says, smiling. “I know how to get a second date.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Keith rolls his eyes. “Maybe I’ll just go to Shiro’s. He needs some help with wedding stuff anyway.”

“Sounds exhilarating.” Lance deadpans. “Remember when you used to be fun?” He pokes Keith’s cheek. Keith swats his hand away.
“I was never fun.” He defends in an emotionless voice.

“Hm.” Lance is still grinning. “Fair enough.” He says jokingly. “Well, tell Shiro I say hello.”

“I will. You gonna be out late tonight?”

Lance scoffs. “No, Keith. I’m going to a bar with a hot girl and I’ll be back at 7PM for supper.”

Keith’s lips twitch upwards despite himself. “Fuck off.”

xxx

5th Grade

“Hello, Lance. I know it’s time for recess, but I just wanted to make sure everything was okay.” Mrs. Farrell, Lance’s language arts teacher, places a kind hand on his shoulder. “You usually do really well on these. Was something more difficult about this one?”

Lance looks down at the large, red ‘F’ written in the corner of his language arts test. The letter is blurry through his tears but he can still see it. What happened? How could he do this? He even studied for two hours with his mom! He was so prepared for it! Stupid, Lance says to himself, lip quivering. This means you’re stupid. You should’ve worked harder. “No.” He says angrily, responding to her question. “It wasn’t difficult.”

Mrs. Farrell looks sad. “The reading part is the part you’re best at.” She hands him the paper. Lance crinkles the corner of it in his tiny hand. “But it seems like you left a whole page blank in the reading section this time. Did you not understand the story?”

Lance knows that Mrs. Farrell is being nice but for some reason he feels afraid. “I’m not stupid. I understood the story.”

“Lance…” She says softly. “Of course you’re not stupid. I’m just trying to figure out how to help you.”

“I don’t…know.” Lance says, sounding small. “I was scared, I guess.”

“Why were you scared?”

Tears blur Lance’s vision again. He whimpers and shakes his head. If he says it, it will sound dumb. I’m so stupid. I’m so stupid. I was going to get them wrong anyway. I was running out of time. Stupid. Stupid.

“Lance, we can’t get better unless we talk about it.” His teacher says gently. But Lance feels the tears streaking his cheeks now and he feels so silly for crying. She isn’t even being mean to him. He feels angry with himself anyway.

“I don’t want to.” He says, crossing his arms. “I wanna go play soccer now.”

Mrs. Farrell sighs, looking disappointed. “Okay, we can talk later. But don’t be afraid to come tell me anything, okay?”
Lance nods, wiping his nose angrily. He marches out of the room and towards the playground without looking back.

He finds Keith sitting on one of the swings, picking at the skin around his fingernails. Lance makes sure he wipes his face off before joining, sitting in the swing next to his. “Hey, Snickers.”

Keith looks up at him with big eyes. It’s weird to be able to see them, because usually Keith’s hair is long enough to cover them, but he got a new haircut yesterday and it’s so short that Lance can barely recognize him.

“What did Mrs. Farrell say? Are you in trouble?”

“Psshh, no way. She just wanted to ask me about an amazing essay I wrote.”

Keith just keeps looking at him, expression unchanging. “...okay.” He says.

“What wanna play soccer?”

Keith shrugs. “Okay.”

Lance lets Keith lead the way, falling behind slightly so he can wipe his nose with his sleeve again. He feels like he wants to cry more, but takes a deep breath. He doesn’t miss the way Keith glances back, just for a second, looking worried.

He can probably tell how much of a baby I am. Lance starts to say to himself. I bet Keith would never let himself cry in front of a teacher. He’s too cool. “So? Where’s the ball?” Lance says, surprised by how happy he sounds as he catches up to Keith. “Or are we just gonna pretend there is one? Because I can do that too.”

Keith doesn’t answer right way. He just hugs himself, suddenly looking even more grumpy than he usually does. ‘Look... jus’ wanted to say...” He mumbles, trailing off.

Lance raises an eyebrow. “What did you say?”

Keith scowls. “I just wanted to say,” he says, louder, “that I got a D on the test. The language arts one. So...”

Lance’s heart thumps loudly. “...Really?” He says, shocked.

“Yeah. So if that’s what...well, I thought the test was hard too.”

Lance swallows. Keith doesn’t really understand why Lance failed. To be honest, Lance doesn’t really understand why he failed either. But Keith is actually...trying to make him feel better?

“Well...” He responds, not really knowing what else to say. “Okay.”

Keith nods. “Yeah.”

“So...soccer?”

A small smile appears on Keith’s face. “Yeah.”

xxx
Nyma looks way too good tonight. Lance can’t even comprehend it. Everything about her is unique- -she just looks like someone who’s natural beauty stuns people into silence. At least, it stunned Lance into silence. She’s got almond shaped eyes and full lips high cheekbones. Her nose is thin and sloping, with a small hoop decorating her right nostril. Her cheeks are an adorable combination of freckles and a tiny bit of baby fat that never quite went away. Her hair is long and light brown, but she’s got the ends dyed a soft, red color. She’s got an edgy look that Lance’s little, romantic heart practically dies for. She rocks the ‘smudged eyeliner, black coffee’ aesthetic and Lance is truly, genuinely digging it.

When he left the apartment, Lance was convinced that he looked really damn attractive. He threw on a dark blue, slightly oversized t-shirt and some tight, light-wash jeans. It’s one of his favorite “I’m being really casual about this but also I’m really effortlessly hot” outfits. He’s got about four of them. This one makes him feel the best. Keith thinks he’s insane for putting so much thought into his clothes, because “Nobody thinks about what you’re wearing as much as you do, Lance”. And it doesn’t help that Keith literally wears the same thing every single day, and has since freshman year of high school. He is the epitome of not giving a shit. Lance is the complete opposite. Everything he does has to have a purpose.

But that’s completely besides the point. Lance usually feels pretty great about himself until he actually gets to the place that he’s going to. There’s something about being in public that makes him feel so inherently average-looking. When he looks at himself in the mirror he can tell that he’s objectively an attractive guy, with some unique physical traits. But he can’t help but feel like he just kind of looks like everyone else. Except maybe not as good. Well, whatever. He came out to have fun anyway.

He spots Nyma among the crowd and she waves him over. She’s looking really sexy in a tight, black dress with her hair pulled back. Her nose ring is black tonight as well. Lance’s heart rate picks up as he walks over to her.

“Hey, McClain.” She says smoothly.

“Hey.” Lance responds, sounding equally as charming. He’s not really sure how he gets away with it, honestly. Especially since he’s slowly starting to feel like a potato sack in this shirt. He lets his false confidence take control, numbing all of his other senses. He wraps a hand around Nyma's thin wrist. “Drinks?” He asks in a low voice.

She hums. “Of course.”

They push through the crowd and make it to the bar, which is crowded with people. Lance manages to wedge himself between a few sweaty bodies to order a couple of drinks. This bar isn’t his favorite. He wasn’t really sure how to tell Nyma that, because she seemed really into it. But he honestly would prefer the one across the street. It’s less crowded, the A/C actually works, and the alcohol tastes much better. The bartender who works there on Friday nights went on a couple dates with Keith, once upon a time. But it didn’t end up working out because according to Keith, he was a “little bitch”, whatever that means. But who cares! Because now Nyma pressing closer to him in a way that’s making him feel dizzy. Her hand tangles into his hair. She leans in the speak into his ear. “You look good tonight.”
No I don’t. Lance hums. “So do you.” He wraps his arms around her waist. Her dress leaves nothing to the imagination. “So good.”

Nyma’s breath smells like tequila. She was drinking before he got here. He wonders exactly how drunk she is. “Wanna meet some of my friends?” She asks.

No. Absolutely not. “Of course, lead the way m’lady.”

She smiles and bites her lip in an attractive way, taking Lance’s hand and leading him across the dance floor to the other side of the bar. They weave through people until they reach the far back corner, where there is a group of people sitting on a couch smoking hookah. They’ve all got the same vibes as Nyma; edgy, smudged liner, cigarette smoke. Lance feels like a dork–his face still smells like the Clinique face mask and toner he used after his shower and his shirt is soft from his fabric softener that has the little teddy bear on the bottle. Wow, he’s uncool. He’s a genuinely uncool guy.

“Guy, this is Lance.” Nyma says. “Lance this is Jen, April, Ryan, and Andy.”

They all wave lazily at him, clearly uninterested. “Hey guys.” He tries, frowning slightly when he doesn’t get a response.

Nyma, seemingly oblivious to the rudeness that is happening, sits down on the couch and pats the space next to her. Lance squeezes in.

He watches Nyma take a hit, eyes closing and lashes curling against her cheekbones. Wow, shes hot. Her lips look delicious on the mouthpiece and Lance really wants to bite at them. She lets the smoke out slowly tilting her head back, and then offers Lance the mouthpiece.


She raises a perfectly shaped eyebrow at him. “What?”

“I did that a lot in college. But I’m…not a big fan. Anymore.”

Nyma looks utterly confused and a little pissed off. “Okay. Well, whatever.” She takes another hit. Lance can feel everyone’s eyes on him. He’s way too old now to give into peer pressure. He knows that. Logically…he knows that.

Their eyes bore into him–these people are so disinterested in his existence but seemingly very interested in his drug and alcohol use. He looks at the mouthpiece, starting to feel that choking, suffocating sensation that always creeps up on him when he can feel people disapproving of him. I’m ruining the whole night. Nobody is having fun anymore because I’m here. He can hear the voice in his head, saying “Hey, who brought this asshole? He won’t even take a goddamn hit!” Except it doesn’t sound like his own voice. It sounds like somebody else’s. It sounds like all of the people around him, yelling at him, angry at him for severely cramping their style. He looks around. Everyone still looks disinterested in him. But what if they’re not? What if they are interested? What if they are very, very interested and he’s actually pissing them off?

“But, um.” His voice cracks out before he can stop it. “Old habits die hard, I guess?” He holds out his hand for the pipe. Nyma grins wickedly at him.

“That’s more like it.” She says, handing it over. Like a switch going off, the weight lifts off Lance’s chest. Okay, good. She’s not mad at him. Her friends…are a normal level of disinterested again. Everything is right in the world.
He brings the mouthpiece to his lips, already regretting it.

The taste takes him back. It takes him back to long, painful nights and waking up in strange places. It takes him back to vomiting in public restrooms and passing out on park benches. It takes him back to Keith’s face—hurt and angry as he says, “Where the fuck were you last night?”

It’s all behind him now, of course. It really was only a few months that were particularly bad, in his sophomore year. A lot...had happened that year.

He blows the smoke out through his nose and it burns his eyes, making them tear a little. Before he knows what’s happening, Nyma is closing in, pressing their lips together.

She tastes like cigarette smoke and vodka. Lance wrinkles his nose. But he should totally feel lucky. This girl is really, really hot.

xxx

“Keith! Oh thank god you’re here. Allura is going insane.” Shiro says gratefully after he opens the door. He waves Keith in and they pad into the living room. There is a candle on the coffee table and Keith breathes it in, smelling the sweet citrus. He loves visiting Shiro and Allura’s tiny house. It’s one of the purest places left on planet earth. It’s small, and always warm. It smells like freshly baked cookies even though Allura can’t cook to save her life. It’s one of Keith’s safe places. He always tries to appreciate all the time he can with Shiro, because it was only based on pure luck that they ended up in the same city and he knows it’s one of the best things that could happen for him. His parents are still a few states away, where Keith went to college, but Shiro being here makes him feel comfortable, and Shiro’s house feels like another slice of home. Keith is really happy for them; Shiro and Allura have both come a long way since they started dating. Buying their first house together, although very tiny, was one of the biggest accomplishments for them. They were both promoted at their respective jobs and were able to afford it. Lance threw a “small get-together” for them at the time, to celebrate. Which, because it’s Lance, wasn’t very small at all.

Allura is sitting at the kitchen table in sweats, which still manage to look classy on her. Her hair is tied up in a messy bun and she’s elbows-deep in a bin filled with envelopes. Shiro sighs.

“Allura had the brilliant idea of stamping all of the wedding invitations herself. She’s got this...stamp thing in the mail that she--”

“Allura, stop making it sound so unreasonable!” Allura defends, turning to Keith. “I got this very adorable custom stamp ordered! I just thought it’d be nice to have it on all of the invitations. See?”

She hold the stamp very close to Keith’s face. “Tell me this isn’t cute!”

On the stamp is a small, organic design with the word “Shallura” written in ornate, detailed cursive.

“Um.”

Shiro crosses his arms. “Hah! Go on, Keith. Tell her the truth.”

“It’s just...your name.” Keith says bluntly to Allura. “With an ‘Sh’ in front of it.”

“Wha--no!” Allura huffs. “It’s our couple name! It’s our names combined together!”
“It’s...really not.” Keith says.

Shiro can’t contain his smile. “See?”

“Well too bad! It’s going on every single invitation! And every single one of your dearest family and friends will see it!” She exclaims, jabbing Shiro in the chest with her finger. “Keith? Are you going to sit there and be useless or help me stamp these?”

Shiro muffles a laugh into his hand. “I’m going to go change. Have fun, Keith.”

Keith sighs. “Thanks, Shiro.”

He sits at the table, across from Allura, and presses the stamp into the dark purple ink. Allura huffs again, as if she physically needed to get some more frustration out, before grabbing the second stamp and doing the same. They find a routine, sitting in content silence for a few minutes.

“How many of these are there?” Keith finally asks.

Allura clears her throat. “Numbers are...funny things. Aren’t they?”

“Allura.”

“Um. Well, less than 350.”

“Okay...and?”

“And...more than 300.” She says defeatedly.

“Oh my god.”

“Don’t tell Shiro! He’ll never stop laughing at me.”

“Oh my god, I’m not going home tonight am I?”

Allura laughs. “Well we did just get a new inflatable mattress. Maybe you can be our tester!”

“Oh boy, sounds riveting but, I’d rather not.” Keith says dryly, but there’s a smile on his face regardless.

xxx

When Lance gets home, Keith isn’t there.

It’s fine, really. He wasn’t even expecting to get home this early. It’s only midnight. He’s only a little bit buzzed. Sighing, he strips his clothes off and tosses them onto the floor next to his bed. He needs to shower. He feels disgustingly filthy. Like the smoke in the air somehow made it’s way underneath his skin and left dirt he’d never be able to scrub clean. Nyma had pulled him into the bathroom and sucked him off, and yeah, that was technically what he wanted to happen but it still isn’t sitting right in his stomach. It wasn’t even that good. She wasn’t very into it. Neither was he. Apparently he had been in love her a week ago but Keith was right...he does tend to say that every time he meets someone new.
Lance scrubs his skin viciously in the shower, trying and failing to get rid of the dirty feeling. He really thought he was past this. Past the whole “taking a hit of something to quell the anxiety” phase of his life. But apparently not. He’s a little disappointed in himself for giving in so easily. He also feels emotionally exhausted. Smiling for so long when you really don’t want to can actually take a lot out of you.

He wonders where Keith is. Is he still at Shiro’s? What could he possibly be doing there?

As if the universe is reading his mind, he hears the front door open and shut, the sound of Keith’s obnoxiously heavy car keys clanking on the counter. Lance dries his hair with his towel and throws on some sweats, walking into the living room. He feels a little relieved at the sight of Keith, especially after the night he’s had.

“Hey man, wanna--”

“Ah!” Keith jumps, turning around with wide eyes. “What the-- you’re home? Jesus you scared the shit out of me.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “My keys are right there, Snickers. Also, the shower was running.”

“Whatever.” Keith huffs. “How was your date? I’m assuming it sucked.”

Lance, for some reason, smiles at that. Keith doesn’t even realize that what he said sounds mean. He literally just says exactly what he’s thinking. It blows Lance’s mind. “Why do you say that?” He asks.

“Because you’re here. With me.” He says, slipping off his black jacket. “Instead of getting laid.”

“Hm. Very interesting deduction.” Lance says, walking into the kitchen to get something to eat. “Super interesting, actually.”

“What happened?” Keith asks, cold tone beginning to thaw. He follows Lance into the kitchen. “You don’t look okay.”

Lance snorts. “Thanks a bunch.”

“No, I’m serious.” Keith frowns. “What happened? Did she do something?” The ‘I’ll kill her’ is kind of implied in his tone.

Lance sighs. “I...just didn’t have a good time.” He says. “But I’m home now. It’s okay. Want something to eat?”

Keith looks at him skeptically. It’s a look Lance knows by heart, because Keith can see through his lies like nobody else. But Keith also knows not to push it. He sighs defeatedly. “Sure. Wanna make something?”

“How about cereal? I just got some more Cinnamon Toast Crunch today.”

Keith smiles. “Wait, really?”

“Yeah.”

“Like, seriously? You’re not joking this time?”

“Oh my god Keith, I literally tricked you one time. You gotta start to rebuild that trust, man!”
“Is it that shitty off-brand kind?”

“No, it’s the real kind. Don’t eat the whole box in two days this time, you animal.” Lance says back, a small smile already returning to his face.

“What’s that? Sorry, couldn’t hear you.” Keith says giddily, pushing past Lance and opening the pantry.

“I swear you’ll have to pay for the next five boxes!” Lance shouts to Keith’s back as he retreats into the living room with the cereal box.

“Whatever you say!” Keith shouts back, and Lance hears the futon creak as Keith flops down onto it.

“Don’t you want milk, you savage?”

“I’m fine just like this! Also, we’re out of milk.”

Lance groans. “Are you kidding me?”

Keith laughs from the living room. “You’re the one who went grocery shopping this week. This is on you.”

Lance grabs a box of Honey Nut Cheerios and joins Keith on the futon. They sit in the barely-lit room, hands buried in their respective cereal boxes, munching quietly. Lance makes the executive decision that he likes this. He likes being freshly showered and eating Honey Nut Cheerios right out of the box. He likes being able to breathe. It’s nice.

“So did she make the first move again?” Keith mumbles through a mouthful of cereal.

“I mean, she sucked my dick.”

“I think that counts.”

Lance chuckles. “Then yeah.”

“Cool.”

Knowing when to stop talking, Keith flicks a piece of cereal off of his hand and it hits the wall across from them, before falling to the floor. Lance flicks a piece afterwards. It hits slightly higher.

An hour later they fall asleep on the futon, cereal covering the entire carpet.

xxx

6th Grade

“Oh my god, Snickers! You have a date?” Lance asks, a little teasingly. They are ankle deep in the
creek below Rossway Cliff, kicking water around and looking for frogs. It has only taken them a few weeks of getting lost repeatedly to find out how to get here. Now, it’s one of Keith’s favorite places. He likes how cold the water is, even in the summer. Finding cool bugs and little frogs is pretty cool too.

“It’s not a date.” Keith frowns. “Stop that.”

“Uhh she’s coming over your house, isn’t she?”

“Yes, but just to work on our history project.” Keith mumbles. Lance leans over and tries to grab at something in the water. He has to crouch over a lot more than Keith does—he’s gotten a lot taller in the past year and Keith has stayed almost exactly the same. Lance pushes his shaggy hair out of his eyes with a wet hand. It may not be curly anymore, but there’s still a lot of it. Keith’s is still really short. His parents say it suits him. He doesn’t really care either way.

“She’s having dinner in your house, isn’t she?” Lance asks suggestively.

Keith feels himself blush. “That doesn’t matter, Lance.”

“It’s a date!”

“Nuh uh!”

“It totally is!”

Keith kicks water at him. Lance screeches. “Shut up, Lance. Or I swear—”

“You swear what?” Lance asks tauntingly.

Keith kicks him with water again. Lance just giggles this time.

“Can we please talk about something else?” Keith asks, voice cracking. It’s been doing that a lot lately.

“Why, are you nervous?” Lance asks, this time sounding less teasing.

Keith swallows. “No.”

“Yes you are. You’re blushing!”

“No I’m not!”

“It’s okay to admit it, you know.” Lance says, voice getting gentler with every word. “I’m not going to judge you.”

Keith sighs. “Okay, fine. Yes...I’m a little nervous.”

“Well, lucky for you, you have me!” Lance says, throwing his arms up in dramatic presentation.

Keith scoffs. “You haven’t even been on a date before.”

“True. But my sister has! And she tells me everything about them!”

Keith’s expression softens a little. “Oh.” He says. “So...what do I do?”

“You gotta make her something sweet! Girls love sweet things, I think.”
“What?”

“Like, bake something!”

Keith crosses his arms, frowning slightly. “I don’t know how to bake.”

“Hmmm…” Lance taps his chin and looks around at the water, as if that will give him an answer. Then he snaps his fingers. “Ah-ha! I’ve got it. Let’s go to my house.” He starts waddling towards land again, waving his hands with excitement.

“But we didn’t even find any frogs yet?” Keith pouts.

“Frogs can wait! Duty calls, Snickers!”

Lance stumbles into his kitchen excitedly and Keith follows behind him, feeling nervous. Lance’s older sister, Elena, is sitting at the kitchen table with a book in her hand. When she sees Lance, she raises an eyebrow. “Why do you look like you’re about to make a mess?” She asks, rolling her eyes. Her gaze falls on Keith. “Wow, you look especially grumpy today.”

Keith hums in reply.

“Quiet, Elena! I’m teaching Keith how to bake.”

“That sounds...like a horrible idea.” She says, getting up and walking over to the counter, where Lance in taking a mug out of the cabinet. “You should really ask mom before you do that.”

“Calm down, jeez.” Lance says, rolling his eyes dramatically. “I’m just using the microwave. It’s that thing you taught me. Remember?”

Elena actually smiles at this. Then she sighs in defeat. “Okay. Alright, fine.” She turns to Keith. “Please make sure he doesn’t make a mess.”

Lance scowls, but Keith just nods solemnly. Elena picks up her book. “I’ll be in my room. Not witnessing this.” The stairs creak as she climbs onto them.

Keith’s house, although only a neighborhood away, is drastically different from Lance’s. He’d never say it out loud, but there’s something about Lance’s that just feels more...homey to him. He loves his own house, and his room, but Lance’s house reminds him a little more of what his home in Texas used to be like. It’s all dark wood and ridiculously floral wallpaper. The cabinets feel used and the floors creak when you walk on them. It always smells like some kind of flower. Keith thinks it’s lilac. It’s probably lilac.

His house, on the other hand, is newly refurbished. His parents had the entire lower level renovated and it looks a lot more modern now, compared to the houses around it. Keith thinks it looks really nice, and Lance loves it, but very deep down, there is always something about this creaky wood that Keith likes just a little bit more.

“Okay, Snickers. Ready for this? I’m gonna blow your mind. And then you’re gonna blow your date’s mind. And it’ll be great.”
Keith blinks. “Okay.” He says, not able to be as enthusiastic as Lance is about...anything, really.

“We’re going to make an entire cake,” Lance pauses, for dramatic effect, “in this mug !” He shoves the gray mug in Keith’s face. “Ta-daa!”

“That’s impossible.” Keith says, unphased.

“Nope! My sister taught me! We can cook it in the microwave!” Lance scrambles to the pantry to get more ingredients. “It's so easy, you don’t even have to know anything about baking.”

“I don’t see how this is...dating advice.” Keith responds, feeling even more nervous because of Lance’s spectacle. He really didn’t think that Amy coming over would be such a big deal. He doesn’t even...like her like that. But Lance seems to think that he does? And...well, does he? Should he? How would he know?

“You gotta woo her with food!” Lance pauses, considering. “Foo her!”

Keith feels the smile on his face, snorting a laugh before he can stop himself. “That was bad.”

“Rule number one to foo-ing? Start with something sweet. I’m tellin’ ya!”

“Alright, alright, fine .” Keith says, still grinning. “I’ll...foo her.”

“Sweet! This is going to be the best first date ever!”

Keith has failed Elena, because he promised to make sure that Lance didn’t make a mess. But now they’re both sprawled out on the kitchen floor with badly-drawn chocolate moustaches on their faces and batter covering the entire countertop. Lance is saying the word “chocolate” over and over and over again, with weird accents and super wrong pronunciation. It shouldn't even be funny because it doesn’t make any sense, but Keith doesn’t think he’s ever laughed this hard in his life.

Present Day

Lance’s car is always burning hot. He cranks the heat no matter what the temperature is outside. It’s madness. Keith can’t stand it. Lance has always liked hot weather but he should know by now that if Keith is in the car too, he isn’t going to get away with turning the heat on in the middle of spring. Keith reaches forward and dials it down about six notches. Lance huffs.

“Why do you hate my toasty car?” He asks, sounding offended.

“It’s not toasty, it’s hell.” Keith says crassly. “One of these days you’re going to pass out at the wheel and die.”

“I’ll die a toasty, toasty man.”

“You’ll still die.”
“I think you’re missing the point.”

Keith gapes at him. “I’m the one missing the point?”

Lance laughs. “Will you stop complaining? We’re about to go eat some of the fanciest food in this city for free. You should be jumping out of your seat!”

“I’m ecstatic.” Keith deadpans, clearly not ecstatic.

“You better be! This restaurant is the best in this entire area, especially for catering. And usually they don’t let me bring a guest! But these guys were particularly nice.”

As part of his ‘event planning’ agenda, Lance often goes to cake tastings, catering check-ups, and food-runs, etc. For the couple who have him planning their wedding, he apparently promised to check out the catering company they were considering to see if it was worth the money. This is something that the event planner sometimes has to do, but Keith doesn’t think Lance minds too much. About a month ago, Lance came back home with about a pound of leftover wedding cake from one of his cake tastings where the amount was “a little overestimated.” They ate like kings for a week.

This time around, Lance is checking up on a new restaurant/caterer in the area who gave him permission to bring a guest. Keith was actually really excited when Lance invited him, but he didn’t know how to say it. Lance got the idea, though. He usually does.

“I heard he makes this mushroom sauce that is to die for.” Lance says happily. “That’s the first thing on the menu.”

“What’s this guy’s name again?”

“Hunk Garrett. He apparently just graduated culinary school but he climbed to the top of the food chain—hah, get it? Food chain? Anyway, he made it to the top really fast.” Keith tries to scowl at the pun, but can’t keep the laugh from blowing out of his nose. Lance continues. “I really hope we can actually score them as a caterer, my reputation would explode. Like, in a good way.”

Keith smiles. “Well then let’s make a good impression.”

“That’s right, Keith! Try not to do anything too disagreeable. Like, you know. Being yourself and stuff.”

Lance cackles as Keith flicks his cheek, hard.

xxx

The restaurant is surprisingly casual. Apparently Lance had managed to convince this chef, somehow, to see him after closing; which means the place is completely empty when Lance and Keith walk in. It has a very underrated vibe. The brick walls are covered in art from various local artists. The lighting is dim and there is soft music playing from somewhere near the bar. Keith sits on one of the barstools and watches Lance scurry around the place, taking notes into his phone and snapping pictures of the ambiance.

“Wow this place is great! This couple really nailed their wedding aesthetic when picking a restaurant. Props to them.”
Keith is clearly lacking context to whatever Lance is talking about, but nods anyway. He can always tell that Lance is super excited about a project when he starts to use the word “aesthetic” in his sentences.

Lance joins Keith at the bar. There are already two menus laid out, as if, whoever this Hunk guy is, was very prepared for their arrival. Keith looks around questioningly. “Uh. Where is everybody?”

Lance frowns. “Hello?” He calls out to nobody.

Suddenly there is a young girl squeezing behind the bar and jogging towards them. She’s got short, light brown hair pulled up in the world’s smallest bun, with half of her head shaved. Her large, trendy glasses cover half of her face and she’s swimming in a baggy, gray hoodie and loose jeans. “Sorry, sorry! I spilled beer all over the kitchen and it was a bitch to clean up. Are you Lance McClain?”

Keith glances at Lance, who is blinking owlishly with a confused expression on his face. Probably because of the foul language, surprising him.

“Are you...Hunk?” Lance asks, sounding confused.

The girl scoffs. “God, no.” She says, adjusting her glasses on her nose. “I’m Pidge. Bartender slash hostess slash sometimes busboy.” She extends her hand in greeting. Lance takes it.

“Are you really old enough to be bartending?” He asks, instead of saying hello. Pidge shrugs.

“Ehhh. I’m nineteen. I technically have my servers permit.”

“Technically?”

Pidge shrugs. “You know how it is.”

Keith can tell by the way Lance glances down at the bar that he truly doesn’t know how it is, but he also knows that Lance always stops himself after asking two questions about something, for fear of looking like an idiot. “Cool, cool.” Lance nods. “Oh, this is my buddy Keith.” He says, jabbing a thumb in Keith’s direction. “He’s going to be a lot meaner about the food than I am.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Not true.” He says. Pidge shakes his hand. “Nice to meet you, Keith. So, Hunk should be out in a couple of minutes. He’s getting everything together. Today was killer, for real. Do you guys want anything to drink?”

“I’ll have a diet coke.” Keith says.

“Just some water.” Lance says. “Please.” He adds. Pidge nods and walks towards the kitchen. The door swings open and then shut. Lance immediately turns to Keith. “Okay, how old does one have to be to get a server's permit? Also, how can someone only ‘technically’ have one? Also, why does she have three jobs? Is she the only person who works here?” All of the questions that Lance had wanted to ask earlier spill out of his mouth. He usually does this-- waits until he’s alone with Keith to ask questions he thinks sound stupid. Keith wonders why Lance cares so much about what strangers think about him. It annoys him to no end, that Lance works so hard to please people and then gets left in the dark more than half the time.

“Eighteen for a server's permit.” Keith answers. “By ‘technically’ she means that she has one but it needs to be renewed. And according to the portrait at the front of the restaurant, there is only one other person that works here besides Hunk and Pidge. Except I don’t know which one is Hunk and which one is the other guy.”
Lance breathes a collective sigh of relief. “Jesus. Thank you, Snickers.”

“Why don’t you just ask?” Keith pushes, which he tries not to do, usually. But he threw it out there, just for fun.

Lance’s brows furrow. “It’s... just stupid. You know it is.”

“Lance--”

“Hi, Lance! Is that you? Jeez, you’re a lot younger than I thought you’d be.” A deep voice comes from the kitchen as the door swings open. The guy who walks out of the kitchen is tall and stocky, with thick arms and a square jaw. His skin is dark, a bit darker than Lance’s and he has short brown hair sticking out from under his chef hat. His white smock is stained with various different things, which Keith always thinks is the mark of a good chef.

Lance is staring at him, shocked. “You are younger than I thought, too.” He says. “You’re Hunk?”

“That’s me!” Hunk says proudly.

“You own this place?”

“Well, the manager is technically Coran, but he went home early today. Anyway, welcome! Glad you could make it. I’ve never catered a wedding, this is so exciting.”

“Excited to be doing business with you!” Lance says happily. “This is Keith. He’s my built-in food critic.”

“Hi.” Keith says, unamused.

“Pleasure, Keith. Glad you could make it. Any critic is a good critic. The more the merrier!”

Wow, Lance is going to love this guy. Keith can already tell. His eyes shine in the same way Lance’s do—alight with passion and love for what he does. He can see all of the pieces clicking into place before they actually do. Lance looks absolutely overjoyed.

“Well, thanks so much for doing this for us.” He says.

Hunk wipes his forehead with the edge of dirty sleeve. “Of course! I’m not going to make anyone buy me out for an entire night without knowing what they’re getting first.” He says, gesturing around to the restaurant. “It is a new place after all. And I love getting opinions on my cooking anyway!”

Keith was expecting this to be much more... formal than what it is turning out to be. His heart feels... pleasantly surprised by Hunk and Pidge.

“Bring out the first plate, let’s do this!” Lance’s loud voice breaks into his thoughts.

“Alright, down to business! I like it.” Hunk says, ducking back into the kitchen to get the first plate. He returns in record time. “Pidge?” He shouts over his shoulder. “Why do these nice young men not have their drinks yet?”

Keith hears Pidge groan from another room. “I’m coming, jeez.”

Keith, on the other hand, is probably going to get along very well with Pidge.

Pidge comes through with their drinks, mumbling a “sorry I was busy” and letting them clatter onto the table. Hunk sighs.
“Thanks, Pidge.” He turns back to Lance and Keith, placing the plates in front of them. “She’s taking more than the recommended credit hours for someone her age. So, she’s kind of a mess.”

Hunk says, smiling kindly the whole time. He claps his hands together. “Anyway! This would be the appetizer. Yes, that it a crostini and yes, that is melted cheese on the tippy top. The sauce here is perfect for dipping, but I highly recommend pouring it right here where the bread is showing through. It soaks it all up and makes it really soft and full of flavor.” Keith blinks at Lance, who is looking at him with an excited, shocked expression. His eyes say, “please say something because if I do then I’ll end up squeaking”.

“This smells great.” Keith says happily, giving Lance a moment to breathe. “It smells like it might be spicy. Is it spicy?”

Hunk nods. “Good guess! Yeah, there’s a little bit of ground-up red pepper flakes in the sauce. I like adding it for a kick.”

Lance already has the whole crostini in his mouth. “Holy shit.” He says, voice muffled around it. Hunk bursts out laughing.

“You might be my new favorite client.”

“Oh, trust me.” Keith says, smiling a little. “He’s just getting started.”

xxx

This food is so good. Lance is actually going to die. He might be dying right now. This may be what heaven is. Holy shit how did he manage to score this guy as a caterer and then eat this amazing meal for absolutely no charge? He takes a million pictures for his clients, They will come later, of course, to try the food for themselves; but he was appointed as the “first round decision maker”. He knows they won’t be disappointed.

He’s practically licking his plate after dessert and he feels like his stomach might burst. It wasn’t a lot of food, but it was rich, and hearty, and Holy crap this Hunk guy knows what he’s doing. No wonder this place is crazy popular. Keith has been silent as well--which is something very foreign to Lance, especially because Keith will never miss an opportunity to tell someone what they are doing wrong. But Keith hasn’t said anything about the food. Which can only mean one thing. He fucking adores it.

And if Keith adores it, then it passes every single test.

Keith clears his throat. “This was really good.” He says. And Lance doesn’t think he has ever, in the eighteen years that they have been friends, heard him say those words in a sentence like that.

“Oh really? You think so? That’s so great. I was super nervous about cooking for a new client. I mean, I know that the food is good but like, it’s all subjective, you know?” Hunk rambles nervously. “Cause like, it doesn’t really matter if I like it, you know? It’s all about how other people like it--”


Hunk grins broadly, blushing. “Ah, you think so? Wow, thanks so much. Really! I’m so glad you liked it. So those would be the three courses at the wedding. And then you’ll have to get the actual wedding cake from somewhere else because unfortunately...I don’t do that.” Hunk chuckles
nervously.

“Great! Sounds so great. I should be able to bring Alexa and James over within a week or so. They want to try the food for themselves. But I’ll tell them it’s a yes from me.”

“Sure thing! Cool!” Hunk says.

Pidge comes out of wherever she was hiding and sits in the barstool next to Keith. Hunk smiles sympathetically at her.

“Finished?” He asks.

“No. I still have seven pages left of this chapter. Please put me out of my misery.”

“I can’t kill you.” Hunk says sadly. “But do you want a beer?”

Pidge nods. “Yeah, just one. That’d be great.”

“Do you guys want anything to drink?” Hunk asks. “You can hang here for a bit longer if you want.”

Lance jumps a little in his seat. “Oh, sure! Is that alright, Snickers?” He asks, poking Keith’s arm. Keith looks down at where Lance’s finger jabbed him, then his gaze drifts back to Lance’s face. His dark, grumpy eyes look much softer, and there is a satisfied flush on his cheeks from the spicy food. He smiles. “Okay, sure.”

“Snickers?” Hunk asks, sounding lost.

“Oh boy! Wait until you hear this story--”

“Lance.”

“-- it has got to be one of my favorite Keith stories, ever.” He looks at Keith, who is ducking his head to hide his probably blushing face. His hair is so long that it covers his eyes when he looks down. Lance wonders when it got that long. Has it always been that long?

Hunk is looking back and forth between them, raising an eyebrow. “Oh, oh--wait. Sorry. Are you two--?”

“No.” Keith says tiredly. Lance chuckles. Keith always gets so annoyed when people think they’re dating. It’s hilarious.

“No, but everyone thinks we are. We’ve just known each other for for ever.” Lance says, rolling his eyes and dismissing it. “Anyway, we were in sixth grade and Keith bought a Snickers bar on a field trip, and he put it in his back pocket--”

“It was completely wrapped!” Keith snaps, sounding as irritated as he gets every time Lance tells this story.

“--and then in the bus, he completely forgot about it and it melted all over his ass.”

“There was no way the chocolate could have gotten out! I don’t know how it happened!”

“And nobody noticed until we were all in the cafeteria and I was the first one to see it. I almost choked on my pepsi. It was hilarious.”
“Okay fine, it was funny. Funny- ish.” Keith mumbles. “But it’s been like ten years! He hasn’t stopped calling me that!”

“I think that’s the best thing I’ve ever heard.” Pidge says, still chuckling. Hunk places a few cans of beer on the bar.

“That’s gotta be a record for the longest someone can be embarrassed about something.” He says, grinning widely. “I love it.”

“Wow, you all suck as much as Lance. I didn’t think it was possible.” Keith says, in his typical dry, teasing voice. But Lance recognizes it as happiness; and he swears he sees Keith’s face almost, just barely, crack into a small smile.

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr: dimplesandcurlsss
my art insta: allscribbledup

message me i love hearing from you! also if you ever draw fan art, tag me and i will die of happiness. like i will be on the floor. <333
Vanilla Cupcakes

Chapter Summary

Keith makes a strange discovery whilst on a blind date. and...i dont know. he's going to be the first one to pine hopelessly, my friends. That's all I'm gonna say

Chapter Notes

hi loves, for those of you who follow me on tumblr, you know that about a week ago i lost a friend in a pretty dreadful way. things have been a little rough for me since then. i had a bit of this chapter written beforehand and thought I would just post it :) it was more of a self indulgent chapter than anything else. writing has brought me a lot of happiness during this time and i hope my writing brings you happiness too :)

A few things: Keith is not asexual. ive had a few people ask. but no, he was just a very late bloomer and incredibly shy when he was growing up.
Lance's anxiety is modeled almost directly from my own experience with anxiety disorder so if some of it seems inaccurate to you for some reason, just know that everyone experiences it differently!

POR FAVOR read the notes at the end as well. love you guys, thanks for your support through this sucky time <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seventh Grade

Keith knew he’d find Lance here. Rossway Cliff has quickly become Lance’s favorite place to hang out, especially because nobody ever goes up there. And Lance, from what Keith has gathered, really doesn’t like being around people as much as he pretends to. Keith wipes the sweat off of his forehead as he continues climbing up, higher and higher. His skin is already dotted with new acne spots and he really doesn’t need more sweat making it worse, but Lance hasn’t talked to him in a week and Keith is really starting to get worried. So, a few more pimples would be worth it.

Lance has been in the guidance counselor's office a lot since middle school started. He doesn’t really tell Keith what it is about, but Keith has been noticing small things about Lance that are changing. Lance’s grin isn’t the same bright, toothy grin it used to be. He can see the light in Lance’s eyes dimming. Even when they are at their brightest, they aren’t as bright as they used to be. And Lance would walk out of the office and join Keith in the hallway, plastering a fake smile on his face and saying “Sorry about that! So, wanna stop by the gas station and get Oreos?"

He sees Lance sitting near the edge of the cliff, hugging his knees and looking at the stream below.
He looks sad. His eyes are puffy and red. Keith sighs. He’s not sure how to talk to people about touchy things like this, but he’s willing to try. At least Lance will know that he cares, even if he embarasses himself. He slowly walks over and sits down next to Lance. “Hey.” He says quietly.

Lance jumps slightly, surprised, and looks at Keith with concerned eyes. “Snickers?”

“What are you doing up here?” Keith asks. “Are you okay?”

Lance bites his lip, turning to look back at the creek. Keith tries to read his expression, uselessly. He can’t help but feel jealous because Lance’s face is flawless-- not a zit in sight. And he even got the cool neon rubber bands for his braces. Keith’s are just an ugly silver. Lance’s hair is buzzed off, very short, and Keith is still trying to get used it it. He liked how it was before, but Lance hated how much of it there was.

“My mom says I need to start seeing someone.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Seeing who?”

“Like...a therapist.”

The silence around them is heavy. Keith watches Lance’s eyes turn glassy. He clears his throat.

“Okay? So what?”

Lance scowls at him. “What do you mean, so what?” He snaps. “It’s a big deal, okay? It means I’m crazy, and nobody can fix me.”

“You’re not crazy.”

“I am.” Lance shakes his head furiously.

“No, you’re not. You just need some help, that’s all.”

“How come nobody else does, then? Why am I the only one who needs help?”

Keith shrugs. “Does it matter?”

“Of course it matters! Why am I so abnormal ?”

“You’re not.” Keith says again, frustratedly. “Everybody has something they need to fix about themselves. Look at my face! It’s covered with pimples. And you don’t have any. See? It’s like that.” Keith reasons.

“Pimples go away with soap, Keith. My whole brain is messed up!”

“No it’s not.” Keith swallows, thrown off by the use of his name where ‘Snickers’ usually goes.

“Your brain is great.”

“Oh really?” Keith has never heard Lance this frustrated. Angry tears are filling his eyes. “Like you would know. You don’t even hear half of the horrible things.”

“No. I don’t.” Keith says, voice shaky. He’s really, really not good at this. “But I-I hear the good things.”

This makes Lance pause. He sniffs, face softening. “What do you mean?”

Keith swallows. “I-I mean...you always come up with ideas for my projects and stuff...because I’m
not imaginative enough to think of them. And...your stories are really funny and...you know. Good stuff. Creative stuff.”

Lance is looking at him like he just said the most profound thing in the world. “Really?” He asks softly.

“Well, yeah. Of course. You’re like, the idea guy, ya know? A lot of people...like your brain.”

Lance turns back to the creek, so Keith does the same. The sound of the water down below is calming, and the air tastes sweet. It reminds Keith of the countless times they stood down there, soaking wet and flinging mud at each other while laughing hysterically. Ever since middle school started, things have felt...less fun.

“Thanks, Snickers.” Lance mumbles finally.

Keith takes a deep breath through his nose. “Are you ever going to stop calling me that?”

He can hear Lance’s smile. “No way.”

xxx

Present Day

Lance always likes it when Keith gets drunk, because he doesn’t do it very often. In the many years that they have been friends, Keith has only, truly been drunk three or four times with Lance, and they were usually special occasions. But it’s hilarious when he does drink, because his cold, careless personality melts off a little and leaves a wide-eyed, giggly, and obnoxiously loud person in their place. There’s gotta be some kind of magic to it. Something more than just alcohol involved, but there isn’t. Keith just has zero tolerance and gets wasted impressively quickly.

Lance has only ever seen Keith truly, genuinely lose his ‘cool, calm, and collected’ composure a total of three times in his life. Excluding, of course, the times they’ve gotten drunk together. These three moments were all for very different reasons. The first time was in eighth grade, when they took a weekend roadtrip to North Carolina to see The Red Hot Chili Peppers in concert. Keith’s dad had been kind enough to drive them. The Red Hot Chili Peppers were Keith’s all time favorite band and he had been listening to them for years. Lance’s “girlfriend” at the time had a really rich dad who managed to score them front row tickets. Lance had bugged Keith the whole ride, saying things like, “Hey Snickers. Snickers. Hey, hey Snickers. How excited are you? I bet you’re super excited. I bet you’re dying with excitement. You are literally about to freak out, I know it. So freaking excited.” And Keith just rolled his eyes and kept telling him to shut the fuck up, but his fingers were tapping rhythms onto his knees and his leg wouldn’t stop bouncing the entire car ride.

When they got there, Keith saw a booth with merchandise and bought a shirt, slipping it over his head on top of the black shirt he was already wearing. The new shirt was red and Lance remembers thinking that he’s never seen Keith wear anything other than black before. After they took their seats and waited in buzzing, excited silence for the show to start, Lance remembers looking at Keith and seeing his wide eyes, nervous hands, excited jittering knees. Keith refused to sit down. And when the first drum beats filled the air, Keith had jumped, grabbing Lance by the shirt, aggressively pulling him into a standing position and shaking him violently. “Holy Shit!” Keith had screamed, voice
cracking. “Holy shit holy shit holy *shit*! It’s them! It’s actually *them*! What the fuck! I know this song! Lance I *know this song*!” He looked at Lance with huge, beaming eyes and a goofy crooked grin that Lance had never, in his entire life, seen break across Keith’s face. And Keith doesn’t sing very well, but he sang at the top of his lungs the whole damn time. That was the first time Lance had ever seen Keith, walls completely down.

The second time was when Keith had just gotten surgery on his knee from a very unfortunate karate accident in their sophomore year of high school. He was drugged up on twelve different things and Lance had come over to keep him company, even though Keith’s mom had said he was “way too out of it” to talk. Keith had a foggy look in his eyes and he was laid out on the couch with a huge cast on his leg. When he spoke, his words slurried and his laugh was deep. Keith’s voice had gotten a lot deeper over the years but ‘drugged up Keith’ takes the cake on that one. They somehow ended up talking about weddings, and getting married. Lance had said that he wonders what his future wife would look like. This was, of course, before he came out as bisexual in college. Keith, on the other hand, high as fuck on painkillers, had said, “I dunno who I’ll marry but I bet he’ll be fuckin’ beautiful.” There was a moment of silence afterwards where Lance just stared at him. Keith’s eyes had flown open in a moment of clarity, looking panicked. “She.” He said. “I meant she.” But the cat was out of the bag. Keith remembers this as the “most embarrassing way to come out, ever.” But what Keith *doesn’t* remember, which Lance very much does, was the thirty whole minutes after Keith’s confession where he drunkenly stumbled through explaining *every single step* necessary to have sex with another man, and then finished it off with “I know b’cause porn taught me.” Lance had looked at him, thoroughly shocked and a little perplexed, as Keith burst out laughing afterwards, doubling over and covering his red face. Then he had put a finger to Lance’s lips and with a mischievous glint in his eyes, he said “Shhhh, but don’t tell anyone I said any of that! They’ll think I’m a pervert!” And, well, yeah. Lance still hasn’t told anyone that Keith had said any of that. Not even Keith.

The third time was much less happy. It was in sophomore year of college; the beginning of a darker time for both of them. Keith’s grandfather, who practically raised him while his parents were busy working long hours, passed away very suddenly and unexpectedly. Lance remembers watching Keith receive the news on the phone. He remembers seeing Keith’s face crumble; seeing the tears fill his eyes and the hard, angry clenching of his fist. Keith had chucked the phone across the room, anguish tears streaming down his face as he watched it hit the wall and break into a million pieces. “No. No. No. I didn’t say goodbye I--I didn’t get to fucking say goodbye--” He was chanting, over and over again, until he finally collapsed onto the floor with his face in his knees, heaving with sobs that sounded so brokenhearted they still haunt Lance to this day.

So, that’s it. Those are the three times that Lance has seen Keith-- the raw, unguarded, emotional version of Keith that very few people have witnessed.

But now, Keith, for some reason, is banging on his bedroom door and laughing hysterically. And Lance has a feeling this is going to be the fourth time. “Lance! Let me in! Come *on*, man. Please. I’m bored.” Keith sounds very, very drunk. It’s only 10PM. On a Sunday, no less. Why Keith is drunk is beyond Lance. Sighing, he walks towards the door and opens it. Keith collides into him, painfully, and hugs him around the waist.

“Hi!” He says happily into Lance’s chest. Lance grips his shoulders, trying to keep balanced.

“Hey, Snickers. You doin’ alright?”

“’m good. Went out for drinks with work people. It was someone’s birthday or somethin’.” Keith mumbles happily, hugging Lance tighter. “Hot guy bought me drinks and I wanted to keep talking to him so...I drank ’em all.”
Lance snorts. “Oh yeah? Meet someone cute?”

“Mnhmm!” Keith pulls away. Now that Lance can see his face, it’s very clear that Keith isn’t sober. His pupils are so blown out that almost none of his iris is visible. His long hair is a shaggy mess, sticking up in all different directions, and his face is flushed a deep, pretty pink. “He has a motorcycle. And he has a sleeve which is so fucking hottt.”

Lance raises an eyebrow, catching Keith when he falls forward slightly. “Like a tattoo sleeve?”

Keith scoffs, making a big show out of rolling his eyes. “No, Lance, a singular shirt sleeve. Of course I mean tattoos.”

Lance laughs. “Well I’m sorry, sir. I’ll be less stupid next time.”

Keith grins crookedly at him. “Anyway, we have a date on Wednesday!” He says, pumping a fist into the air. “I scored! Sort of.”

“Oh, that’s...wow!” This’ll be good for Keith. He hasn’t gone out with anyone in a while. “Nice!”

“Right? I bet he’s great in bed.” Keith slurs. “Can’t wait.”

Lance laughs. It comes out a little nervous. He doesn’t know why. “What’s his name?”

Keith shrugs. “I forget. I’ll find out later. Celebrate with me!” He grabs Lance’s hands and pulls him into the kitchen. Lance stumbles after him as Keith blabbers happily. “’M gunna get laid for the first time in forever. So sick of jackin’ off all the time.”

From past experience, Lance knows that Keith will only ever talk about sex when he’s under the influence. When he’s sober? Forget about it. He’d rather die. But put a few drinks in him and it’s like his inner horny gorilla awakens and he can’t seem to talk about anything else. It’s been awhile since Keith has spoken about anything remotely sexual though, and Lance, for some stupid reason, feels like blushing. It’s unfair because Lance talks about sex all the time but when Keith does it, it’s... “I’m happy for you, man.” He says, meaning it. “You deserve some good sex.”

“Yes, I do.” Keith flops onto the futon, staring at his legs as they dangle off the edge. “And I’m gonna get it from that guy.”

“Oh yeah?” Lance chuckles, joining Keith on the futon. He sits on his side so he can face him. “How you gonna do that, Snickers?”

Keith scowls at him. “Don’t underestimate me. I have my ways.” He says, sounding way too serious to actually be serious.

“I’m not underestimating anything.” Lance says in a teasing voice. “I know you have your ways.”

“Good.” Keith says. “Because I do.”

“Cool, cool. So what are these ways, huh?” Lance asks. Because the only way he will ever see this side of Keith is when he’s this drunk. And that...doesn’t happen often. Just let him enjoy this, okay?

Keith frowns. “Can’t tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because then you’ll go use it for yourself.”
“So?”

“So...it’s mine. Get your own.”

Lance is trying really, really hard not to laugh. “Well that’s not fair. I wanna have good sex too.”

“You already do! All the time!”

“Well yeah but not the Keith way!”

Keith blinks slowly at him, looking a little pissed but mostly just very confused. “I can’t show you. That’d be weird.”

“Hmm. Would it?”

“Well yeah. I mean, I don’t wanna have sex with you.”

Lance winks. “Not even a little?” He jokes. Keith rolls his eyes.

“I’m going to bed.” He says. Lance laughs, fighting down a blush. He can’t help it, he gets this way whenever anyone talks about sex, okay? It’s not just a Keith thing. Sometimes he feels like he’s still fourteen years old, blushing at the mention of a penis or something of the like.

They both get up and Lance starts walking to his room. It’s not that late, but it’s probably better to just end the night where it is right now. He needs to get up especially early tomorrow, anyway. A lot of shit to do. A lot of shit to do. He runs a hand through his hair, sighing. He hears Keith waddling around drunkenly behind him, bumping into things and trying to get situated. He chuckles a little to himself. That boy is insane.


For as close as they are, Keith and Lance actually don’t hug that often. It mainly because Keith has a very strict “don’t fucking touch me, ever” policy. Which Lance is fine with, mostly. Even though he’s generally a very handsy person. But when either one of them is drunk? It’s like they need to make up for all the hugs lost to sobriety. Keith rarely ever asks Lance to hug him, unless he’s completely out of it.

Lance laughs and steps forward, wrapping his arms around Keith’s shoulders. “Alright, Snickers. Here’s your hug. Congrats on the date, and not puking.”

Keith hums into his shoulder. “The night isn’t over yet.” He mumbles.

“Do I need to get you that red bucket again?”

“I think that might be best.”

Lance sighs. “I hate that thing.”

“Alright, I’ll barf on your face instead.”

“Noted.”

xxx
It feels like it’s been eons since Keith last went on a date. He isn’t even sure why he agreed to it, because this guy kinda seems like a tool, now that Keith isn’t trashed. He woke up the morning after his embarrassingly drunk evening and sent a text to the new number in his phone, asking if the date was still on (because he was so drunk he could have very easily imagined it). He got the little emoji wearing sunglasses in response. In conclusion, this guy is probably a tool. When Keith has an instinct about something he is almost never wrong.

Man, that guy was something else, though. Keith’s memory is incredibly foggy. He barely even remembers what they talked about. All he remembers is trailing his eyes over the tight black tank top and the curling pattern of dark ink on the man’s forearm. His hair was dark and slightly curly. His jeans were gray and ripped at the knees. He vaguely remembers the feeling of making out with someone. Was it in a car? It might have been in a car. Did he walk home? He was sure that he walked home.

Ugh. This is why he barely ever drinks. He doesn’t like not being in control of his thoughts. It’s not in his nature to second guess himself. He doesn’t like vagueness. Foggy details. Forgotten sensations.

Lance is usually the guy who goes on dates. He’s the guy who brings people home, who flirts when they go out to bars, who’s probably better in bed. Keith doesn’t really like to think about Lance in...those kinds of settings. After all, it’s hard to think someone can be sexual after you’ve heard them talk about their nose hair and poop for however many years. People always ask Keith if he’s ever had feelings for Lance and Keith just laughs because Lance? Of course Keith loves him to death as a friend, or possibly a brother, but he’s seen that boy go through some genuinely gross things. He’s popped that boy’s zits at one point in time, when Lance actually had a couple in eleventh grade. People don’t realize how much of Lance Keith has seen. The line has to be drawn somewhere, doesn’t it?

It’s also pretty obvious that Lance, with his preppy clothes and polished skin, is not at all Keith’s type. Keith tends to like...dirtier men. Men who don’t use face masks or cupcake bodywash or cry during Sex in the City reruns. It’s not that he doesn’t love those things about Lance, it’s just that he’s not...attracted to them...

Keith tugs on the same black shirt and jeans that he wears all the time, deciding that just because he’s going on a date with a hot guy doesn’t mean he has to look any different. They’re just getting drinks, after all.

He walks out into the living room and Lance whistles loudly from the couch. “Lookin’ hot as usual, Snickers.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “I look the same as I always do.”

“Exactly.”

“Will you save your lines for someone else?”

“Oh come on, you know I need to practice on you before I try it on anyone else. So how was that one? I’d say it was a five.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Five out of what?”

“Five, obviously.”

Keith actually hears himself chuckle before he realizes he’s doing it. He runs a hand through his hair.
“But actually, do I...look okay?”

“I just said you look hot.” Lance says, looking confused.

“Well yeah but you were joking.”

Lance gasps dramatically. “Are you insinuating that I lied to you? I thought we were closer than that!”

“I’m leaving now.”

“Be safe! Look both ways before crossing the road! Buy a condom because I used the one that was in your wallet!”

Keith turns back to Lance, hand on the doorknob. “You what?”

“It was an emergency! I was all out.”

Keith groans. “You are the absolute worst person I’ve ever known.”

“Love you too! Say hello to biker boy for me!”

“Bye, Lance.”

“See ya, Snickers.”

xxx

Lance is working from home today, after getting permission from Allura. It’s easy to ask for things these days because Allura is so preoccupied with wedding plans she genuinely doesn’t care what Lance does. There is a bar mitzvah this weekend at the Laser Tag place downtown, and Lance has to make sure all of the decorations are perfect. It was his idea to decorate the entire place with a galaxy theme— so that even when the kids aren’t playing laser tag it still feels like space. It seemed like a good idea until he got into budgeting, logistics, and resource management. Now it’s kind of a shitshow. This is what he always does. He has a big idea and it falls flat, crushed by reality. People tell him that his parties are still incredible either way, but, they’re probably lying just to make him feel better. There’s no way they could actually be happy with what he puts out. Other planners with more money and better ideas probably get it done with so much more technical skill.

He sighs.

Whatever.

He dials Allura’s phone number and listens to it ring.

“Hello?” She answers after the third ring, sounding exhausted.

“Hello, beautiful.” Lance says, a little sarcastically because he’s not really in the mood to be charming. “Did I catch you at a bad time?”

“What is it, Lance?” She asks, sounding exasperated. “I have three appointments today and I have to leave for the west side in an hour.”
“Oh. Uh…” Lance’s stomach twists. He physically can’t stand it when someone isn’t pleased with him. His body fights it like it’s an infection. “I’ll call back later.”

“No, what is it?” She presses.

“I just, was wondering...about the budget for the Beckers. How flexible is it?”

“Not very.” She sighs. “I’d say you can add about five hundred more but even that would be hard to negotiate with them.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“So it’s your choice whether to take that risk or not.”

“Yeah.”

“Sorry Lance.” She sounds genuinely upset. “Sorry I can’t help you with this one more. I know you can do it though. I just...text me if you need anything else.”

“Yeah, okay.” Lance responds, nerves already twisting their way into his gut. People always tell him things like that. Like, “I know you can do it” or “but you’ll be fine on your own.” It’s as if they don’t realize that he’s actually completely clueless. For some reason, people genuinely believe he actually can do it. And it’s supposed to make him feel better but it just makes him feel worse because they are just setting themselves up for disappointment when they see what he actually does. At least...well, that’s how it feels, anyway.

He sighs, opening his text messages and shooting a text to Keith.

Lance

Hey man, lollipop or dragon?

Keith is on his date right now but surprisingly, Lance’s phone lights up not even fifteen seconds later.

Snickers Kogane

Dragon

Lance swallows. Looks like he’s asking for more money, then. He takes a shaky breath and dials the clients number, trying to quell his nervous heartbeat. It’s just a call, Lance, he tells himself. Just a phone call. Please calm down.

Someday he’ll learn to have Keith’s confidence. But for today, he just needs to get this phone call
out of the way so he can watch Netflix and pretend to work for the rest of the night.

xxx

9th Grade

Lance and Keith lay down near the edge of Rossway cliff, panting and staring at the sky. Keith hears his heart thudding in his ears at an alarmingly fast pace, but he feels light and giddy from sprinting. He just raced Lance up the hill and of course Lance won. His legs have nearly double in length since seventh grade and now he’s a lot taller than Keith. But running was still fun, and if he ignores the sound of Lance laughing smugly next to him, it actually a pretty nice moment.

The sky is starting to turn navy. It’s Keith’s favorite time of the day, when the sunlight slowly melts into a deep blue. The moon is almost full tonight, and Keith can hear the telltale running water sound from the creek below.

It’s the first week of ninth grade and Keith is excited. From what he’s heard, high school isn’t really the best thing in the world, but middle school was so rough that Keith is willing to welcome any kind of change. Lance had started seeing a therapist and it was rocky at first. He would come to this cliff a lot and Keith would just watch him watch the water, not really knowing what to say. Lance was having a lot of trouble and Keith didn’t understand why. He asked his parents about it and they tried to explain it to him, but he didn’t quite get it. His conversations with Lance mostly consisted of Keith asking, “well why do you feel that way? It’s not true” to which Lance would always snap back, “I don’t know, alright?”

Luckily, towards the end of eighth grade, Lance seemed to be shaping back up into himself again. It was like an antidote that started working, slowly but surely. By the end of the summer, it was like nothing bad had ever happened. After months and months of dull expressions and scared eyes, Lance was finally cracking jokes and laughing hysterically and calling Keith “Snickers” again. He even dated a girl, Jess, for three whole months towards the end of the school year. She was “kind of boring but really cute”, in Lance’s words. They broke up before summer break. Keith is glad that they can start high school together without having to worry about how things used to be.

Lance sits up, finally catching his breath. He leans back onto his hands and stretches his legs out in front of him, staring at the view over the cliff’s edge. Keith sits up too, hugging his knees to his chest.

Lance is smiling back at him when their eyes meet. He just recently got his braces off, because his teeth needed a lot less fixing than Keith’s, and his smile is taking some getting used to. Keith forgot what his teeth look like without the neon green rubber bands covering them, and now that they are visible again, it’s throwing him off. It’s also, admittedly, making him jealous-- every girl he’s spoken to in the last month has asked him about Lance. He’s apparently one of the most attractive guys in the class. It makes Keith frown when he looks at his own gray braces and pale, zit-covered face and feel very self conscious. Why does his best friend have to be fucking Prince Charming? Not fair. “I feel good tonight.” Lance says to him, sounding earnest.

Keith smiles back, not as brightly but he tries his best. “That’s good I guess.”
“Yeah, it is.” A pause. “The view is just as cool at night.” He says, staring out into the water.

Keith nods. “It hasn’t changed much.”

“Did you ever tell your parents that you came up here?”

Keith shakes his head no.

“Wow, what a rebel.”

“They would literally kill me. My mom would have a stroke.”

“But it’s not even that dangerous!”

Keith shrugs. “Right?”

“Unless…” Lance wiggles his eyebrows suggestively. Keith snorts.

“Unless what?”

“Unless they’re worried that you’re...ya know.”

Keith frowns. “That I’m what?”

Lance grins, showing off his annoyingly straight teeth. “Well, this is one of the most popular places to make out in town.”

Keith’s frown turns into a scowl. “Ew. No. I don’t think they’re worried about that.”

“I think they are.”

“I’m not going to make out with anyone, that’s gross,” Keith says, nose wrinkling.

“It’s not! You just don’t know because you haven’t done it.”

“Well have you? Ew, did you make out with Jess?”

“Well, not really. But I kissed her!”

“It’s not the same thing.”

“Well have you kissed anyone?” Lance asks, a little defensively. Keith rolls his eyes.

“No. And I don’t want to.”

“You don’t want to kiss anyone?”

“No.”

“Not even Ms. Dibbs?”

“What? Ew.”

“She’s so hot!”

“No...she isn’t.” Keith says, slightly unsure. Is she hot? How does one tell?
“Well what about Victoria from your english class?”

Keith purses his lips. “Curly haired Victoria?”

“Yeah!”

“No.”

Lance looks at him with wide eyes, extremely confused and slightly annoyed. “What? Really?”

“Can we talk about something else?” Keith asks, frustrated. It’s not that he doesn’t think girls are attractive. It’s just that he can’t really see himself kissing one. He feels much more...comfortable around guys. Whatever. He’s probably just a late bloomer.

“Well maybe it’s because you haven’t done it before.” Lance reasons, refusing to change the subject. Keith sighs.

“Well I can’t do anything about that.”

“Are you scared?” Lance asks, and it isn’t teasing. It sounds genuine.

“No.” Keith furrows his brow. “Why would I be?”

“Ya know. ‘First kiss’ and all. It’s kind of a big deal.”

“Whatever.” Keith scoffs. “I mostly just want to get it over with so people can stop asking me.”

Lance hums in acknowledgement, obviously realizing that he’s crossed the line into angry territory. The air is quiet for a while, nothing but the faint sound of singing insects filling Keith’s ears. The breeze is warm like it always is in August. Keith turns his gaze up to the round moon, loving how it looks more yellow than white. Then Lance speaks again.

“Well, do you want me to do it?” He asks quietly.

Keith looks at him questioningly. “Do what?”

Lance clears his throat. “Kiss you?”

Keith scowls, heat flaring in his cheeks. “Are you insane?”

“What? You said you wanted to get it out of the way!”

“Well yeah but I don’t want to kiss you!”

Lance sputters. “Wha--? I’ll have you know that I’m an excellent kisser!”

“But I don’t-- I don’t like you like that! We’re both boys, that’s weird ,” Keith says, and hearing the words come out of his mouth suddenly makes him very nervous.

“Well that’s why it’s perfect!” Lance argues back, turning his whole body to face Keith. “You don’t like me. I don’t like you. It’ll be meaningless! Harmless, even! And then you can tell everyone you had your first kiss and we’ll never speak of it again.”

Keith stares at him, dumbfounded. It’s so stupid that it actually kind of makes sense . He studies Lance’s confident face, covered with tiny droplets of sweat from the thick summer air. His heart is beating slightly faster than usual. He isn’t actually going to do this, is he?
Keith finds himself turning towards Lance before he realizes he’s moving. “I…don’t think it’s a good idea.” He says, voice surprisingly level.

Lance frowns. “Okay. Sorry, Just thought I’d try to help.” He says gloomily. Keith finds himself studying the small, sad pout that Lance makes with his lips. It couldn’t be that bad, right? Kissing another guy? It doesn’t even mean anything. And Lance isn’t even well he’s not un attractive.

Keith swallows. There’s no way he’s going to do this. It’s the dumbest idea ever. But...it would be nice to just be able to tell people that he’s kissed someone. And he feels more comfortable doing it with Lance than any of the girls in the class.

He clears his throat and the words tumble out of his mouth, garbled and rushed. “Fine, kiss me but make it quick, okay?”

Lance jerks his head around and raises an eyebrow at Keith. “Wait, seriously?”

Keith flushes. “Please don’t tell me you were joking this whole time.”

“What? No I--um. Just didn’t think...Okay.”

Keith swallows. “Okay.”

Lance scooches forward slightly and barely leans in, as if he’s experimenting. Keith catches a whiff of something that smells a little bit like a vanilla cupcake and leans back on instinct.

“No, Snickers, you gotta sit still.” Lance says softly. He grabs Keith by the back of the neck. “Don’t lean away, okay?”

Keith feels Lance’s fingers curling into the skin beneath his ear and it’s a very foreign feeling, being touched there. He isn’t expecting it. Lance’s lips quirk upwards in a cocky, side-smile.

“This is weird.” He says.

“Yeah.”

“Now...close your eyes or something.”

Keith scowls, but lets his eyes fall shut anyway.

“Stop that.”

Keith grunts. “Stop what?”

“Doing that thing with your face.”

“What am I doing?”

“Just. Relax.”

Keith sighs frustratedly and takes a large breath through his nose. He feels Lance lean forward. The palm on the back of his back is sweaty and gripping a little bit tighter. The tip of Lance’s nose touches his and he jerks away slightly. Lance holds him in place. Keith hums angrily. “J-just--”

“Yeah. Sorry.”

Keith suddenly feels Lance’s lips on his it’s an odd, strange sensation that leaves his nerves buzzing.
Lance’s skin smells like vanilla. His lips feel different than Keith thought they would. They aren’t as chapped as they look. They’re a little bit colder than the air around them. The touch feels awkward. The silence is practically ringing in Keith’s ears. But then Lance’s lips shift slightly and slot in between Keith’s and it’s…

It’s…actually…

It’s nice.

It feels nice.

As quickly as it began, it ends. Lance pulls away and lets his hand fall from Keith’s neck. He leans back and smiles at Keith, who realizes that he probably has the stupidest expression on his face. He clears his throat and looks away, letting his eyes fall onto the creek again.

“See?” Lance says. “Not so bad.” He sounds completely confident. His voice doesn’t waver.

Keith swallows. He opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out. He lets it shut again.

“Oh come on, don’t be all awkward now.” Lance whines. “It’s not a big deal.”

Keith finally gathers the courage to look at him. “I’m not being awkward. I just don’t know what to say.”

“Well?” Lance crawls forward so that he’s invading Keith’s personal space again. “Well how was I?” He asks excitedly.

Keith raises an eyebrow. “You were fine.” He deadpans.

“That’s it?” Lance pouts. “Just fine?”

“Well, you’re not a girl. So.” It sounds strange when he says it. It leaves a heaviness in his gut.

Lance sighs. “Fair enough.” He says, shrugging. Then he assumes the position he was previously in, leaning back onto his hands and crossing his legs in front of him. He tilts his head up to the sky and smiles. Keith’s cheeks are burning and he wonders if Lance can tell.

“Hey Lance?” He says cautiously.

“Mhm?”

A long silence stretches between them, but it isn’t uncomfortable. “Thank you.” Keith finally says.

Lance doesn’t say anything back. He just grins and bumps Keith’s shoulder with his.

xxx

Present Day

Keith has been on a decent number of dates but he has never, in his life, been on a blind one. As
someone who always has their life planned out, meeting someone spontaneously who doesn’t really have a face in your brain isn’t exactly his cup of tea. He had texted the unknown number and (quite ashamedly) asked for the man’s name. Apparently it’s Kevin. Kevin. Doesn’t really sound like the man he was with on Sunday but hey, there’s more than meets the eye.

They decided to meet in a small bar on the street corner below Keith’s apartment building. It’s one of Keith’s favorite bars. They serve the best tequila. Keith doesn’t drink very often but when he does, tequila is easily a top pick. It gets him drunk the fastest and it doesn’t taste as shitty as vodka. This bar also has some of the comfiest bar stools ever. The ones at Hunk’s restaurant might be the best, but the stools at this bar come in close second. Keith flags down the bartender and orders two Moscow Mules. He’s a lot more nervous than he’s letting on. It’s been so long since he’s tried, actively, to impress somebody. It feels very strange.

The bar is dark and crowded. This bar in particular is a bit seedy. It’s one of those bars where people go solely to make out on every single surface. Nobody is really phased by it here. The workers never say anything. That’s part of the reason why Lance recommended this place for Keith’s date. It’s not even that late into the evening and there is already a couple sucking face on the barstool next to him. Keith snorts a laugh. Apparently Lance knows exactly what he’s doing when it comes to this stuff. It’s not that Keith only wants this guy for sex, it’s just...he really wants this guy...for sex. He feels a little bad. But mostly giddy with anticipation. This guy probably doesn’t want anything more from him anyway.

The bar door opens and closes and Keith tries his best not to turn around and see who it is. He’s got to keep up this mysterious look he’s got going on for him. If he looks too eager, it might kill the mood. He hears footsteps approaching him and bites his lip, feeling excited. He feels a tap on his shoulder and looks over, ready to see that curly dark hair and unshaved chin and ripped jeans and--

“Keith? Hi, I’m Kevin. From the other night?” The man holds out his hand in greeting, but Keith can’t move.

What the fuck?

What the actual fuck?

What the fuck is going on?

Standing in front of Keith is a man that smells like cinnamon sugar, with a pressed, teal button-down shirt on and khaki pants to match. Tan, clean-shaven skin. Long eyelashes. Short, wispy brown hair. Blue eyes. He’s muscular, very built, and filling out his preppy shirt quite nicely but Keith can’t ignore it. He can’t ignore the familiar features that pop into his head, slightly more delicate and feminine but awfully similar. He feels like the carpet has been pulled out from under his feet because wait, hold up one fucking second this is not the guy Keith talked to on Sunday, no it is not the guy he made out with it can’t be because that guy was sexy and manly and this guy looks...

This guy...

This guy looks like Lance.

The man is starting to look less and less confident with every passing second. “Do you..uh… not remember me?” He asks, confused. “I mean, you were pretty far gone so I wouldn’t be totally surprised if--”

“You’re Kevin?” Keith blurts, a little rudely, feeling heat rise to his cheeks. “You?”
“Uh...yeah?”

Keith clears his throat. “Uh. Sorry.” He mumbles. “Yeah you’re right, I might’ve been...a little...uh.” He swallows. “I remember you a little differently, that’s all. Sorry.” Shit, he sounds really awkward. “Um?”

Kevin clears his throat. “Should I just go?” He asks, all too kindly.

“No! No, I’m sorry. I’ve been really rude. I’m sorry. Do you want a drink? I’ve got a moscow mule here.” Keith clears his throat, gesturing to the stool next to him. Kevin smiles, looking relieved. His smile is actually really nice, and Keith feels weird for thinking so. Because…

Is this really the guy he hooked up with? What happened to the guy who bought him all of those drinks? The hot guy he was talking to at the bar? Did he hook up with both of them? Oh my god.

Kevin laughs and Keith jumps a little at the sound, startled.

“You look incredibly confused.”

Keith tries to smile back. “Nah, I’ll be fine. So, uh, Kevin…” Keith starts. How can he ask this delicately? “What brought you to the bar on a Sunday evening?” He attempts, smirking. Kevin leans in close to him and his scent is so sickeningly sweet that it he could almost be using the same exact body wash as--

“Was there with a friend.” Kevin says vaguely, with a smile. His voice lowers slightly. “Couldn’t take my eyes off of you all night though.”

Wow, Keith hasn’t been complimented like that in a while. His face flushes. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.” Kevin sends Keith a cocky side-smile and Keith swears that it looks like something Lance would do. “Couldn’t believe it when you came over to me.”

Keith swallows as Kevin leans in even closer, pressing his nose and lips underneath Keith’s jaw. He made the first move on this guy? This guy isn’t even remotely his type. He’s freshly manicured, for crying out loud. The only other guy Keith knows who is freshly manicured is--

“Well I’m glad I did…” Keith finds himself responding in a low voice, because now there is a mouth on his neck, hot and hungry, and damn he’s a lot hornier than he thought he was. It’s been too long.

Kevin hums into his neck. “Glad you did, too. This other guy was all over you but...you knew what you wanted.” He says roughly. Then, with a voice barely above a whisper, he says, “even though your pickup line was awful.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. Other guy? Biker guy? He turned down biker guy for this? To make matters worse, he apparently used a pickup line. That doesn’t sound like him. He never uses pickup lines. “Oh yeah? You still remember it though so it must’ve worked.” Keith says confidently, while his brain spins.

Kevin separated from his neck and moves his face up to look at Keith again. Their noses brush slightly. Keith, for some reason, actually likes the sugary smell of his mouth. He might even be wearing lip balm. It’s insanity. Why does Keith want to kiss it?

“Of course I still remember. You came up to me and you were like, ‘you look a lot like somebody I know, but don’t worry, he’s really hot.’ It’s the cheesiest one I’ve ever heard but...it worked.”
What the fuck? Keith is starting to feel a little dizzy. He swallows. He couldn’t have meant Lance, could he? But there’s nobody else that this guy looks like. And it wasn’t supposed to be a cheesy pick up line. Keith was actually, in his drunken state, trying to tell this guy that he looked like Lance.

Keith is starting to feel a little dizzy. Being so close to Kevin is making snippets of his memory come back. Kevin’s tan, shirtless body in the backseat of his car. Kevin’s hair, not as soft as it looks, between his fingers. The smell of cinnamon rolls. The taste of vanilla lip balm. The worst part of it all is that Keith wants, so badly, to do it again. And he doesn’t even know why. This guy is the polar opposite of anything that he ever finds attractive. But he wants to feel that hair between his fingers again. He wants to taste the sweetness of his lips and he wants to feel up and down the smooth, tattoo-less tan skin of his torso. It’s so...different. But it's so recognizable. Because...it's Lance...

And now he feels incredibly self conscious because he’s staring. He probably looks like he’s in mild shock. Kevin is smirking at him with pink, pretty lips. Lips that look familiar. Lips that remind him of Lance’s. And he’s having a crisis. He is really and truly have a colossal crisis.

He leans forward experimentally and presses his lips to Kevin’s. They feel warm. They feel comfortable. Keith’s eyes flutter shut. There’s no way this is healthy for his relationship with Lance. But shit, he can’t help it. Something inside him is slowly cracking as Kevin hums into his mouth, deepening the kiss.

Again. It’s really hard to find someone attractive when you’ve heard them talk about their nose hair and poop for however many years. It’s hard to find someone attractive when they use neon green face masks and cry during Sex in the City reruns. It’s a really, really hard thing to do.

But fuck.

Keith, apparently, manages to do it anyway.

xxx

“Hey, Snickers! Look who stopped by!”

Keith trudges shamefully into the apartment after having, objectively, some of the best sex of his life. Which makes him hate himself. Because the sex itself wasn’t even that great but it was…well...

He musters up the courage to pick up his head and look at Lance. He feels incredibly dirty. Okay, fine. So he thinks Lance is attractive. He just had car sex with a guy who makes him think about Lance. Whatever. Big deal. No, it’s not a big deal. Lance sees him and grins. Keith glances to the side and sees Hunk and Pidge sitting on the floor next to the futon. Shit. He didn’t think he would be seeing people. His sex hair is insane. He probably looks very disheveled. It’s probably very obvious what he just came from.

On the other hand he’s thankful for some distractions. Maybe being alone with Lance would feel a little weird right now. Keith never thought he’d say that in his life, but...it’s been a weird night, okay? Hunk and Pidge have kept in contact with Lance a lot since the taste testing. Lance texts with Hunk all the time. Pidge occasionally sends Keith a funny picture. It’s crazy how quickly they all became friends. They really only hung out one other time, but Hunk and Pidge seem like really cool people and honestly, Lance and Keith can afford to have a few more friends in this town.

“Hey guys.” He says. It sounds a little cold. He feels like his voice needs to be warmed up before it’s
used with new friends.

Lance is smirking. “Clearly, Snickers here just got lucky.”

Hunk and Pidge look like they’re stifling laughter. Keith sighs, face heating up. “I’ll be out in a bit. Gonna shower.” He mumbles, tossing his stuff into the corner of the room. He’s never felt this powerless over his own thoughts. Usually he’s really good about controlling what he thinks. But now he feels like his brain is a crapshoot. Maybe showering will help. Showering might help.

He hears his bedroom door open and feels a hand on his shoulder. He jerks at the touch, panicked, and whirls around. Lance is looking at him questioningly, hand still hovering in the air.

Keith swallows hard. Fuck. His brain starts running before he can stop it. Has Lance’s jaw always been that sharp? How long have those freckles been there? Wait those have been there forever. Why are they so appealing now? Are those really Lance’s eyes? How are they so blue? The sweet smell of vanilla cupcake fills the air around Keith. Lance must've just showered. Keith didn't even realize that Lance had a scent until just now. He feels the need to sprint away. What is happening?

“Hey man, how was it? You know I need details!” Lance whisper-yells, like he doesn’t want Hunk and Pidge to hear.

Keith blinks stupidly at him. “Um.” His voice cracks. “I...need to shower though. So...”

Lance leans back slightly, raising an eyebrow at him. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.”

“No you’re not. Was he a dick? He sounded like he might be one.”

“No.” Keiths scowls. “He was fine.”

Lance grimaces. “Was the sex bad?”

Keith could not possibly be blushing more than he is right now. “Sex was great.” He mumbles. “Can I please shower?”

Lance looks lost. “Uh...sure?”

Keith nods, ducking into the bathroom and slamming the door. He doesn’t hear Lance’s footsteps on the other side of the door, which means Lance is still standing there, probably looking incredibly confused. Keith puts his face in his hands and tries to breathe. He’s not going to let this make anything awkward. He’s gotta grow the fuck up. So Lance is attractive, Whatever. He’s always been attractive. Keith has always known, somewhere in the back of his mind, that Lance was an attractive guy. But he just never...well he never thought that he thought that too.

A soft knock on the door has Keith looking up. “Hello?”

Lance’s voice sounds sad. “Did I...do something wrong?”

Guilt twists in Keith’s chest. He knows that Lance gets incredibly upset when people seem mad at him. Lance must be torturing himself right now. Keith sighs. Alright, time to grow the fuck up. Get a hold of yourself. Don’t make Lance go through this for no reason.

“Nah, you’re good.” He says gently. “Yeah you’re right, the guy was a bit of a dick. Not sure if I’ll see him again. You should...go hang out with Hunk and Pidge. I’ll be out in a bit, okay?”
A small moment of silence. “Okay, sure.”

Keith listens to the fading footsteps, and then takes a long, deep breath.

That might've been one of the first lies he’s ever told Lance in his life.

Chapter End Notes

you all know my philosophy on comments is that if you take the time to comment, I am going to take the time to answer. but because of things that...have happened, i think that the comments for this chapter and the last chapter might not get replies because it does take a lot of time and energy that I...am not sure i have right now? im really sorry if this upsets people. Next chapter, I will def start replying again. Just know that I read every single one of your comments and i appreciate them so incredibly much. Every comment I get makes me endlessly happy. If you arent content with commenting without a reply, you can totally personally message me on tumblr and I will get back to you on that for sure! thank you so so much for reading, you people give me life. Have a wonderful day <3 Update will probably be a bit more than a week this time around, due to the extenuating circumstances. But maybe not! we'll see. love <333
Butter Pastries

Chapter Summary

Keith is suffering

Chapter Notes

me: ill totally wait until the end of this fic to put in smut
me: finds a way to put smut into the fourth chapter because i have no self control

i think i finally have ~somewhat~ of an idea of where I want this fic to go. im just doin things i love and all!

just wanted to say thank you all for the messages and support...things have slowly been getting better and im so grateful for all of your kindness and patience with me. love!

hopefully you'll enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10th Grade

“Will you please hold still?” Lance says frustratedly, grabbing Keith’s chin. “You’re going to make me get it everywhere.” He pauses, giggling. “That’s what she said.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “I can’t stay still for much longer.” Lance’s masterpiece is almost done. But it won’t look half as good as he wants it to if Keith doesn’t stop moving.

“Just a few more minutes.” Lance says, sticking his tongue out in concentration. “I just need to do the teeth.”

It’s Halloween today, and for the first time in about three years, Keith and Lance have plans. There is always an awkward window between trick-or-treating age and partying age, but they have finally entered into the beginnings of the partying stage of their lives. The party is hosted by some asshole in their class who probably was forced to invite the entire grade, but it doesn’t matter because they’re going to a party and there might even be alcohol!

Lance decided to dress up as a cat. It’s not his most original idea, but he liked how he looked with the cat ears on, and the makeup was simple. He doesn’t want to scare people away, after all. Keith, on the other hand, doesn’t give a shit about scaring people away, and wanted to just paint his face to look like a skull. Of course Keith has absolutely zero artistic talent, so it became Lance’s new project to recreate his face. They’ve been sitting across each other, cross legged, on the floor, for almost half an hour. Lance didn’t think it would take so long. Keith is getting antsy. Lance smudges black paint just below Keith’s cheekbone, before leaning back and admiring his work.
“Okay! Go check it out.” He says happily. Keith huffs, getting up wobbly and walking to the bathroom. Lance doesn’t follow him, but hears him gasp happily.

“Holy crap, Lance this is awesome.” Keith says from the bathroom, and Lance can hear his grin.

“You like it?”

“It’s frickin sweet, thanks.” Keith says, still smiling as he walks back into Lance’s room. Keith just recently got his braces off, finally, and he’s been smiling a lot more since then. He used to be really self conscious about his teeth. Lance remembers how Keith never used to show his teeth when he smiled in pictures. But now he smiles all the time.

The makeup actually looks really cool, not that Lance likes patting himself on the back. Keith has deep black rings around his eyes, sharp, dark lines underneath his cheeks, and black stripes along his lips as teeth. Keith is really, really pale, so the white base paint actually doesn’t look that stark or bright against the skin on his neck. His hair is an even darker black than the paint around his eyes, which really pulls together the whole look.

“You look so great!” Lance says excitedly. “I’m pumped.”

“You look good too.” Keith says, slipping on a black hoodie because he never wears anything else, not even on Halloween.

“Thanks, man. Ready to go?”

Keith takes a deep breath. “Yeah let’s do it.”

x

As much fun as Spin the bottle was when they were in middle school, spin the bottle is a lot more fun when you’ve had a few beers. Keith refuses to drink, but Lance was so excited when he saw the cans that he couldn’t contain himself. It’s like all of the movies, with the red solo cups and the people making out in the bathroom. Only this time, it’s real. The beer tastes like shit and burns on the way down but it leaves Lance’s brain feeling slow, like liquid, in a very pleasant way. He’s never been drunk before, but he imagines this is what it’s starting to feel like. It’s like the continuous stream of his loud, obtrusive thoughts has suddenly been turned off. He’s so used to feeling terrified of what the people around him think but right now he feels like he’s finally on the same level as them-- the alcohol acts like a barrier to all of the fear in his brain.

Keith is sitting next to him on the floor, a little too close, but Lance knows it’s because these situations with tons of people make him feel incredibly uncomfortable. His makeup hasn’t smudged at all, even with all of the sweating Lance can feel him doing through the sleeve of his shirt. It still looks really good. The pleasant buzzing in Lance’s head welcomes Keith’s closeness. It’s nice to have a good friend when surrounded by people you don’t know that well.

The bottle spins in the middle of the circle and everyone watches with bated breath. The room smells like beer and sweat, and just a hint of perfume from some girl who put on way too much. The bottle slows. Keith leans in a little more, gripping Lance’s arm. “No... please no.” He says desperately. But despite his wishes, the bottle points directly at him. And across the circle, it points to Scott Marren; easily the biggest douchebag in the class.
Scott is a lady’s man. Fuckboy. Known heartbreaker. A very “girls want him, boys want to be him” type of person. Lance knows for a fact that Keith has always, always hated him. But now the bottle is sitting unmistakably straight between them, and Scott looks way too drunk to be making any good decisions. His floppy, blonde hair is mussed up and his face is flushed, covered with a sheen of sweat.

Keith looks at Lance with wide, panicked eyes. He only just came out to Lance about two months ago, and Lance can see the fear twisting his face into a pained, terrified expression. And that’s when it occurs to Lance, hits him like a train, that Keith might actually... not hate Scott Marren.

That deep down, a very small part of Keith really wants to kiss Scott. It’s so obvious, at least to Lance, just by looking at him. He really, really wants to kiss Scott.

Which is why he is staring at Lance now, practically pleading. Because as much as he wants to, Lance knows he’d rather die than let anyone know that.

Scott is crawling across the circle, towards Keith; a little wobbly, because of all the drinks he’s had. People are shouting encouraging words. Some of them are covering their eyes, dying from second-hand embarrassment. It’s the first time since the game started that a boy is kissing another boy, and everyone is losing it. Lance rolls his eyes. He may not be attracted to boys but it’s really not that big of a deal. He kissed Keith last year and he’s still got all of his limbs. So whatever.

Scott is giggling like an idiot as he gets closer and Lance can see Keith’s furious blush, even through his makeup.

“Hey, good lookin’” Scott mumbles, now kneeling in front of Keith. His tone is so exaggerated that he has got to be joking. Mocking, actually. He’s swaying back and forth, clearly not sober. Dressed as a construction worker. “You gonna treat me well?” The crowd howls.

“Uh--” Keith’s voice cracks when it comes out. Lance sees the terror in Keith’s eyes. He isn’t going to let this happen.

“Hey Scott!” Lance says, not even realizing that he spoke. His buzz is going away slightly but he can still feel it, warming his cheeks.

Scott turns to him and raises an eyebrow. “Yes?” He asks, annoyed.

Lance grabs him by the collar, saying a prayer to whatever god exists, and presses their lips together. It’s sloppy and uncoordinated. Scott smells like sweat. His lips taste like bitter rum. Everyone in the room gasps loudly. The small circle of people dissolves into chaos.

“Holy shit!” Someone says.

“Oh my gosh, Lance is kissing Scott?!” Someone else exclaims.

Lance feels two hands on his chest, forcibly pushing him away. “What the hell, man?” Scott spits nastily, wiping his mouth. “You can’t just do that!”

Lance shrugs, playing it off like his heart isn’t about to crawl up his throat and suffocate him. “Why does Keith get to have all the fun?” He asks nonchalantly. Then he winks, for good measure. Scott looks at him in complete horror, wiping his mouth again.

“The fuck is wrong with you?” Scott snarls. “Fuck this, I’m outta here.” And with that, he waddles away, quite drunkenly. A posse of good looking girls follow him, giggling profusely and asking if he’s alright.
Lance gets up and dusts himself off, ignoring the few people who are still laughing at him, and holds a hand out to Keith. Keith stares at his hand like he’s never seen one before in his life. Then he looks up at Lance with round, glassy eyes.

“C’mon Snickers.” Lance pushes, grabbing his hand. “Let’s blow this popsicle stand.” Keith’s grip tightens against his palm as they weave through the crowd, dodging countless smelly, sweaty bodies, before finally making it to the door and stumbling onto the front porch.

The air is brisk and chilly. It’s the kind of night that is especially dark because the moon is covered by clouds. Lance takes a deep breath, rubbing his eyes and probably destroying his makeup. Goosebumps cover his arms as a cold breeze curls around them. He turns slightly to look at Keith, who is still in full makeup, completely untouched. It looks especially spooky underneath the white light coming from the small lamp above them.

Lance’s buzz is pretty much gone now and he kind of wishes he could feel it again, because now his thoughts are returning in unforgiving waves. Everyone thinks you’re a loser. You don’t even belong at this party. You’re only here because people feel bad for you. You should be home right now. You’re mom needed your help cooking dinner and you left to come here, and for what? What if something happens to her and that was the last you could’ve seen her? Why don’t you think about anybody but yourself? Stupid. Stupid. Stupid--

Warm, solid arms wrap around his waist, bringing him back down to earth. Keith’s cheek presses into his shoulder. It’s hot and soft, compared to the cold, tight skin near Lance’s bare collarbone. Keith...is hugging him. Keith Kogane is hugging him. This has only happened one other time. This is a big deal. In the entirety of their friendship, Lance has learned many things about Keith. One being that he is not a touchy feely person. But now Keith is pressed into him, holding on for dear life. And Lance feels the nervous breath leave his body in a rush, expelling all of his crazy, crazy thoughts.

“Aww don’t be sad, Snickers.” Lance jokes. “You didn’t miss out on anything. He smelled like ass.”

Keith chuckles a little breathlessly into his shoulder. Then he speaks, voice muffled. “Lance…”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

Lance hugs Keith a little tighter, because he doesn’t get to do this very often. But he really likes it. He grew up in a family that was all about using touches to show you care. He takes a deep breath. Keith smells a lot better than Scott did.

“You’re welcome. Let’s go watch Halloweentown. Fuck this.”

Keith laughs loudly as they pull apart. “Hell yeah.”

xxx

_Present Day_

Keith has made the executive decision to get the fuck over whatever small mishap occurred in his
brain on Wednesday and chalk it up to complete and utter misunderstanding. So what if he found Kevin attractive? That didn’t necessarily mean that he found Lance attractive. They’re two different people after all. And Kevin is much manlier than Lance. He’s more of Keith’s type than Lance. He looks like he lifts weights. And he actually has a little bit of blonde stubble. That’s manly, right? So, it’s totally different. Totally different.

At least that what Keith is putting all of his energy into telling himself.

On Friday evening Lance comes into Keith’s room and flops down on his bed, sprawling out like a starfish and hitting Keith’s face with his hand in the process. “It’s finally the weekend.” He says tiredly, eyes fluttering shut.

Keith swallows. Lance is shirtless, like he always is. All the time. So it’s not a big deal. It’s nothing he hasn’t seen before. He knows all of those little freckles below Lance’s collarbone. He knows the sharp lines of Lance’s hip bones. He knows the small mole, right next to his bellybutton. He’s seen these things since they were both seven years old, splashing around in an inflatable pool. And yet... now they look...

Lance clears his throat. “I said, it’s finally the weekend.” He repeats, cracking one eye open to make sure Keith is listening to him.

“Oh. Uh. Yeah, thank god.” Keith replies clumsily. “Do you... have any plans?” He’s not your type he’s not your type he’s not your type he’s not your type

“Might be going out with Nyma again.” Lance says. It sounds bored.

“I thought you didn’t have fun last time?”

“I...didn’t.” Lance sighs, sitting up and ruffling his hair into place after it got squished by the pillow. Keith watches, feeling distraught. “But I could use a drink. And maybe a good time. It’s been a long week.”

“But she won’t give you a good time.” Keith says, confused. “You said the blowjob sucked.”

Lance snorts. “Heh, get it? Sucked?”

Keith bites his lip. “Please fuck off.”

Lance clears his throat, flopping back down onto the bed. “I mean, yeah.” He says nonchalantly. Keith is sitting up against the headboard and looking down at him. Lance shrugs. “But it’s better than nothing, right?”

“Do you have any idea how pathetic that sounds?”

“Yes. Yes I do.” Lance yawns. “But you know me. Flings are my thing... and all that. On second thought, maybe I’ll just jack off and then eat some Cheetos.”

Keith laughs. A small flutter beats in his stomach but then is gone in an instant. “That sounds like a more appealing plan.”

“Yeah I might just do that. You got any plans?”

Keith hums, scooching himself down so that he can lay down flat. “Maybe we should invite Shiro and Allura for dinner. They’ve been stressed with all the wedding stuff and I bet they’d appreciate a home cooked meal.”
Lance makes a small, pouty noise. “But, like, objectively, doesn’t jacking off just sound like a better idea?”

Keith laughs. “Come on, we haven’t had people over in forever.”

“That’s because this apartment is abysmal.” Lance deadpans. “Also? Neither of us can cook. You burnt spaghetti yesterday.”

“You were distracting me!”

“I was watching America’s Next Top Model!”

“Obviously I needed to find out if I was right about who got eliminated.”

Lance sighs tiredly. “And you were…”

“And I was!” Keith says defensively. “So the spaghetti was doomed from the start, really.”

Lance laughs and Keith feels that stupid flutter again. Just for a second. Then it’s gone. “Maybe we can invite Hunk over to cook? With Pidge. That way they can meet Shiro and Allura.” He says, voice surprisingly steady.

“That could be fun. I’ll text Hunk and see if he can. You’ll text Shiro?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“We should probably also clean up the apartment.” Lance says, as he types the text out. “It looks like trash.”

“Yeah...let’s do that.”

They both stay right where they are, still staring at the ceiling. Lance groans frustratedly. “I don’t want to.”

“Come on, let’s be social beings for once in our lives.” Keith sits up, pushing himself off of the bed. “Lance. Lance, come on.”

Lance sighs, long and loud. “Fine.” He gets up and stretches, twisting his back a little and listening to it crack. Keith watches the muscles shift under the smooth, dark skin. Then he watches them relax. His cheeks feel hot. Why can’t he fucking look away?

“What are you looking at?” Lance asks, sounding concerned. He looks down at himself and looks up at Keith with big, blue, worried eyes. Of course Lance thinks there’s something wrong. There’s no way that Keith could be looking for….other reasons. Which he isn’t, by the way. That would be insane because...Lance is...not his type...

“Spider.” Keith says stupidly, with absolutely no reasoning behind it. “There was an ant--I-I mean, a spider. On your stomach. So, um. But it’s gone now--”

“A what?” Lance shrieks, jumping and making a huge spectacle out of slapping himself all over the place. “Is it there? Is it on me? Is it--is-- Ah! Is that it?” A fluff from the pillow falls from his hair and into his eyes and he shrieks again.

“Oh my-- Lance. It’s gone.” Keith says, cheeks burning.

Lance is panting. “Jesus, Snickers! Don’t fucking scare me like that!”
“Sorry.”

Lance takes a deep breath, running a hand down his face. Then, to Keith’s surprise, a string of giggles tumble out of his mouth. It sounds a little hysterical, but he’s got a little smile curved across his lips and Keith looks at his teeth peeking out—slightly less straight than they used to be because Lance stopped wearing his retainer too early. “Jesus, never do that again.” Lance says breathlessly, through a fit of giggles.

Keith can hear his heartbeat in his ears, louder than it’s been in a while.

It just sucks because Lance’s laugh is much, much nicer than Kevin’s.

xxx

10th Grade

Lance loves the smell of his therapist’s office. It used to make him sick to his stomach, when he was terrified of coming in. But now it’s a source of comfort to him. He doesn’t really know where it comes from. It might be incense burning, it might be a glade plug-in, or a candle, or lysol odor control spray. But it’s hearty and sweet and a little tangy, and he can feel his anxious heartbeat settling every time it hits his nose.

His therapist is a kind old thing; Dr. Rintel is about a foot shorter than him and twice the width. He’s a short, stocky, jolly man with a balding head and a full beard. When Lance started coming here four years ago, he used to come once a week. Now that he’s seemingly doing a little better, he only comes out for monthly sessions. This month in particular, however, wasn’t his best, so he called Dr. Rintel and asked if he could come talk to him. The moment his butt sinks into the soft, plushy couch cushion, the familiarity of the area soothes him. Even if only a little.

Dr. Rintel is smiling at him. “Lance! Good to see you. Glad you could drive out here on such short notice.”

Lance smiles even though he really doesn’t feel up to it. This guy’s grin is just contagious. “Good to see you, too. How are you?”

“I’m doing just swell, thank you.” He says, like he always does. “And yourself?”

Lance glances down at his nails. “I’m...I’m good.” He says, sounding unsure. “I’m...okay.”

Dr. Rintel nods. “Why don’t you tell me a bit about what’s been going on this month?”

Lance swallows. A long silence passes between them. Dr. Rintel waits patiently.

This month felt like chaos in Lance’s brain. In reality, nothing too horrible had actually happened. January is just usually a tough month for him. Something about New Year’s resolutions dying, and people giving up on people and winter with no Christmas to look forward to anymore and--

Who is he kidding? “There was this girl.” He blurs, sighing frustratedly. “N-not just in the month, though. Like, over the past couple of months. But...”
Dr. Rintel nods, not daring to interrupt. Lance bites at his fingernail nervously before continuing.

“I met her in my French class. We really hit it off and I really thought…” He shrugs. “Anyway. We dated for two months and I thought it was great. I really liked her. But…”

“What is her name?”

“Felicity.”

Dr. Rintel nods. “And what happened?”

Lance swallows again. “She said I was... too much. For her.” He sighs. “I didn’t even know anything was wrong but apparently just... me. It was just me that was wrong.”

“Well that is a bit of an over-generalization, don’t you think?” Dr. Rintel offers. “It may just be that you were not a good match for each other.”

“Well I thought we were.”

Dr. Rintel gives Lance a sad smile. “Unfortunately, a relationship involves two people, Lance. Did she say what was bothering her?”

Lance shrugs. “Too sensitive. Too emotional. Too hyper. Too much.” He rubs his eyes, suddenly feeling exhausted. “I just felt...so strongly about her. And I ruined everything. I feel like… I do that a lot. Like my feelings repulse people.”

“Lance, you can’t deny that you are an emotional person. And maybe even a very romantic one, too. It is not a bad thing to be. You just need to surround yourself with people who make you feel comfortable with that. Sometimes, it doesn’t work out.” Dr. Rintel offers a kind smile. “And that is how you learn for the next time.”

Lance can feel himself getting frustrated. “But it’s not sometimes, it’s all the time.” He says, frowning. “Every time I have a crush on a girl, it ends like this. She’s not the first person to tell me that. I’m too much for everybody.”

Dr. Rintel raises a finger in warning. “Another over-generalization.”

Lance scowls. “No, it’s not.”

“Finding those right people takes a very, very long time.” Dr. Rintel says softly. “That is why they are so valuable.”

“Even if they’re the right person, god knows I’ll screw it up.”

He hears Dr. Rintel hum. “Have you screwed it up with your family?” He asks pointedly. “Have they told you to leave because you are too much for them?”

Lance blinks. “...No.”

“And your friend Keith? Has he told you that you’re too much for him?”

Lance looks down at his shoes, sighing. “No…”

Another kind smile. “Just the beginning of a long list, Lance. A very long list of valuable people you will meet in your life.”
Lance takes a deep breath through his nose. “There’s still time for me to scare them away too, though. Just because they’ve stuck around doesn’t mean they won’t leave in the future.”

Dr. Rintel raises a skeptical eyebrow. “I can’t promise you anything will or won’t happen.” He says. “But I do know that they appreciate you, the same amount that you appreciate them. And Lance?”

Lance lifts his head.

“That amount is not ‘too much’.”

xxx

Present Day

“Wow, this place looks…” Shiro glances around at the shabby apartment. “Actually really nice? What the hell happened?”

Lance giggles happily, clapping his hands and jumping. “That was me! All me. I re-decorated. Isn’t it classic?”

“Allura says kindly, smiling. “We haven’t been here in awhile, have we, Shiro?”

Shiro looks around skeptically, shaking his head. “Nope, it’s been a minute. Hey, where’s Keith?”

“He’s in the shower. Poor guy did most of the dishes from the past...well we hadn’t done dishes in a while. So he had less time than me to get ready. Come in, come in!”

Lance is actually pretty psyched about this idea. Having Hunk, Pidge, Shiro, and Allura over for dinner seemed a little daunting at first, especially when all he really wanted to do was jack off and eat cheetos, but he’s actually excited for everyone to meet. And for Hunk to bless him with his cooking again. It been awhile since he’s gotten to eat it.

Shiro and Allura sit down at the table, which Lance wiped down with a Clorox wipe for the first time, probably, since they moved in. It actually looks like it’s a different color now. He’s equal parts impressed and disgusted with himself. “I can’t wait for you guys to try Hunk’s cooking. He’ll be here with Pidge in a bit. They’re bringing most of the food.”

“But don’t worry,” Keith’s voice sounds from behind them, flat and unamused. “I took the liberty of chopping up some carrots...because they were about to go bad.” He tosses a ziploc bag filled with pathetic looking carrots onto the table. “Enjoy.”

“Host of the year.” Allura deadpans.

“I feel so honored.” Shiro says sarcastically, but he’s grinning.

Lance turns to Keith, who is retreating into the kitchen, probably to get drinks. He follows him. “Nice touch with the carrots, but for future reference, at least put them in a paper plate? You know, like those dixie ones? With the little blue flowers on the edges?” He says it jokingly, a light smile playing on his lips. Keith snorts, turning around abruptly, probably to say something mean back. Lance doesn’t anticipate it and crashes into him. They both stumble briefly and Lance puts hand on
Keith’s waist, steadying him.

“Ow, jeez Snickers.” Lance says, covering his forehead with his free hand, where it crashed into Keith’s. “What gives?”

Keith looks like he just swallowed something sour. There is a faint blush on his cheeks. Probably still there from the hot shower? “I…” He clears his throat. “Uh, where did we put the Sprite?” Keith tears away from him, looking panicked. “Did we even get Sprite? I don’t think we, uh, I don’t think we remembered. But Shiro likes Sprite so—”

“Hey, Keith, what the hell? I’m the one with crippling anxiety, remember?” Lance frowns slightly. Keith has been acting very strange lately. Ever since his date with that biker guy on Wednesday he’s been really jumpy. Lance isn’t used to Keith keeping anything from him, and he knows that there is something Keith isn’t saying. “You need to calm down. Anyway, the Sprite is on top of the fridge.”


Lance raises an eyebrow. What the actual fuck? “Uh…okay?”

Keith smiles a little half heartedly at him and then turns around towards the fridge, struggling on his tiptoes to reach the Sprite. Lance chuckles a little. Keith always hates when he puts stuff up there because it isn’t as easy for him to reach. Lance walks over to where Keith is struggling. He leans over Keith a little too easily, gripping his shoulder for stability, and grabs the bottle. “Easy there, tiger. Don’t hurt yourself.” He teases, like he always does.

Keith whirls around, looking mortified. Lance raises an eyebrow, laughing. “Oh come on, lighten up. It’s not my fault I’m taller than you.”

“Stop putting stuff up there!” Keith grits out, face red. He’s probably embarrassed, poor guy.

“Well luckily you’ll always have me around to get them for you.” Lance teases happily, ruffling Keith’s damp hair, because he knows that Keith hates it when he does that.

Keith hums angrily, but it sounds weak. He doesn’t reply. Lance shrugs, sighing. Whatever Keith’s problem is, it’s probably going to have to wait until after everyone leaves anyway.

xxx

Keith doesn’t care, or anything like that. But Lance needs to stop touching him, just for like five seconds, so he can clear his head. Every time he’s convinced himself that he’s over it, Lance gets uncomfortably close and sends his brain on a bender. It’s not like Lance is doing anything particularly different from what he usual does—but Keith has been incredibly hyper-aware of every single touch Lance presses into his skin. He tried to tell himself that this is insane, and he’s being dramatic, and things need to go back to normal right now. But then Kevin’s face flashes through his mind. He sees the naked tan skin and the pink lips and the wispy hair. He remembers how Kevin felt against him. Inside of him. He remembers the sweet smell of Kevin’s lip balm that made him think of Lance the entire. damn. time. How Lance would feel. How Lance would sound. How Lance would taste.

It started out as a morbid curiosity—because Keith has never thought of Lance in that way, ever.
And now that he has discovered that apparently, his drunk self has thought about it, he’s curious. He’s curious to know what a moan from Lance would even sound like. He’s curious to know what Lance does in bed. He’s got to be good, right? He sleeps with a different girl practically every weekend. There’s got to be a reason for it...right?

Long story short, Keith is...very hyper aware of every time Lance touches him.

When they crashed into each other, which they have done a thousand times before, Keith felt the heat from Lance’s hand on his waist and his mind went completely blank. Then Lance actually had the audacity to press up all over Keith’s back, reaching over him to get the fucking Sprite and seriously? Why does he put shit up there anyway? To show off how long his legs are? Or something crazy like that?

A knock on the front door snaps him out of his spiralling.

“That must be Hunk!” Lance jumps away from his seat happily, pushing past Keith and running to the door. Keith feels a very strong need to retreat into his room, but then Shiro has a hand on his shoulder.

“You okay, Keith?” He asks, in his typical older brother fashion.

Keith looks at him and tries to quell the obvious panic in his eyes. “What? I’m fine.”

Shiro raises an unconvinced eyebrow at him. Thankfully, Hunks booming voice fills the apartment and saves the day.

“Hey Keith! I brought those pastries that you like! Oh, is this Shiro? Hold on one second--” Hunk is struggling to carry about four trays of food right now and Keith takes pity on him.

“I got it, Hunk.” Keith says, smiling. “You can give me a couple.”

“Oh thank god.” Hunk sighs, placing two of the trays in Keith’s hands. They make their way to the kitchen.

“Where’s Pidge?” Keith asks.

“She’s getting the dessert from the car.” Hunk says, panting a little.

“There’s more? Hunk we’re only six people!”

“I got really excited okay? And don’t you dare complain about leftovers!”

Keith chuckles. “Leftovers are welcome.”

“Great!”

Keith hears Lance and Pidge making their way into the kitchen. Pidge is groaning.

“Jesus, Hunk, how many sticks of butter did you put in these cakes? My arms hurt just from carrying them!”

Hunk grins. “I mean it won’t kill you, per say. It might just leave you in a food coma. With very slight memory loss.”

“Mmm, those are my favorite kinds of cakes.” Lance says, rubbing his stomach. “I’m so hungry I could die.”
They all walk into the living and dining area, which is really just a futon and small, rickety kitchen table from IKEA with fold-out chairs. Shiro and Allura are giggling about something at the table, looking way too in love for Keith to stomach today. Hunk begins setting out the food and Lance helps pour drinks for everyone. Pidge refuses to help because she’s “not going to be the waitress tonight, bitches.”

It all feels warm and comfortable in Keith’s stomach. Especially seeing Shiro, because they’ve both been so busy that they haven’t seen each other in a couple of weeks. It’s a little ridiculous because they live seven minutes away from each other but don’t take advantage of it as much as they should.

The room fills with the earthy, delicious smell of Hunk’s cooking. Keith doesn’t even know what the fuck he made but he knows it’s going to be amazing. Lance is almost glowing, with a huge grin on his face that has Keith’s gut twisting a little. It may be out of guilt. But he doesn’t know what he has to be guilty for. He just doesn’t like keeping things from Lance. Seeing Lance right now, so happy, is….

Keith doesn’t want to think about this anymore.

They all fall into easy conversation Shiro happened to study the same kind of topic that Pidge is studying right now, so they branch off into a separate side conversation that bores the hell out of everybody else. Pidge looks fascinated, and a little intimidated, by everything Shiro is saying. Hunk smirks at them, as if he knew this would happen.

“The minute you told me that Shiro studied astrophysics I pretty much predicted this conversation would occur someday.” Hunk says, smiling at Keith.

“Mmm, Hunk!” Allura chimes in. “This is not a business meeting by any means but,” She covers her mouth, still chewing, and continues. “But this food is absolutely amazing. If catering is something you want to get into more seriously, please don’t hesitate to give me a call. We’d love to have you working with Altea Event Planning.”

Hunk looks floored “Wow, I’m so glad you like it!” He looks at Lance excitedly.

Lance chuckles. “Told you she would like it.” He says, shrugging.

They eat in a comfortable silence for a while. Nobody wants to talk because they are shoveling food into their mouths. Keith has got to admit, this is one of the most satisfying experiences in his life. Sitting with people he loves, eating amazing food, and best of all, not having to say anything.

Lance’s knee knocks into his underneath the table and Keith jerks slightly, almost dropping his fork. Lance glances at him with a questioning and concerned expression. Keith attempts an “I’m okay” smile at him.

Keith looks even more confused at that.

Keith is blushing now. Shit. Why is he like this? Why did he have to have sex with that Kevin guy? He should’ve walked away when he saw what was happening. He looks back down at his plate and pokes around frantically at the salad with his fork. When he looks up he sees Shiro looking at him strangely from across the table. Just for a moment, and then he turns to Allura and wipes some sauce from the corner of her mouth.

Ugh. Gag.

“So, Shiro. Lance told me you guys are getting married in a few weeks. That’s exciting! Congratulations!” Hunk exclaims.
Shiro laughs. “It is exciting, but let me tell you. Planning a wedding is stressful as hell. Especially with this girl.”

Allura pouts. “I’m a romantic, okay? I want everything to be perfect.”

Keith smiles as he remembers the cheesy stamps that he spent hours putting on invitations. “Well, the word ‘perfect’ is a little...subjective.” He says crassly. Shiro laughs out loud. Allura scowls.

“Well, Lance is on my side. Right, Lance?”

“Duh!” Lance says happily. “Romance is everything! We’re going to make this wedding perfect. I promise.”

Allura grins. “See? Lance has been so amazing. He really is good at what he does.” Allura says sweetly. Lance ducks his head, blushing a little.

Cute, Keith thinks.


“Nah, I’m just tying up loose ends.” Lance says, selling himself short as usual.

“No, you’re doing more than that.” Keith says a little too urgently. The words fall out of his mouth like he can’t control them. “He is practically planning the whole wedding. And he’s doing a great job, too. I saw the venue. And the centerpieces.” Keith clears his throat, looking back down at his salad. “They’re gorgeous.”

He can feel Lance looking at him but doesn’t meet his eyes. Pidge hums. “I bet they are. I want to see!”

“Me too!” Hunk says.

Lance is blushing for real now, looking around the table, a little dumbfounded. “I-I mean..I can pull up pictures after dinner?”

“Good idea.” Keith says, still not meeting Lance’s eyes.

He doesn’t understand why Lance sells himself short like that. All the time. Lance throws the most amazing ceremonies. They always blow Keith away. It’s like the inside of Lance’s mind is painted with colors that Keith isn’t trained to see. His imagination is beautiful. Although Keith is perfectly happy with what he’s doing with his life right now, he sometimes envies the capability Lance has to create gorgeous things.

Sometimes.

But it’s not that Lance ...is gorgeous. Just. You know. The stuff he creates. Of course.

Shiro is nodding. “It’s true, Lance really knows how to make the wedding ours without our input. It’s truly a gift.”

“Oh man, guys. Quit it. If I blush anymore I’ll pass out.” Lance says shyly. And Keith knows he’s not kidding.

Keith chances a glance at Lance’s face and regrets it immediately. Lance has got his lower lip caught between his teeth and a smile so bright that Keith finds it hard to look away.
He’s just happy that Lance is happy, alright?

“Anyway.” Lance says, changing the subject. “I’m dying to try those little butter pastries. Shall I help you serve them?” He asks Hunk, standing up and gathering everyone’s plates.

“Oh yeah, of course! Let’s make some tea, too. They’re really good with tea.” Hunk says happily, following Lance into the kitchen. The minute they disappear, Shiro is next to Keith.

“Are you sick?” He asks, sounding concerned.

“What? Jesus, no. I’m fine.”

“You look like you’re about to pass out.”

Keith scowls. “It was a tough week, okay?” He isn’t going to let this... slight malfunction in his physical attraction to Lance actually ruin his weekend. “I’m feeling better now that I ate. Food was good, wasn’t it?”

Shiro shoots a questioning look at Allura, who just shrugs defeatedly. He sighs. “Yeah, it was really good.”

Lance and Hunk return with two huge trays of food and Keith’s full stomach screams in protest, but he’s not going to listen to it.

After all, it seems that his body has decided to internally go insane today, so how can he trust anything it tells him?

xxx

They all end up leaving around eleven. Hunk wasn’t lying about his pastries. The food coma was almost lethal. After showing everyone some photo’s of centerpieces and floral arrangements, Shiro and Allura decided to hit the road for fear of falling asleep while driving if they waited any longer. Hunk and Pidge followed soon after.

And now Lance is in the bathroom, with the door locked, and he hasn’t come out in about twenty minutes. Keith bangs on the door, irritated. “Lance, come on, I have to pee.”

A pained groan comes from the other side of the door. “I’m dying.”

Keith sighs. “What’s wrong?”

“I had...more than one...of those pastries.”

“You what?” Keith jiggles the door knob. “How many did you have?”


“Six?” Keith shrieks. “Are you insane?”

“Apparently!” Lance whines, sounding miserable. Keith hears shuffling and then the doorknob is being unlocked. He pushes it open and looks down at Lance’s pitiful body, sprawled out onto the floor. Keith sighs defeatedly and kneels down, grabbing Lance by his shoulders and hoisting him
“Laying down will only make you feel sicker.” Keith mumbles. Lance lifts himself the rest of the way, shakily, until he is sitting against the wall, directly in front of the toilet. Keith takes a breath, sliding down the wall until he is sitting next to Lance. They both stare at the toilet in silence for a minute.

“I really don’t feel like barfing.” Lance pouts. “It’s so unpleasant.”

“That tends to be the overall opinion on barfing, I think.” Keith nods. “But you probably won’t feel better if you don’t.”

Lance sighs tiredly, rubbing his eyes. Keith turns his head to look, feeling that guilty twisting in his gut again. Like he shouldn’t be looking. Like he isn’t allowed. Lance’s hair is shaggy and disheveled and his lips look even pinker than Kev--

“Thanks for what you said today.” Lance speaks, effectively pulling Keith back into reality. “About my work.”

Keith takes a deep breath. He can do this. He can do this. He can be Lance’s friend and be a little bit attracted to him, too. It’s not like it’s going to change anything. Why is he being so hard on himself? Lance would be flattered if he knew. Right?

Keith clears his throat. “I mean, yeah. You know. It’s the truth.”

Lance hums. “I was surprised. I don’t even think I’ve ever heard you say that word out loud before.”

“What word?”

“Gorgeous.” Lance breathes, sounding like he’s clearly still in pain. “You bitter ass has never uttered that word. It’s too generous.”

Keith snorts, feeling a blush make it’s way up his neck. “I guess. Whatever.” You can do this.

Lance hums and lets his head fall to the side, where it lands on Keith’s shoulder. “Will you hold my hair back?” He asks sleepily.

Keith’s heart hiccups in his chest. He ignores it. “No.”

“Fair enough.” Lance shrugs, but their shoulders are pressed together so it lifts Keith’s too.

You can do this. You can do this.

“Don’t you dare fall asleep here.” Keith says, meaning to sound angry. But it just comes out weak. “I still need to pee.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

“Lance.”

“Okay, fine. But you gotta give me ten more minutes.” Lance says gloomily.

“Sure.” Keith gets up, welcoming the rush of air that fills his lungs when Lance is no longer pressed against his side. He sighs, in and out. Lance crawls over to the toilet and plants his forehead on the seat, swearing under his breath in Spanish. Keith tries not think about that voice in a different context. Jesus, he’s got to go to bed.
“Goodnight, Snickers.” Lance mutters miserably.

Keith feels the persistent warmth in his cheeks, trying to tell him something that he so desperately wants to avoid. You can do this. You can do this.

You. can. do. this.

“Goodnight, Lance.”

xxx

“Lance, what are you doing up?” Keith asks. Lance is in the kitchen pouring himself a glass of water. Keith trails his eyes over Lance’s shirtless torso, feeling particularly self indulgent. His eyes glaze over the toned stomach, small birthmarks, swooping hip bones and sharp collarbones.

“Couldn’t sleep.” Lance says, voice soothing. It sounds far away.

“Yeah? Me neither.” Keith says. He doesn’t know why. He can’t stop staring at Lance’s small, brown nipples. They’re kind of cute. Keith’s head is spinning. He’s horrified when he looks up and sees Lance grinning smugly at him.

“Like what you see?” He asks, taking a few steps towards Keith.

“Yes.” Keith breathes, not sure why.

Lance hums. It’s different from any other hum that Keith has heard from him before. It’s low…and appreciative…and…

Lance is less than a foot away from him now. Keith smells cupcakes. He swallows hard. Lance whispers. “You can touch me, if you want to.”

“W-where?” Keith asks shakily.

“Anywhere.”

Keith shakes his head, but doesn’t dare move away. “No, we can’t do that to each other. We’re friends, remember?”

“Mm, right.” Lance murmurs, brushing their noses together. “That’s right.”

“…yeah…”

“Guess I’ll just touch myself then.”

“Yeah…go do that.” Keith says weakly.

To his horror, Lance doesn’t move away. Instead, he is snaking a hand down his stomach and then it disappears beneath his waistband.

“L-Lance.” Keith hisses, screwing his eyes shut. “You can’t do that with me here.”
"I’m not breaking any rules, though. Am I?" Lance says hotly, into Keith’s ear. “We’re not even touching each other.”

Keith hears a squeaking noise and then realizes it’s him. Lance chuckles, low and raspy. “Open your eyes Keith. I know you want to see this.”

Keith’s eyes flutter open and meet Lance’s-- a dark, navy blue that is clouded in arousal. Lance is moving his hand at a steady pace and Keith can hear his breathing start to quicken. It hits his lips in short, hot puffs. Lance pushes his face forward slightly, pressing their noses and foreheads together and he breathes out shakily. “Mm, Keith.” He practically purrs it, top lip brushing against Keith’s. “I always think about you when I do this…”

Keith swallows. His limbs feel like they’re shaking. “Lance…” His voice is barely audible.

Lance quickens his pace. Keith watches his eyes flutter shut. He hears a small whine fall from Lance’s lips and he’s never heard anything like that come from Lance before and holy shit--

“Mmmf--you’re so hot, Keith...I wanna know what it’d feel like if this was your hand…”

Keith takes a shaky breath. “Or my mouth.” He says courageously, feeling clinically insane. Does he even have any control over what he’s saying?

Lance moans out loud at this, forehead falling into the crook of Keith’s neck. Keith can’t see what Lance is doing to himself but it’s gotta be good, because now Lance is whimpering into his neck and breathing unevenly and Keith is practically bathing in the needy sounds filling the room. He had no idea Lance could ever sound so sexy. He had no idea Lance could be this fucking hot, but now he’s choking shaky moans just below Keith’s ear and Keith can see his hips stuttering and he wants to suffocate in the smell of vanilla frosting.

“K-keith--”

Shit holy shit holy shit holy

“Keith, f-fuck--”

The way he says his name is so--

“Keith?” A loud knock on his door. “Snickers, you awake?”

Keith shoots upwards, gasping for air and white-knuckling his bedsheets. What is happening?

“I know it’s Sunday but I’m gonna run a few errands and I was just making sure you didn’t need anything.” Lance’s voice, soft and unsure, from the other side of the door.

Keith glances around his room, frantically, as if it will provide him with answers to what the fuck just happened. “O-oh I, uh…” His voice sounds scratchy and unused. He takes a few more deep breaths.

“You what?” Lance’s slightly impatient voice comes muffled through the door.

“I’m good.” Keith chokes out.
“Okay, see you in a bit.” Keith hears the front door open and shut. He flops back down onto his bed, heart reeling.

What the fuck?

*What the fuck what the fuck what the fuck?*

Keith glances down a his lap, where he is unsurprisingly sporting the most painful boner he’s had in the past three months. Holy shit. This can’t be happening. Because there's *basic* attraction, and then there's *wet dreams*. They seem to be operating on two different planes, and one of those is a *lot* safer than the other, and holy *fuck*, he didn't even think he mind could *go there*...

He must’ve eaten something funky before bed. Or maybe somebody drugged him. Or maybe he fell asleep in a position that would allow no blood flow to his brain and all blood flow to his dick.

But if any of those things were *true*, then he wouldn’t want to hear those small, sweet moans come from Lance’s mouth again, and again, and again. He wouldn’t want to feel that hot breath on his neck, or hear Lance stutter his name as he’s about to come and...

Fuck fuck *fuck fuck*.

He really, *really* wants that right now. Wide awake. Completely sober. He wants that. For some crazy, insane, groundless and unfounded reason, he *wants that*.

Keith always prides himself in his ability to make clear, uncut decisions. To cut the bullshit. To say it like it is. He has an unbelievably organized mind. Everything he thinks about is compartmentalized in clear, labeled boxes, organized in the way that makes the most sense. He keeps his emotions in one box and his responsibilities in another. Making decisions is easy because all he has to do is reach into the file he needs and retrieve the information required. It’s how he has operated for as long as he can remember.

But for some reason he feels like the pristine, office desk of his brain is being consumed by ivy, curling and twisting its way into all of the folders and drawers; growing underneath one of the legs and making the entire desk crooked. It feels like chaos. Keith can’t control it. It sprouts new branches and engulfs Keith’s small labeled boxes like web, tangling them and making them impossible to straighten out again. This ivy begins and ends with *Lance*; a curly mop of hair and a smile filled with missing teeth. And it has somehow infiltrated every corner of Keith’s mind since then.

He takes a shaky breath and runs his hand down his face, giving into temptation and continuing until it falls into his crotch. He squeezes lightly, hissing as the pleasure shoots up his spine.

Well...*fuck*.

Apparently, he’s got a massive, incredibly concerning, soul-sucking crush on his best friend.

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**Chapter End Notes**

thanks again, guys. <3
Lemon Tart

Chapter Summary

Roadblocks, mostly. There wouldn't be a story without them, right?

Chapter Notes

this fic is going to be 4732895329473 chapters long because the burn will be so slow that you'll want to pull your eyelashes out. Im so sorry, i dont know why im like this.

I totally brought up the dreaded "sophomore year" of college a thousand times in the first couple of chapters but then never elaborated on what happened--its because i want the flashbacks to kinda go in chronological order and right now I'm still in the high school years so...there will probably be a large portion of a chapter dedicated to what "happened in sophomore year of college" lol just not yet

with every chapter i discover more and more where i want the story to go. sorry its taking me so long, but im getting there :) i dont really have anything else to say. enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

11th Grade

“You sure you don’t want to come along?” Lance asks, straightening his bowtie in the mirror before turning to Keith, who is sitting cross legged on his bed with a physics textbook in his lap. “Could be really fun!”

Keith snorts. “Prom seems more like your thing than mine, I think.” He says blatantly. “And I wouldn’t wanna third wheel with you and Erica. I don’t even have a date.”

“Aw, come on. You wouldn’t be third wheeling.”

Keith raises an eyebrow at him.

“You wouldn’t be third wheeling that much.” Lance corrects, smirking. “Anyway, how do I look?” He holds out his arms in presentation. Keith studies him, looking unamused.

“You’d look great if you didn’t gel your hair back like that.” He says.

Lance frowns. “What’s wrong with my hair?”

“It’s not…” Keith waves a hand like he’s searching for the word. “…Fluffy enough. It’s stuck to your head.” He points to Lance’s head. “It makes your ears look bigger.”

Keith sighs, dropping his textbook to the side and walking over to where Lance is standing. “Just, like…” He reaches up and digs his fingers into Lance’s hair, messing it up. “Fluff it up a bit.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at his reflection in the mirror. Keith steps back, studying the disheveled mess on Lance’s head. “There, like that.”

“But now it just look like it usually does.” Lance says, confused. He’s come to learn that Keith has weird taste in things, but usually makes the right call when it comes down to it.

“Exactly.” Keith says flatly. “And it usually looks good.”

Lance hums. “Whatever you say.” And wow, his ears do look more proportional now. “Okay, cool. So I’m gonna pick up Erica in about twenty minutes. And then we’ll probably get dinner…” Lance mumbles to himself, listing his plans off with his fingers. “Apparently after-prom ends at like 2 or 3AM so, are you staying over? Or will you be at your place when I get back?”

Keith hums in consideration, looking down at the textbook. “I don’t know. I haven’t decided yet.”

“Okay, well, text me if you stay so I know to expect you.”

“Cool, sounds good.” Keith looks like he wants to say something else, but he doesn’t. Lance sends him a questioning look.

“What is it?”

Keith opens his mouth and closes it again. Then he shrugs. “Just. You know. Have fun.”

Lance grins. “You know I will.”

xxx

Erica is Lance’s current girlfriend and they’ve been together longer than Lance has been with anyone else. Jess, in eighth grade, only lasted three months. Skylar, at the beginning of tenth grade, kissed him twice and then decided she...wasn’t interested. Felicity in tenth only lasted two months before she...wasn’t interested anymore, either. But now, he and Erica are spending their six month anniversary at junior prom, and he is so fucking excited.

Erica has big brown eyes and freckles on the bridge of her nose. She smells like roses and her skin is always soft. Her laugh makes his heart flutter and she always wears the cutest jean shorts with an orange flower embroidered onto the right pocket. They hang out often. They do homework together, and talk about anime and watch movies. They make out. Sometimes they go even further than that. Lance blushes just thinking about it. She’s so pretty. He loves her. He knows he does. This has got to be what love feels like. What else could it possibly be? But he hasn’t said it yet. He’s waiting for the best moment, and he feels like tonight is going to be the night.

He picks her up and swallows enough of his anxiety to get through the door and talk to her parents. They take a few pictures-- her parents are as understated as she is. Very genuine, down-to-earth people. They don’t want the glitz and the glam, which is totally fine. Lance has already met them various times throughout his relationship with her, and they really seem to like him when he’s on his best behavior, so he tries to tone himself down a bit when he talks to them.
Erica seems distant tonight but Lance can’t imagine why. It’s prom, after all! One of the long awaited nights of the year. And their six month anniversary! He wonders why she isn’t more excited. It must be nerves.

They drive to a local seafood restaurant where Lance had carefully called yesterday morning to make a reservation. Calling restaurants, or calling anyone, really, is not something that is easy for Lance to do. But he was willing to go through it to make sure Erica is treated well tonight. The lights are dim and their booth is in the back corner of the restaurant. Lance prides himself on how romantic he’s being. Could this be any more perfect?

Erica smiles shyly at him and then looks back down at her food. Lance’s eyebrows pull together.

“You alright?” He asks, trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice.

She hesitates a bit before replying, then smiles a little sadly. “Of course. Sorry. This is...really lovely, Lance.”

Lance smiles. “Great! I’m glad you like it. I wasn’t really into the whole seafood thing when I was younger but it’s totally growing on me now. And this place is like, super fancy too. I can’t believe I managed to snag reservations, especially on prom night.” He slowly realizes he’s rambling and cuts himself off. He bites down the apology that sits at the tip of his tongue.

She looks back down at her food and stabs a shrimp with her fork, bringing it up to her face and examining it lazily. “Do you...really want to go to prom?” She suddenly asks, grimacing a little.

“What do you mean?” Lance asks, laughing nervously.

“I mean, I think it’s cute that you’re excited and stuff but, Lance, it’s just junior prom. It’s not like...a huge deal or anything.”

Lance feels the dread pooling in his chest. He’s heard that tone of voice before. “Well...I didn’t say it was a huge deal, I’m just excited to spend time with you.” He says.

“If it’s not a huge deal then why don’t we bail, ya know? Go do something more fun.”

Lance blinks. “I...like what?”

“I don’t know. Maybe your older sister can get us some tequila. I hear that Scott Marren is throwing a party tonight and everyone is going there instead. Prom is going to be lame this year, probably.”


She shrugs. “I mean, it’s a school hosted event. Like, the teachers will all be there and stuff. We can’t even do anything.”

This isn’t the first time that Erica has suggested something like this, but Lance really thought that by now she’d like his company enough to want to have fun with him, no matter where. And he was really excited about going to prom. He clears his throat.

“But I...don’t want to do anything else.” He says, mentally slapping himself. Way to sound like a pussy, hot shot.

Erica rolls her eyes. “Of course you don’t.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”
“It just figures that you’d rather go to prom than actually go do something interesting.”

Ouch. Lance scowls. “Excuse me?”

“It’s just such a...you thing to do.” It sounds annoyed.

“I don’t understand. Prom is really fun, and really romantic--”

“Yeah maybe in like, movies and stuff. But it’s not like this is High School Musical or something. Your whole ‘storybook romance’ thing is just...I thought it’d get better by now. It’s too much for me. I can’t take it, alright?”

Well.

There it is again.

‘Too much for me.’

“Is it because I’m clingy?” He asks, automatically regretting it. She sighs tiredly.

“You just...like us too much. It’s not as good for me as it is for you, okay?” Her face falls when her eyes meet Lance’s. Probably because Lance looks like a kicked puppy. Which he shouldn’t. He should be angry. He should be furious because he paid for this dinner and he worked his ass off for this…

This…

Storybook romance.

Lance drops his fork and takes a shaky breath. He needs to get out of here.

“Lance, look, I’m...sorry. I know how hard you worked for all this and I...maybe for another girl. I’m really sorry. But I just don’t...want to go to prom.” She tries for a sympathetic smile but Lance can’t handle this. He can’t handle how beautiful she looks, even when she says such mean things. And his heart is breaking into a million pieces. It’s shattering in a way he’s never felt it break before.

I deserve this, the voice in his head chants. I deserve this, I deserve this, I deserve this…

He throws a fifty onto the table and scrambles out of the booth, straightening out his suit. “You should...call someone to pick you up.” He mumbles sadly. Then, without looking back, he walks out the front door.

He breaks down once he’s in his car. Tears burn as they streak down his face. It’s a curse. The curse of caring too much. Of wanting cliches. Of being overwhelming even when he isn’t trying to be. Lance feels like his chest is overflowing and there’s nowhere for any of it to go. It fill his car. It fills his brain.

What’s wrong with me? What’s so wrong with me?

He places a shaky hand on his eyes, shielding them from some confused passerbys in the parking lot.

He just really wanted to go to prom.

Taking out his phone, he dials Keith’s number. Keith answers on the first ring.

“Hello?”
“Hey, Snickers.” Lance says, attempting to keep his voice level. “Are you still at my place?”

Keith sounds like he’s smiling. “Yeah, your mom wouldn’t let me leave without dinner. You headed to the dance now?”

Lance takes a deep breath. “No, I’m… coming back home. Could you… stay?”

The static of Keith’s silence rings in his ear. Then Keith says, “What? Lance, are you alright? What happened?”

Lance clears his throat. “Erica doesn’t want to go to prom.” His voice breaks a little. “Or date me.” He actually laughs after he says that.

“Are you fucking serious?” Keith sounds angry. “You paid out of your ass for that dinner.”

“Yeah.”

“And the suit.”

“Yeah…”

“Did she say why?”

Lance coughs awkwardly. He isn’t going to tell Keith. It’s embarrassing. “I think she might like someone else.” He lies.

“Bitch.” Keith says plainly, like it’s a scientific fact. “What about prom?”

“Guess I’m not going.”

Keith sighs. “Where are you, Lance?”

Lance blinks. Another tear falls. “I’m in the restaurant parking lot… may or may not have let a few manly tears slip out.”

A long pause. Then, “Hang tight… I’ll be right there.”

“Wha--?” Keith clicks the phone shut and Lance stares at the “call ended” screen in complete confusion. Did Keith seriously just tell him not to come home?

Lance glances around at the empty parking lot. He looks at the clock in his car. 8:45PM. Jeez, how long did he just sit here crying? Prom started 45 minutes ago.

He twiddles his thumbs and maybe cries a little bit more. His brain drifts back to Felicity’s face when she had said those exact same words. “You’re just… a little too for me much right now.” And Skylar’s voice, as they kissed in the stairwell, saying “Look, I think you’re cute but… you come on a little strong, ya know? Let’s just have some fun and not make it a huge deal okay?”

He doesn’t know why he’s like this. Dr. Rintel had told him that he’d find people who love him just as he is, but Lance has a pretty strong feeling that nobody is going to like him until he stops being who he is; a loud, obnoxious, overly emotional, cliche-obsessed freak.

Highs School Musical was quality, alright?

A car pulls up next to his and he startles, before realizing that it’s Keith’s car. And...what the hell?
He rolls his window down and watches Keith roll his down as well.

Keith is in a suit. He smirks at Lance.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Lance asks. Keith’s suit is all black, including the shirt underneath his jacket. But he’s got a small, red bowtie on, which Lance recognizes as his own. He raises an eyebrow at Keith. “Is that my bowtie?”

“Unfortunately I was all out of my golden sparkly ones, so I didn’t have a choice.” Keith deadpans.

“I don’t…understand…?” Lance is shakily climbing out of his car and shutting the door behind him. He stands at Keith’s open window. “Why are you doing this?”

“You really going to let Erica decide if you get to go to prom or not?” Keith frowns. “Fuck that. Let’s just go anyway.”

Lance pulls a face. “But you hate prom.”

“Yeah.”

“You think it’s stupid.”

“Well, yeah.”

“So…?”

Keith shrugs. “Maybe it’ll be stupid. But I think we’ll manage to have good time anyway.” Keith smiles. “You coming or not?”

Lance blinks at him. “You really don’t have to do this.” he says softly, feeling oddly vulnerable.

“Yeah, I know I don’t.” Keith says matter-of-factly, like it’s the logical thing to say. “But I want to.”

Lance can’t even try to keep the grin off of his face. “Okay.” He mutters, climbing into the passenger seat. “Cool.”

“Besides, I hear that Scott Marren is having a party tonight so…” Keith shifts into reverse, smirking. “We’ve gotta have an excuse not to go to that shitshow, right?”

Lance sighs happily, putting his shaky hands in front of the hot air coming from the vents. “Yeah…”

Lance says, feeling every muscle in his body loosen. “Totally right.”

xxx

Present Day

Kevin’s apartment is way too fancy. Keith feels like he might get something dirty if he sits down on anything, because every single piece of furniture looks like it costs more than his entire bedroom. The couches are white and the appliances are stainless steel and there is granite, quite literally, everywhere. Not to mention, A/C. And a TV. All things which Keith has lived without for a couple
years now. This guy is loaded.

Whatever. It doesn’t matter, because he really only came here for one thing. And the way that Kevin’s hands slide roughly up his thighs is really making up for the slight discomfort he feels in such a pristine home.

“Glad you called…” Kevin murmurs hotly against his lips. “Couldn’t wait to see you again.”

Keith hums and works on unbuttoning the stupid, stupid blue button down that Kevin is wearing. Lance would look really good in it. Keith pushes the thought away. “Me too.” He admits, straddling Kevins hips and pushing him back onto the couch. Kevin’s shirt falls open and Keith’s eyes explore the smooth, dark skin. It looks empty without the freckles. It looks incomplete without that small birthmark, right next to his bellybutton-

Stop it, Keith snaps at himself. Stop.

He falls forwards and connects their lips again, breathing in the cinnamon sugar smell of Kevins mouth. It’s so sweet he can almost taste it. It does the job. It fills a craving. It settles the hungry flutters in his stomach.

Kevin’s hand moves to the button on his jeans and he pushes his hips forward, encouraging him. He buries his fingers into Kevin’s hair. It may look like Lance’s, but it’s not nearly as thick. Or soft. Keith grips at it anyway. Kevin hums appreciatively.

“You’re so hot, holy shit.” Kevin says as he palms Keith through his pants. Keith arches forward slightly.

“So are you…” He says, unfortunately meaning every word. For some reason, so are you.

They kiss for a few more minutes. Keith gets lost in it. He grinds down on Kevin and listens to him whimper. He does it again. Another small, choked noise. He does it again.

“Fuck…” Kevin whispers into his mouth.

Keith shivers, allowing himself, for a moment, to imagine it is Lance.

The moment passes.

Keith trails his fingers over the warm, golden skin of Kevin’s neck. The sharp cuts of his collarbones. They feel familiar. Like he’s spent years staring at them. Memorizing them.

I am a horrible person, Keith thinks to himself, letting his finger drag over one small, brown nipple. Kevin twitches slightly at the touch.

This isn’t right. Keith continues moving his hand down, over the defined abs that Kevin is sporting, but he’s not really into them because…

His fingers fall on the button of Kevin’s pants.

His stupid, preppy, khaki pants. Pants that Lance wears all the fucking time.

Keith takes a deep, shaky breath and starts undoing them.

xxx
“Hey, where’d you go?” Lance asks from the futon, eyes trained on the nintendo DS in his hands. He glances up at Keith when he hears the front door open, and then glances back down. Keith walks into the living room, feeling exhausted, and sits down next to Lance.

It’s a Sunday morning, which is Keith’s least favorite time of the week. He ended up falling asleep at Kevin’s last night, which really isn’t doing very good things for his mind. Then he left at 5:37AM while Kevin was still asleep which probably didn’t help.

It’s 9AM now and Lance is still in his pajamas with a green face mask on. The headband holding his bangs back clearly belonged to his sister before he stole it. It’s bright red and painted with small, yellow flowers.

Why does Keith think it’s cute? Because he’s deranged, that’s why.

He clears his throat, remembering that Lance asked him a question. “I went to Shiro’s last night to help out with some stuff and fell asleep on the couch there.” The lie slips easily off of his tongue, which makes him incredibly guilty. But as he sees Kevin more and more, the lies get easier and easier. He’s not even sure why he doesn’t want to tell Lance. It’s not like Lance would judge him for sleeping with someone. But it’s just...probably so obvious that he looks like…

“Wow, you seem to helping Shiro out a lot lately.” Lance says lazily, eyes still trained on his DS.

“Yeh, he’s been stressed out, so…” Keith blinks away from Lance’s goo-covered face. “How are you?”

Lance shrugs. “Pretty good. Kind of tired. Rough night. I tried getting a lot of work done at once and couldn’t fall asleep till like four.”

“Wow, work on a Saturday?”

Lance sighs. “Yeah, it was stressing me out so I really wanted to get it done.” He shuts his DS and looks at Keith. “But now I’m dying.”

Keith hums. “Well, did you get it done?”

“Yes, thank god.” Lance tosses his DS onto the floor in front of him.

Keith feels the exhaustion tugging at him as well. He really only slept for three hours in total, although it wasn’t because of work. Now he really needs to shower. He lets his gaze fall on Lance, who has his arms crossed over his chest and his head tilted back. Lance’s eyes are closed and Keith knows from past experience that he really only needs minute to fall asleep like that. Without thinking, Keith reaches forward and nudges him.

“Hm?” Lance opens his eyes slowly, studying Keith. “What is it?”

Keith blinks dumbly. Ever since he admitted to himself that he has...a bit of a crush on Lance, things have gotten a little easier for him to swallow. But it still makes him do incredibly stupid, embarrassing things that he would never be caught dead doing before-- like trying to get Lance’s attention with absolutely no purpose or logical reason, and then not knowing what to say.

“I...want to do a face mask too.” He finds himself saying, with absolutely no practical reasoning behind it.
Lance sits up slightly. “What did you just say?”

Keith shrugs. Can’t take it back now. “Well we’re both exhausted so...let’s just relax today.”

“Did you just say you wanted to do a face mask?” Lance sits up even further, eyes lighting up. “Out loud?”

Keith feels himself blushing. “Well, yeah. I guess I did.”

“Oh man!” Lance hops off of the couch, grabbing Keith by the arm. “I’ve been waiting for this day for years! Hell yeah! Let’s go, follow me!” He excitedly pulls Keith off of the futon and Keith feels the warmth in his cheeks getting significantly hotter as Lance’s grip tightens. “I have a whole bunch for you to choose from!”

“Cool.” Keith tries, but it doesn’t come out cool at all. Sheesh. He’s really got to get this crush under control if he doesn’t want to look like a complete idiot.

Lance pulls him into the bathroom and crouches down, opening the cabinet under the sink. He takes out a basket and slams it onto the counter. Keith lets out an audible squeak when he sees the enormous pile of bottles and cans overflowing it.

“Ta-da!” Lance says, sounding a little out of breath from lifting it. “My face masks!”

“Lance, holy fuck.” Keith says, sounding lost. “How many are there?”

“Umm...well, not counting the two I bought yesterday, I think there’s about thirty-eight of them.”

“What?”

“Whatever! It’s not like we need the storage for anything else. Okay! Let’s pick one! I’ll help you.”

“Oh my god.” Keith puts his face in his hands. “You are so ridiculous.”

“I need every single one of these for a different reason, okay?” Lance says defensively. “Hydrating and firming are no laughing matter!”

Keith sighs. “Okay, alright. So...what do I do?”

“Hmmm.” Lance lifts a hand and holds Keith’s chin, turning his face from one side to the other and studying him closely. Keith’s heart hammers away at the small touch. God, this isn’t fair. “I think you need to do two.”

“Two? Why?”

“Well, you need hydration, Snickers. But your face is dull and rough.”

“Thanks.”

“So you need to exfoliate first.”

Keith groans. “I don’t even know what that means. I just wanted to do something relaxing.”

“You know what’s relaxing? Having healthy, glowing skin.”

“I hate you.”
“Okay! Let’s start with exfoliation then!” Lance scans the bottles and pulls out a brown tub of mud. “This’ll do. This one peels off. It’ll take off all of your dead skin.”

Keith scowls, crossing his arms over his chest. “My skin is alive.” He says defensively.

Lance tuts, rolling his eyes and smacking Keith on the forehead. “You know what I mean. Now don’t move. If it gets in your eyebrow then it’ll rip it off.”


The mask feels cold, but he welcomes the change in temperature because his cheeks have been burning for the past ten minutes. Lance’s fingers feel good on his face. Relaxing. Lance has always been graceful in his movements. He may not be ripped, or ‘manly’, but his fingers are long and delicate and his wrists are thin and Keith finds comfort in the way they move; slowly and meticulously like he handles everything he touches with care and purpose. It shows in his artwork. It shows in everything he does. Keith is rough with things. He doesn’t take the time to explore them. To enjoy them. Lance always does.

Now that his blushing has managed to burn past the mask, Keith sighs shakily and tries to think about something else. “Is it supposed to tingle like that?” He asks.

“Yes!” Lance finishes applying the mask with a soft stroke across Keith’s chin. “Aww, you look cute.” He says teasingly.

Keith blinks up at him before he realizes it’s a joke. He frowns. “Fuck you.”

Lance giggles. “This is so exciting! You’re finally doing a face mask with me. Only took fifteen years. Come on, let’s go relax now.”

They both saunter back into the living room and sit back down on the futon. Lance stretches his legs out and rests them on the coffee table, assuming the same comfortable position he was in before when Keith had rudely disturbed him. His head tilts back and his eyes flutter shut.

Keith takes a chance and looks over at the boy sitting next to him. Lance is wearing an old, stained t-shirt from a 5k he ran a few years ago. It’s one of his favorites. His pants are the obnoxious camouflage sweats that Keith hates, and they are a few sizes too big so they bunch up adorably at his ankles. Keith sighs. “I don’t get how this is supposed to be relaxing.” He says, face starting to feel tight.

“You’re pampering yourself. How is that not relaxing?” Lance scoffs. “It would help if you actually sat down all the way.”

Keith didn’t even realize that his butt was planted at the very edge of the futon until Lance said anything. Jesus, is he really that tense right now? Sighing, he slowly leans back and closes his eyes, mimicking Lance’s position.

“This is nice.” Lance says.

“Mmm.”

A long sigh. “This week is gonna be killer.”

“Yeah...me too.” A pause. “Are you alright?”

Keith swallows hard. “Yeah, ‘course I am.”

Lance hums. “I don’t believe you.” He says softly.

“I’m fine, I promise.” Keith mutters. “Really.”

“Okay.”

Keith shifts a little, readjusting his position. God, he hates lying to Lance. But what is he supposed to say? ‘I’ve been fucking a complete stranger because he reminds me of you. Oh by the way, I think you’re adorable and I really want to have sex with you.’

For some reason he feels like that won’t go over too well.

“I’ve got a date tomorrow.”

Keith cracks an eye open at this, heart stuttering slightly. “What?”

“I met this girl at Jeffery’s Diner a couple days ago. We’ve been texting. She wants to meet up tomorrow to like...get to know each other and stuff. Like, a proper date. Not in a bar. In a coffeehouse, on 5th street.”

Keith raises an eyebrow, choosing to ignore his current feelings on the matter and focus on Lance’s. “Well that’s exciting. Isn’t it?”

“Like, a real date, Keith.”

“Why don’t you sound excited?”

Lance sighs, picking at the edge of his green mask and peeling a portion of it off. “I just...I mean, you know how I feel about...all that stuff.” He huffs a nervous breath. “I haven’t dated for real in a long time.”

Keith swallows, scooting a little closer to Lance. “Well yeah but...” He fights to get the words out. “This could be good for you.”

“Maybe.” Lance laughs nervously, shrugging. “It’s not like it’s a huge deal or anything. Just something to do.”

Keith’s heart clenches at the strained sound of Lance’s voice. Because there was a time, years ago, when a date with someone cute was, in fact, a huge deal to Lance. There was a time when Lance would spend hours talking excitedly about what he would bring them, and what he would order, and what he would wear. “They could be my soulmate!” He would always say. Then he would giggle and blush on his way out the door, practically buzzing with anticipation.

But it hasn’t been that way in a while.

Keith misses it.

xxx
“A speech?” Keith asks, sounding nervous.

“Yeah, you’re the Best Man! They typically make a speech. Or, you know, a toast.” Shiro says, smiling.

“Really?”

“Yeah. So I just thought I’d let you know ahead of time. The wedding is coming up a lot sooner than I thought. Crazy crunch time.” Shiro rubs his eyes. “I’m excited, but man, I’m tired. There’s only six weeks left. I really hope Lance manages to get everything done.”

“He’s knows what he’s doing, don’t worry. I can help him with the logistics if he’s ever overwhelmed.” Keith offers.

“Cool, thanks.” Shiro smiles gently at him. “I really appreciate it.”

“Yeah, of course. But I seriously wouldn’t fret. He’s ahead of schedule. He even managed to talk to the cake guy last night.”

“Really? Wow. That’s actually incredibly ahead of schedule.” Shiro says, sounding impressed. “I don’t get how he does it.”

Keith clears his throat. There’s that fluttering again, light yet persistent in his gut. He doesn’t trust his voice so he just nods, shrugging.

Shiro looks skeptical. “Anyway…” He says, studying Keith. “Wanna eat some lunch? This is technically your lunch break, after all.”

Keith just shrugs again. “Yeah sure.”

He watches Shiro walk to the fridge and start taking out the ingredients to make a turkey sandwich. The fluttering is still there. He takes a deep breath. Shiro notices.

“Keith.” He says, like the word weighs a thousand pounds.

Keith hoists himself up onto the counter but keeps his eyes on the ground. “Yeah?” He says, trying to act cool.

“If there’s something wrong...you gotta tell me.” Shiro sounds even more tired than he did when talking about the wedding. “I’m not an idiot. You’ve been acting really weird for the past week. Like...grumpier than usual.”

Keith sighs. Is he really being that obvious? He thought he was doing better than that. He wonders just how much Lance has noticed... “I’m really okay.” He says, and it’s halfway true.

“Well, come on. Don’t do this. The guessing game thing gets old really fast.” Keith bites the inside of his cheek. Shiro is right. It’s been like this for years. Keith may be confident in helping others with their problems and decision making, but when it comes to his own, he doesn’t particularly like confronting them. And he has been like that for as long as he can remember. Some call it “emotionless”. Keith calls it “active avoidance”. Shiro has been the number one person to deal with it- even above Lance.

“Respect me enough to just tell me what’s bothering you.” Shiro says firmly, mouth turned downwards.
Keith nibbles at his bottom lip. “You really, really don’t want to know.” He says quietly.

“But I asked, so.” Shiro snaps back.

Keith swallows. “Like, it’s not…it’s not anything bad.”

“So why can’t you tell me?”

“I just…it’s…”

“Keith.”

Keith huffs frustratedly. God he hates doing this; this ‘talk about his feelings’ shit. Shiro stands in front of him, arms crossed, waiting.

“I’m sleeping with someone.” Keith finally says.

Shiro raises an eyebrow. “Okay...and...?”

Keith clears his throat awkwardly. “Someone who looks like Lance.”

Shiro falters but keeps a steady expression. “Alright...that’s still not a big d--”

“Because he looks like Lance.” Keith says, voice cracking slightly.

Shiro’s eyes widen slightly. “Wait. What?”

“Yes. Shiro. Yeah. It means exactly what you think it means.”

Shiro blinks at him. “And that is...?”

Keith groans and buries his face in his hands. “It means I like him. I like him, Shiro. What the fuck?” It sounds so foreign coming out of his mouth. Words that were fifteen years in the making. Keith was stupid to not see this coming, wasn’t he? Shit, and now Shiro knows, and it’s only a matter of time before Lance knows...

“Keith…” Shiro says, voice soft. “Hey...hey, it’s fine.”

“It’s really not.” Keith mumbles into his hands. “This is on a list of things that should never, ever happen.”

“Well why not?”

“Because it’s not realistic, Shiro. He’s...my best friend. One of my only friends. I can’t go ruining that because of some stupid wet dream.” He says, blushing because he didn’t mean to let that slip out. “And besides, it’s Lance. He’s got a different date every hour. He’s meeting a girl tonight and it’s going to go well, probably. And I want it to, like he’s my best friend I want him to be happy I just…”

Shiro puts a hand on his shoulder. “Keith, how you feel isn’t abnormal. You feel that way because he’s your best friend.”

“No, I feel this way because I’m an idiot who is having a brief lapse in judgment.” He says curtly, and he can actually physically feel his walls rising back up again. “So can we just not talk about this anymore? Or ever again? And Lance can never know, understand?”
Shiro looks sympathetic for a moment, and then sighs defeatedly, shoulders drooping. “Okay. Fine.”

Keith nods slowly. “Thank you. I gotta go back to work now, okay? I’ll start writing that speech.”
He gives Shiro a tentative smile. “See you soon?”

Shiro nods back, slowly returning back to normal. “Yeah. Maybe I’ll come by later.”

“Kay. Cool. See ya, Shiro.” Keith walks out the front door and waits for it to shut behind him before he lets his face fall back into a frown.

The fluttering is only getting worse.

xxx

11th Grade

“What’s all of this?” Keith asks, seeing the pile of magazines and brochures engulfing the top of Lance’s bed.

“Oh! Uh...well I just wanted to, you know...get a head start.” Lance replies, sounding a little sheepish as he gathers the papers in his hands. “Like, college. And all that.”

Something like sadness twists in Keith’s gut. “Oh...you’ve started looking?”

Lance shrugs, pushing the final papers off of the bed and then sitting down on the edge of it. “I mean, yeah. There’s only a few months left of this year, Snickers. Applications are going to start being due soon.”

Keith walks over to the bed and plops down next to Lance, running a nervous hand through his hair. “Where, uh...” Lance raises a patient eyebrow at him. “Where are you looking?”

Lance smiles slowly, biting at his bottom lip. “Aww, you’re gonna miss me aren’t you?”

Keith scowls. “Where are you looking?” He asks again, this time sounding irritated.

Lance chuckles, shrugging. “There are a few places that look interesting. The problem is the money though. Like, there’s this one in San Francisco that looks like a dream, but damn. The money is insane. And then there’s one in Manhattan but like, come on, the rent there is so bad I could probably build a house with physical dollar bills for less of a cost.”

Keith frowns a little, despite himself. “Manhattan? That’s like...”


Keith shrugs. “I guess.”

“Unfortunately, all of those things cost money.” Lance sighs. “So I may end up at Garrison University. Which isn’t bad! It’s just not as...you know?”
Keith perks up slightly at the name. Garrison University is one of the only brochures he has on his bed at home. Unlike Lance, who thinks about college as a glamorous, romanticized adventure just waiting to be lived, Keith sees it for what it is; a practical, somewhat expensive way to further his education. Therefore, he’s not really in it for the fluffy things like Lance is. To be fair, that’s how it has always been. Lance has always wanted something more out of life. Lance has always expected something more out of life. Keith sees life for what it is and doesn’t understand how Lance works; how he can expect something to be so much more than what it really is. How he can be continuously disappointed, over and over and over again, and still think that life can be beautiful.

Must be exhausting.

“Garrison University?” Is all he says.


Keith purses his lips. “Yeah, I was looking at Garrison too.”

Lance grins. “No shit, really? How cool would it be if we ended up in the same place?”

Keith chuckles. “It’s pretty hard to get into though.”

“So what? We’re like, in the top of our class!” Lance says, already getting increasingly excited. “Dude do you realize how awesome that would be? We could be roommates!”

“It would be...pretty awesome.” Keith says, unable to stop the grin from spreading across his face.

“Hell yeah it would! You applying anywhere else?”

Keith shrugs. “I don’t know. Maybe one other place, just in case. But I don’t really care where I go.”

“Really? Like not even a little?”

Keith shakes his head. “Not feeling particularly passionate about any one place. I mean, you know how I am though. As long as it’s a decent school and stuff.”

Lance hums, nodding. The silence stretches on a bit longer than Keith is expecting it to. Then Lance breathes out a bit of an incredulous laugh. “Holy shit, man. We’re like...going to be old.”


Lance scoffs and rolls his eyes. “Screw you and your logical ass. I was trying to have a moment with you!”

“Don’t you know not to try that anymore?” Keith asks, smirking, and he giggles when Lance smacks the side of his head.

Garrison University, Keith think to himself.

Yeah, I can probably do Garrison University.

xxx
Present Day

Her name is Olivia and she is beautiful in a way that makes Lance want to run away. It makes him panic. He isn’t sure when he crossed this line; from being stunned by someone’s beauty to being intimidated by it, but he knows that there was once a time when he wasn’t like this. There was a time when he went on a date with a pretty girl and only felt nervous excitement. But the minute he sees Olivia’s curly blonde hair and freckles enter the small coffee shop, his legs twitch with the urge to flee.

Calm down. She wanted to meet you again. She wants to be here, he tries to tell himself.

When she spots him, her face lights up with a gentle smile. She waves and starts walking over. As she gets closer, he notices smaller details. Her cheeks are rosy and her eyes are hazel. Her teeth are blindingly white, her lashes curl upwards, the sheen on her lips looks like chapstick. She smells like a lemon tart.

“Hi!” She says happily, sitting down across from him. “Sorry I’m late. Traffic was a disaster. Did you order yet?”

Lance smiles charmingly. “Nah, not yet. And don’t worry about it.”

She takes a bit of a rushed breath, collecting herself, and then looks over at the display box with all of the pastries in it. She taps her chin, humming. “I think I’m going to get some coffee cake. You want anything?”

Lance starts to get up. “Oh, allow me. You want the raisin one?”

She wrinkles her nose. It’s adorable. “No, just the cinnamon is fine. Thanks, Lance.” She smiles kindly at him and he feels that familiar nervous flutter in his chest. That flutter used to excite him but now it just makes him feel like he’s suffocating a little. The great thing about Nyma, despite the forced drug abuse and the shitty friends, was that he knew, deep down, that she would never give a shit about him.

This, though?

This is...less safe.

A few moments later, he walks back to the table with the food. Olivia is looking at her hands, chewing her lip nervously. Lance grins as he sits down. Has he already fucked up somehow? Did he do something to make her uncomfortable? “You alright?” He asks, as kindly as possible.

She chuckles a little breathlessly. “Oh, yeah! Sorry, I’m...” She giggles. “I’m going to be honest with you, I’m a little nervous. I don’t usually...ask people on dates like this.”

Lance blinks at her. This is new. “Oh, uh.” He clears his throat, lips quirking upwards. “Well, you’re in luck, cause I’m nervous too.”

She looks relieved. “Really?”

“Yeah. So now that that’s out of the way...” He holds out her cake. “Wanna eat?”

Olivia smiles, eyes crinkling at the corners. She laughs. “Yeah...Yeah of course.”
Lance smiles back and starts unwrapping his muffin. He can feel the anxious thudding of his heart and he can already sense himself getting carried away. The recognizable tidal waves of emotions begin to crest; endearment, excitement, puppy love. They swirl around in his mind like pencil lines in a drawing, indicating where the colors will soon be added.

More than anything, Lance tries to ignore the voice inside his head, deep, deep down, that keeps screaming; Run. Now.

Before you have a chance to fuck this up.

xxx

Keith is laying upside down on the futon and trying to catch popcorn in his mouth when Lance gets home. “Hey!” He says, a little too animatedly. “How was it?”

Lance smiles softly, shrugging off his jacket. He’s wearing a blue button down-- because of course he is. He was on a date. Keith holds his breath. Lance looks really, really nice. His hair is a bit ruffled and his cheeks are flushed and his eyes…

Holy shit. Snap out of it, Keith. Really?

Lance sighs happily. “It was...good.” He says, sounding satisfied.

Keith chuckles nervously. “No declaration of love this time?” He asks, way too hopeful.

Lance scoffs at him. “Nah, not this time. I think I’ll...you know. Try and take it slow this time. It’s not a huge deal, after all. Was just coffee.” He shrugs, blushing a little more. Keith feels his stomach fall to his feet.

Well shit.

If Lance isn’t declaring his love for this girl and writing their wedding vows, then…

He must really, really like her.

Lance clears his throat. “So what are you up to?”

“Literally nothing.” Keith says, bending over to pick up the stray pieces of popcorn on the floor. “Was going to go to the gym but...didn’t happen.”

“Wanna go out for dinner?”

Keith hums. “Sure, why not?”

“Let’s go somewhere fancy. We haven’t done that in a while. We could go to Hunk’s place! Have a proper meal there. ”

Keith shrugs. “Yeah, okay. Just let me change.” He walks into his room and shuts the door, finally allowing himself to deflate a little. Of course the first successful date that Lance goes on in years just happens to be the week that Keith realizes he has...feelings for him. Keith sighs. It’s not like he thought there was a chance in hell for him, anyway. Because Lance knows everything about him and had years upon years to do anything about it. Maybe it means something that they’ve gone this long
without anything happening. It’s just too far gone.

But either way, Keith puts on one of his nicest shirts. He slips on some tighter black pants. He looks down at the bottle of cologne on his dresser, untouched for probably three years, and sighs defeatedly; one puff on his neck. That’s all.

Ruffling his hair a little, Keith takes a deep, steadying breath. He can’t remember the last time he felt the need to try for anything. Now, he feels it; Like a dull, aching throb in his chest.

xxx

Lance looks down at his phone. Jesus, since when did it take Keith this long to get ready, ever? In the many years that Lance has known him, he’s realized that it usually only takes Keith seven minutes to get dressed. Twelve if it’s a special occasion. But Keith is still in there, and it’s been twenty minutes. Lance starts to worry for his health.

“Hey, Snickers?” Lance says, knocking softly on the door. “You pass out or something?” He creaks open the door and sees Keith staring at himself in the mirror. Keith whirs around at the sound of the door opening.

“What’s up?” He asks quickly.

Lance looks around the room. “I was just wondering what was taking so long? Thought you might’ve like, died or something.”

“Oh, uh. I couldn’t find my shirt.” Keith says. “But I’m ready now. So...let’s go?”

Lance glances down at what Keith is wearing. It’s all black, as usual, but in the place of his typical, cotton v-neck there is a snug, black button-down with the sleeves rolled up halfway. His pants are tight around his waist and hug his legs all the way down. Keith looks down at his forearm, nervously fiddling with his sleeve. Lance can feel his eyebrow raising slowly. It’s been awhile since he’s seen Keith dressed up.

“You look really good.” He says, because it’s true. Then he tilts his head forward slightly and sniffs. A tangy, spicy smell fills his nose. “Is that...cologne?”

Keith is blushing, continuing to fiddle with his sleeve. “No.”

“Yeah, it is.” Lance says, smirking. “Wow, when’s the last time you wore cologne?”

Keith huffs. “Can we just go?”

“Aww, you’re getting all flustered! Is there someone at Hunk’s that I need to know about?” Lance asks, purely teasing. But Keith obviously doesn’t take it as a joke. His face twists up like he’s about to barf.

“No.”

Lance squints at him. Wait a minute...“Hmm, I think you’re lying. Cologne is your telltale signal.”

Keith scowls. “Signal for what?”
“You’ve got a crush on someone.” Lance gasps, grabbing Keith by the shoulders. “Oh my god, Snickers. Whoever it is, they’re going to be there, aren’t they? Oh man.”

“I don’t have a crush on anyone.” Keith says, but his voice cracks slightly. “I just wanted to look nice.”


Keith’s face falls a little. Lance wonders if his teasing is going to far. But they always tease each other like this. What’s the big deal?

“I’m not hiding anything.” He says again, sounding much more firm this time.

“You may be good at telling it like it is, Keith. But that also makes you a horrible liar.” Lance reaches out and trails his fingers along a fold in Keith’s collar, straightening it out. Keith’s head moves away slightly.

“I’m not lying.” Oh man, Keith is blushing hard. Lance has got him right where he wants him.

“You sure about that? Because the last time you wore cologne was probably--”

“Can you please just forget about the cologne?” Keith says, sounding irritated.

Lance bites his lip and takes a step closer. “Come on, Snickers. Look at me.” He looks down at Keith and tugs on a lock of his hair; something he always does when Keith’s temper is starting to show. He lets his voice drop a little lower. Gentler. “Who is it?”

Keith is blinking up at him with big, violet eyes and a furious blush on his cheeks. Lance smirks even further, because he can tell Keith is only a second away from admitting it. He can see it, plain on his face. Lance leans forward even more, invading Keith’s personal space and raising an eyebrow. Out of absolutely nowhere, Keith jerks backwards with a panicked look on his face.

“H-Hunk.” He says, voice cracking.

Lance leans back up and blinks at him. “What?”

“I have a crush on Hunk.” Keith says again, the blush reaching all the way to the tips of his ears.

Lance’s eyes widen. “Wait what?”

“Y-yeah.” Keith mumbles. “He’s incredibly talented. And...funny.” The words come out awkward and stuttered. “I...didn’t think I’d like him because he’s not my type but...I guess I do.”

Lance takes a few steps backwards. Keith and Hunk? “No way.” He says, in awe. “Seriously?”

Keith clears his throat awkwardly. “Yeah...seriously.”

Lance can feel the excited grin make it’s way onto his face. The the romantic part of him is buzzing. It feels like it’s about to explode. “Oh my god, no way man! I’m going to make this happen! You mark my words, I’ll be the best wingman out there!”

Keith shakes his head furiously. “No. Nope. I don’t want any help. It’s just a stupid crush, it’ll pass. I don’t even know if he’s gay.”

“Dude we can make this work, though! You look sexy as hell, there’s gotta be a chance!”
Keith puts a hand to his pink face. “Can we not? Please?”

Lance sighs, long and exasperated. “Fine. Fine, I promise I won’t intervene...tonight.”

Keith frowns at him.

“But it’s just so cute! Wow, and so unexpected! But that’s what makes it cute!”

“Lance.”

“Alright, alright, fine.” Lance smiles at him. “You’re secret is safe with me.”

Keith takes a deep breath. “I need to pee.” He mumbles, pushing past Lance and walking towards the bathroom. Lance clutches his heart dramatically. Keith has a crush! It’s so rare. He walks out of Keith’s room with warmth in his cheeks.

His love life might always be a disaster. But when it comes to other people? TV shows? Movies? Nothing in the world makes him happier than seeing other people fall in love. Especially because there’s no chance of him ruining it.

He hears Keith rummaging around in the bathroom and smiles a little to himself.

Keith may not want help right now, but Lance will do everything he can to make sure Keith ends up with what he wants.

That’s what friends are for, after all.

Chapter End Notes

love you guys! <3
Melted Chocolate

Chapter Summary

1) Scott Marren is an asshole
2) *slams fists on table* AHHHHHHHHHhhHHhhh
3) Hunk (sort of)

Chapter Notes

The first "Present Day" section picks up where the last chapter left off.
this chapter....is almost 13k. Who am I? I think i died and then came back to life i dont even remember writing this its like i blacked out ANYWAY

very very slight hint of //homophobia (just a bully saying something dumb) and //violence (a punch in the face) and i finaLY KNOW WHERE THIS STORY IS GOING, OFFICIALLY praise cheezus

the flashbacks cant all be so fluffy, right? I mean, as people grow up, things start to change :/ also can someone please help keith? he's dying. As always, love you all and thanks so much for reading <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12th Grade

“Oof.” Lance says, sounding almost impressed, as he squints at Keith’s chin. “Yeah that’s a bad one.” He leans back slightly and tilts his head to the side, as if looking at it from a 45 degree angle will make it smaller. “Yeah, it’s pretty big.”

Keith grits his teeth. “Well you’re the expert.” He says begrudgingly. “The fuck should I do?”

Of course on the day that the whole class is scheduled to take senior pictures for the yearbook, Keith has a zit the size of Texas itself on his chin. He woke up this morning and actually made a choked, disgusted noise when he saw himself in the mirror. He texted Lance, mostly pretending not to panic, and of course Lance was over in under twenty minutes. Skincare is very, very important to him.

“It wasn’t there yesterday?” Lance asks.

“No. I mean, my chin hurt a little but I thought I just bumped it or something.”

Lance sighs, shaking his head. “You picked at it, didn’t you?”

“Not...really.”

“Snickers! No! Why?”
“I tried my best not to but it was so small. I thought I could get it!” Keith defends, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Well now it’s past the point of no return! And it’s going to scar.”

Keith groans, running a hand down his face. “I can’t believe this.”

Lance looks at him sympathetically, then takes a deep breath. “Okay, well...we gotta try something. We have...” He looks down at his phone. “...about an hour and a half until pictures.” He squints at Keith’s face, grimacing. “We gotta try.”

Keith nods, determined. “So, what do I do?”

Lance looks around the bathroom, humming. “I’m going to need a mixing bowl. And some baking soda. And lemon juice. Oh! And a green tea bag if you have any. Uhhh...” He bites at his nail; a nervous habit that Keith can’t stand. “I might need to borrow...does you mom wear makeup?”

Keith sighs at what his life has come to, and nods. Lance grins.

“Okay! We might be able to pull this off!”

“Whatever you say.” Keith replies, sounding very unenthused. He trudges down to the kitchen, chin throbbing, and collects the ingredients Lance wanted. He has no idea what’s about to happen but he trusts Lance. That boy has had less than five zits throughout their entire highschool career, and usually they disappear within eight hours. He seriously has a gift.

Returning to the bathroom, Lance is down on his knees and already tearing apart the cabinet below the sink. “Snickers, seriously? What is all this shit?” Almost-empty bottles and half-used bars of soap litter the bathroom tile. He holds up a bar of Irish Springs soap. “Is this what you use on your face?”

Keith swallows. “That depends...is that a trick question?”

“Oh my god.” Lance clutches his heart. “You poor thing.”

Keith scowls. “It usually works fine.”

“Absolutely not. No way. Not when you’re my friend.” Lance sighs dramatically, standing back up and grabbing the ingredients out of Keith’s hands. “Okay. Chemistry time.”

Lance gets to work pouring some baking soda into the small bowl and mixing it with water. Keith watches with one eyebrow raised, completely clueless.

“Baking soda is great as absorbing oil.” Lance narrates, in a documentary-like fashion. “So it always does a great job drying zits out. Fun fact! Use it mixed with water if you run out of face wash.” Lance glance at Keith in disdain. “Or if you don’t use face wash at all.”

“I wash my face!” Keith cuts in defensively.

“The acidity from lemon juice pretty much does the same thing. Dries out the zit.” Lance stirs harder. Keith peers into the bowl and studies the white mixture.

“What is the tea bag for?”


Keith sighs. “How are we friends?”
Lance scoffs. “If you keep using that bar of soap, we might not be.” He hands Keith the bowl. “Here, now drown that thing in this.”

Keith huffs, grabbing the bowl. “Fine.”

After he’s got a huge glob of nasty smelling white paste on his chin, he trudges to his bed and falls onto his back. The bed bounces as Lance flops down next to him.

“Man, it burns.” Keith whines.

“Oh, stop complaining.” Lance teases, but he sounds like he’s about to laugh. “You should just go to senior pictures like that.”

Keith snorts. “Hilarious.”

“You look quite dashing.”

“You’re mean today.” Keith complains.

Lance sits up slightly and rests his chin in his hand, looking down at Keith. “Why do you care so much? About this zit.” He asks, skeptically. “You’ve had zits before.”

“Well yeah, but…” Keith shrugs. “It’s senior pictures. You know? High school legacy, and stuff.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “Are you telling me you care about your legacy at this school?” He asks incredulously. “You?”

Keith swallows, looking away. That’s how Lance knows he’s lying. “Or is there something else you care about?” He asks, egging him on. “Because you can’t possibly think I believe that first thing.”

“It’s nothing.” Keith mumbles.

“Is it a someone?” Lance presses, completely ignoring Keith’s excuse. “Oh my god, who is it? Who do you like?”

Keith frowns. “I said it’s nothing.”

“Okay, but let’s be real. There’s a boy.” Lance pokes Keith’s stomach. “Come on.”

Keith rolls his eyes, sighing. “You’re gonna kill me, probably.” He mumbles.

“No I won’t! Who is it?” Lance is almost vibrating with anticipation.

Keith looks at him hesitantly. “I’ve been texting with…” He takes a deep breath, covering his eyes with his hand. “With Scott.”

Lance pauses, blinking down at Keith. “Scott...Marren?”

Keith nods slowly, blush coloring his cheeks. “Not about anything, like...I mean, he texted me asking about homework. And I texted back. Then...I don’t know? We just kept texting?”

Lance gapes at him. “You like him?”

“No! God no. I just...I mean I’ve always thought he was a bit attractive. Just a bit, though.”
“Well yeah, but you’re talking to him now?”

“I mean...yeah. He’s actually kind of funny.”

“Oh my god, Keith. No. He is a douche. You know he is!”

“I know! I know. But, I...don’t know.” Keith rubs his eyes. “I told you it’s stupid.”

“Yeah.” Lance frowns. “It is stupid. He’s a bad guy. Remember Halloween sophomore year? He was an ass to you during spin the bottle.”

Now it’s Keith’s turn to frown. “I didn’t say I was in love with him. Calm down, jeez.”

“I don’t get it!” Lance retorts, sitting up all the way. Clearly worked up. “All he does is throw parties and break girls hearts. Since when are you into people that shallow?”

Keith sits up now, too. “I’m not going to marry the guy, Lance.” He growls. “We’ve just been texting for a couple days! What the hell has gotten into you? I don’t even know if he likes guys. He probably doesn’t, alright? Just come off it. Jesus.”

“How does someone with such good judgement fall for that?”

“Oh my god.”

“Like, of all the guys you could’ve liked, you had to choose him?”

“Look, you’re the one who pushed me to tell you, alright?” Keith snaps, clenching his fists at his sides. “This could’ve been avoided if you didn't force yourself into my business all the damn time!”

Lance recoils, expression softening slightly. Keith scoffs, still angry. “I know he’s a bad guy, alright? I’m not an idiot. I just...liked texting him. Whatever. I don’t have a chance, anyway.”

They sit in awkward silence. Keith’s chest feels tight. His heart is pounding. This isn’t the first time they’ve fought, but it feels much heavier than usual. Maybe it’s because it’s the end of the year. Maybe it’s because there’s a chance that they’ll go to different colleges and never see each other again. It’s just a time of high stress. He can still feel the anger, burning like fire in his throat. He wants to say more, but bites his tongue.

Lance reaches forward, a little shakily, and tugs on a lock of his hair. Gently. It’s something he started doing a year ago when Keith’s temper was getting really bad. Something of a warning. He hears Lance let out a wobbly breath.

“I--I’m sorry.” He mumbles. “I’m sorry, Snickers.”

Keith swallows.

“Was just trying to look out for you but...I went too far.” Keith can hear the shame in his voice. The panic. “I’m really sorry.”

Keith sighs, lifting his eyes to look at Lance. Lance’s blue eyes look stormy. The worried crease between his brows makes Keith feel sadness pricking in his gut. That expression doesn’t suit him. “It’s okay...” He admits, because he knows Lance well enough to see what is happening here. “I’m sorry for snapping...I understand what you were trying to do, but...” Keith shrugs. “You know. Just.”

“Yeah.” Lance says softly, “I know.”
The silence that follows isn’t nearly as awkward as the silence was before. It’s somewhat of a recuperating silence; both of them gathering their bearings before they say anything else.

Keith sighs dramatically, pointing to his chin. “Can I take this shit off now?”

Lance’s face cracks into a tentative smile. “Oh, yeah. Green tea time.”

Keith chuckles as Lance scrambles off the bed, grabbing a washcloth and tearing open a packet of green tea. “Don’t worry,” Lance says. “This step won’t burn nearly as much.”

Keith follows him into the bathroom. Lance whirls around at as he enters and goes to work, pressing the wet washcloth to his face and scrubbing away the white paste. “Huh.” He mumbles. “It actually looks smaller.”

Keith doesn’t bother hiding the grin that spreads across his face. “Really?”

“Yeah. A little bit of concealer to cover the redness and you’ll be golden.” Keith can still see the traces of sadness in Lance’s expression. He really isn’t a fan. He reaches a hand forward and squeezes Lance’s arm.


Lance looks at him with surprised eyes and clears his throat. “Okay.”

“And thank you, by the way.” He continues. “For helping me with this.”

Lance grins and Keith feels like everything is right with the world again. “You kidding me? I’m honored to be your skincare consultant. You need all the help you can get.”

Keith snorts, flicking Lance’s cheek. “Fuck you.” He says through a smile as Lance giggles smugly at him.

xxx

Present Day

Keith is, officially, the biggest idiot in the entire universe. Every idiot, in every country on planet earth, is less of an idiot than him. If aliens exist, he is stupider than all of them.

Because apparently, he has a crush on Hunk now. Or at least, that’s what he told Lance.

Lance . The guy he actually has a crush on.

And of course Lance, being Lance , has now made it his life’s mission to make sure Keith ends up with Hunk. Which isn’t necessarily a horrible thing, because Hunk is a genuinely great guy. But he’s just not the guy Keith likes .

Keith can still see Lance’s expression in his head. The joking eyes. The raised eyebrow and unconvinced smirk as he said, “Yeah? For who, me? Come on. You’re hiding something.” As if the thought of Keith dressing up for him is so insane it’s got to be a lie. Keith had felt a stab--small but
definitely there, in his chest. He’s so obviously in way over his head. And now he’s stuck in a lie, beneath another lie, under yet another lie. And as someone who always tells the brutal, uncut truth; no ifs, ands, or buts about it; he feels like he’s free-falling and there’s nothing to grab onto.

Keith climbs into Lance’s car, now feeling very self conscious about the cologne he is wearing. Of course the first person who came to mind was Hunk. They’re going to his restaurant for dinner. It was the only thing he could think of. He had blurted it before he could stop it. For about four seconds after he said it, he was actually impressed with how cleverly he solved his problem. Then it dawned on him that he actually severely fucked up, and now Lance is driving in his hot-as-hell car and blabbering on and on about how he never saw this coming. How he’s just so shocked and it’s so romantic that Keith was so pleasantly surprised by Hunk that he was able to fall for someone so different from all of the other guys he’s liked in the past.

“I mean, you went from Biker Guy to Hunk! That’s gotta mean something huge, right?”

No, I went from Biker Guy to you, you complete asswipe, Keith thinks hopelessly.

“It’s like every romantic comedy in the world is being brought to life before my every eyes.” Lance blabbers happily. “And it’s happening to you! Damn, that’s the most unexpected part! Life is crazy, man.”

Keith wipes droplets of sweat off his forehead. “Can you please turn the heat down?” He asks, choosing to ignore everything Lance is saying. “I’m dying, here.”

Lance sighs. “Okay, okay, I won’t talk about it anymore. I promise. But the heat stays on.”

Keith groans. “I hate you so much.”

Lance is grinning, focus still trained on the road. Keith let’s his eyes trace over the swoop of Lance’s hooked nose, the slightly crooked teeth, and the small pucker of his lips. He takes a small breath, letting his head fall sideways onto the headrest and trying to get himself to look away. Lance is still in his blue shirt from the date he went on earlier today. Keith may have been out of line in high school when he said it, but he was right. When Lance wears blue, it really does brings out his eyes. God. How did Keith never see just how pretty Lance really is? It’s like he can look at him forever. When did it get this bad? His heart lurches in his chest and he finally looks away.

He must be pulling some kind of distraught face, or something, because then Lance says. “Hey, I wasn’t kidding. You look really, really good.” He looks at Keith and sends him a soft smile that makes a part of Keith’s heart melt. “Like...don’t be nervous.”

Keith wants peel his skin off at the irony. “I can’t help it...” He says shyly. It’s the first true thing he’s said to Lance in a couple of weeks. It feels good. “It’s just hard, you know...being around someone you really like.” If he’s going to do this, he might as well milk it. His voice comes out a little weak, watching Lance dart his tongue out and run it over his bottom lip. He feels hot all over. It’s not because the heat is on.

“Yeah, Snickers. I totally get it. Don’t worry, I got your back.”

Keith breathes through the unfair fluttering in his chest. “Yeah. Thanks.”

xxx
It is a complete miracle that the entire time they are at dinner, they don’t run into Hunk. Turns out that being a chef during actual working hours means a lot less face time with the customers, so Lance and Keith eat at a small table in the nicest part of the restaurant and Keith thanks his lucky stars that he doesn’t have to manifest his lie any further because he really doesn’t feel equipped to do so. It’s a nice outing, overall. Keith ignores the nervous ball of energy rolling around in his gut and instead focuses on the soft, content look in Lance’s eyes and the way he hums when he eats something he really likes. These are things that he recognizes. They are things that are familiar to him. And he never realized how much comfort they brought him until now.

They drive home in a silence that isn’t awkward. It’s settling, and comfortable. Keith lets his eyes fall shut because the heat in Lance’s car is actually very welcoming after a big meal. He hears Lance humming along softly to the song on the radio and it makes his lips twitch upwards in a smile. On one hand, he feels like he is playing with fire, which is destructive and dangerous and uncontrollable. On the other hand, playing with fire is so incredibly sweet. Because sometimes, when it’s really cold, everywhere else around him, he can still extend his hands closer to the fire and feel the warmth curl around them, tender and tickling. And it’s a sweet feeling. It’s like melted chocolate.

xxx

12 Grade

Keith blows his bangs out of his face and sighs as he fiddles with the small bundle of ribbons in his hands. He feels incredibly stupid, because this “event planning” stuff totally seems like something Lance would do instead of him. He isn’t nearly creative enough, or passionate enough, to join something as stupid and meaningless as “Prom Committee” and actually enjoy it. When he saw the flyers, he actually snorted, because really? How much does somebody have to despise themselves to willingly do something like that? Helping plan prom? Who does that?

But then he noticed that the first name on the sign up sheet, on literally every single flyer hanging in the school, was “Scott Marren”. And he doesn’t like to think of himself as somebody who does things solely because of other people, but he found himself in a moment of complete weakness as he lifted a shaky hand to write his name down underneath Scott’s.

Keith realized that he was gay shortly after his first day of 10th grade, and it wasn’t anything too groundbreaking. It was a pretty cliche way to find out, really. The typical, and entirely cliche “Girls are pretty but I don’t want to have sex with them, and being in the boys locker room is my favorite part of playing sports” thing is kind of overdone, but that’s actually, quite ashamedly, how it ended up happening for Keith overall. Scott, however, was the first guy. Some may call it a “gay awakening”, but there was one day in Biology when Scott walked into class late and Keith had to take a moment to calm down the blush in his face when he saw him. Keith isn’t someone who usually focuses on details like outfits and makeup and hair styles, especially when it comes to the boneheads in his high school; but he remembers how Scott looked that day with insane clarity. A navy, knit sweater. Dark wash jeans. Blonde, ruffled hair and bright green eyes. His skin looked pale and his cheeks were flushed and Keith remembered thinking that had he never, ever thought a girl looked that gorgeous before.
Of course, he didn’t tell Lance. He was dying to, because he never keeps anything from Lance. But he knew how much Lance hated Scott and didn’t want to step on any toes. For weeks, he was getting low scores in Bio because he was so distracted by the floppy blonde hair on the back of Scott’s stupidly pretty head. It was his first crush on anyone, really. And he didn’t even know anything about Scott’s actual personality, but he knew that he wanted to put his hands in his pants.

Or something like that.

And now Keith is paying for his actions because he’s got a back t-shirt on that says “Prom Committee” and he has to tie ribbons around nearly 400 balloon weights while sitting in the almost-empty gymnasium, just so that he can get a glimpse of the back of Scott’s head from time to time. It feels pathetic. It is pathetic. Especially after he got into a fight with Lance about Scott not even a week ago. He just hates how much his curiosity is winning him over. He hates how much he wants to talk to Scott. And most of all, he hates that Lance doesn’t even know any of this is happening.

Without any sort of warning, Scott flops down into the seat next to him and sighs, grabbing a handful of ribbons. “Hey, man. Need some help with those?” He asks. Keith blinks dumbly at him. His gray shirt stretches a little tightly around his shoulders.

“Oh. Uh. Yeah...that’d be nice.”

Scott chuckles and picks up a balloon weight, starting to do what Keith is doing. “How long have you been doing this back here?” He asks.

Keith shrugs. “Like forty five minutes.”

“Damn, you’re a trooper. I always give up after five minutes.”

Keith smiles slightly. “Well I’m having a blast.”

Scott snorts. “Looks like it.”

The silence is suffocating. Keith feels the pressure to say something charming. He doesn’t dare open his mouth.

“So, what’s your deal?” Scott asks, examining the knot he tied around the balloon weight. “I barely ever see you around.”

Keith glances up at him, then quickly back down. “I don’t have a deal.”

“You even go to prom last year?”

“I went for a bit. It was pretty fun.”

Scott hums. “Well it’ll be even better this year, I think.”

“Yeah?”

“Hell yeah. With these balloon weights? Doesn’t get much better than that.”

Keith chuckles. “You may be right about that.”

Scott takes out his phone and starts playing music. It’s not the kind of music Keith likes, but it doesn’t really matter. His heart is fluttering relentlessly either way. They work without talking for a few minutes. Keith steals glances that he prays Scott doesn’t notice. He can’t help it.
A text lights up his phone and he looks down to see Lance’s name. He swallows, shutting it off. He just wants to have a few moments to himself.

“Man, this is rough.” Scott complains, tipping his head back and closing his eyes. “We deserve a beer or something after this.”

Keith hums. “A beer sounds good.” He lies, because he doesn’t particularly like beer. But it seems like the right thing to say.

“Wanna come over afterwards? We can chill.”

Keith pauses, swallowing. “What?”

Scott raises an eyebrow at him. “My house? After this.”

Keith blinks at him. “Uh…” His heart is suddenly in his throat. He wasn’t expecting this. Scott’s house? Alone?

“I mean, just ’cause we’re the last people here and all. Also, you’ve been on the committee for forever and we haven’t hung out, which is a little crazy.” Scott grins at him and Keith feels like he’s on fire. “Ya know?”

“Yeah, sure.” Keith manages, biting his lip nervously. “Sounds good.”

“Cool.” Scott smiles. It looks genuine. “Let’s meet a quota and get the fuck out of here. Yeah?”

“What quota?”

“How many you got done there?”

Keith looks down at the pile of ribbons in his lap. “Like, seventy.”

Scott smirks. “Let’s get to a hundred?”

Keith nods, biting back his excited grin.

xxx

Scott’s parents are loaded, which doesn’t even surprise Keith a little. Keith’s house is big, but Scott’s house is enormous. Keith’s palms feel sweat and clammy as he walks with Scott through the shiny, mahogany double doors. They actually have a wine cellar in the basement where Scott puts in a combination and pushes past a large, metal door; re-emerging with a six pack of beer and a triumphant smile on his face. Exhausted, they both collapse onto the couch and pop open their beers. Scott talks a lot. He talks about his family; his dad is an investor and his mom does accounting for a large technology firm. He has a younger brother who loves computers. A younger sister in boarding school. Keith watches the whole time, feeling a little speechless and Scott pops open another beer, and then another. Face getting pinker. Words getting a little lazier. He points around the room and tells Keith about the things hanging on the walls. There is a gun that his father first took him hunting with. There is a participation trophy for when he got last place in a karate competition. They eat pretzels. Keith knows that Scott is a little tipsy now, and he thinks it’s adorable. He still can’t really believe he is here. And it gets less and less believable as Scott moves closer and closer to Keith on
the couch. At first, Keith thinks it’s all in his head. But then Scott reaches forward and wipes a crumb off of the corner of his mouth.

“I remember seeing you at prom last year.” Scott confesses, voice significantly lower. “You didn’t seem like the type. I was surprised.”

Keith swallows. “Yeah, I wasn’t...planning on it. But there was a change in plans.”

Scott hums. “You and that McClain kid...you dating or something?”

Keith feels the blush burn across his face. “What? Lance? No. No he’s just a good friend.”

Scott blinks slowly at him. “Really?” He leans in a little closer.

“Yes.” Keith breathes, not trusting his voice.

“Cool.”

Keith clenches his fist, hard, as Scott comes in closer.

“So, is it true, then?” Scott murmurs.

Keith can smell the beer on his breath. “Is what true?”

“That you’re..ya know…” Scott pauses, swallowing. “You’re into guys.”

Keith nods hesitantly, eyes darting down to Scott’s lips.

Scott looks a little taken aback, but doesn’t move away. “I’ve never tried anything with a guy before.” Scott says, and it sounds extremely suggestive. “Have you?”

Keith’s brain flashes to the small, innocent kiss he shared with Lance a couple years back. He shakes his head no.

Scott’s nose bumps against his. “Wanna help each other out, then?”

Keith’s head is reeling. “You...like guys?” He asks, in mild shock.

Scott shrugs, a sexy smirk making its way to his lips. “I definitely could ...” Scott mutters.

There are warning signs going up all over the inside of Keith’s mind. Red lights, flashing obnoxiously, with loud beeping and screaming and utter chaos but all he can really hear, over all of it, is a very excited holy shit holy shit holy shit

He leans in first, perhaps feeling a little too excited, and presses their lips together. The only other guy he ever kissed, in his entire life, was Lance. And this is much, much different. Because Scott is running his hand up Keith’s thigh and slipping it under his shirt, stroking the naked skin of his stomach. Keith feels the hunger curling in his chest and the burning heat throughout his entire body at the sensation of it. Scott’s lips aren’t quite as soft as Lance’s were. They aren’t as gentle. But Keith doesn’t mind at all. Scott is in his lap in seconds, pressing their bodies together and burying his hands in Keith’s hair. Keith feels the weight of him pressing down onto his hips and he shudders, surprised by how good it feels. A tongues swipes across his bottom lip and he jumps, shocked by it. It feels weird. Wet and a little slimy. But Keith parts his lips a little cluelessly, and grips a little tighter when he feels Scott’s tongues slip into his mouth.

His inexperience is making him a little self conscious, but the excitement of the moment and the
small amount of alcohol in his veins is making it feel so exhilarating. They find a rhythm after a few awkward seconds. Keith breathes in and smells a musky, pine scent. He’s not sure if it’s the air freshener in the room or if it is Scott, but he doesn’t care. He doesn’t really care about anything, because Scott is touching him like he wants to touch him. He is kissing him with purpose, which is something Keith has never experienced before. It makes him feel...sexy. Like maybe, to somebody, he could actually be a sexy person.

Scott pulls away, face flushed and panting. “Wow.” He says, voice low. “You kiss even hotter than you look. Didn’t think it was possible.”

Keith chuckles nervously, ducking to hide his blushing face. “Thanks.”

Scott leans forward again, biting down on Keith’s bottom lip, and Keith lets himself get lost in it.

xxx

The next day, during the prom committee meeting, Keith waves hello to Scott, who is sitting at a table with a few of his friends. Scott raises an eyebrow in confusion and claims not to know him.

Keith was played by the most notorious player in the game.

He still has the audacity to be upset about it.

xxx

**Present Day**

“Snickers?” Lance walks into the apartment and scans the living room for Keith’s black mop of hair. “You home? I’ve got food!”

Keith bedroom door creaks open slowly and he wanders out, with mussed up hair and crumpled boxers on. He must’ve fallen asleep after work. It’s something he does a lot. Usually on Wednesday, which is his busiest day. Keith rubs his eyes and yawns, walking towards Lance. “Fuck, what time is it?” His voice is rough with sleep. He glances at the dark window. “Please don’t tell me it’s as late as it looks.”

“It’s seven thirty.” Lance says, smiling a little at Keith’s exhausted face. “It’s not too late, don’t worry.”

Keith flops down at the table and looks up at Lance with lazy eyes, raising an eyebrow. “What have you been up to?” His violet eyes are a little bloodshot. Lance puts the box out in front of them and sits down across from Keith.
“Got some dinner with Olivia.” Lance says, prying the small box open. “We went to this really cute place for dessert but I couldn’t finish mine so…” They both peer into the box. “I got this double fudge brownie but I could only have a bite before I nearly exploded.” He chuckles. Olivia had bet him that he wouldn’t be able to finish it. He totally thought he could. Turns out she was right.

Keith is looking down at the brownie like it’s made out of mud. He looks a little disgusted. Lance cocks his head to the side questioningly.

“Do you suddenly not like chocolate?” He asks, mostly teasing.

Keith blinks up at him. “Oh, no it’s not that. Just, you know…”

Lance waits because, no, he doesn’t know. Keith looks like he’s trying to find words to say.

“Just...hard to eat when I just woke up, ya know?”

Lance purses his lips skeptically but nods anyway. Keith has been acting strange lately. Not strange enough for anyone else to notice, but definitely strange enough for Lance to notice. He looks more nervous. He acts much more agitated. Lance knows that Keith usually gets like this when he has a crush but it’s been especially bad recently. And Hunk isn’t even a crush that should make Keith feel so self conscious. He’s such a great guy!

Lance shrugs at Keith’s response and swipes his finger across the chocolate frosting on top of the brownie. He hums as he licks it clean off. “You sure? It’s really good.” He mumbles around the tip of his index finger.

Keith swallows visibly. He looks perplexed, eyes trained on Lance’s finger. Lance raises his eyebrows and pops the finger out of his mouth. “What is it?” He asks.

Keith clears his throat, shaking his head. “Nothing. I’m gonna go get some peanut butter. I feel like it’d taste good with it. Be right back.”

“Mmk.” Lance shrugs yet again, dipping his finger back in and putting another dollop of frosting into his mouth. Keith returns with a knife and a jar of peanut butter. He reaches in and tears a corner of the brownie off, spreading peanut butter on the bottom of it and stuffing it into his mouth. His eyes fall shut and he hums happily. Lance feels himself relax at Keith’s normal reaction. Maybe everything is okay with him. Usually Lance is good at being able to tell. Now? He feels like he’s losing his touch.

Keith clears his throat. “So...that’s like, the fourth date, isn’t it?” The words sound a little bored. Like a conversation starter, more than anything, but Lance takes the bait anyhow.

“Yup! That was the fourth one. It was a lot of fun. She’s...incredible.” Lance says, meaning it. His heart flutters when he thinks about it. How he held her chin and kissed her today, so softly. Softer than he’s ever kissed anyone before. The darker part of his anxiety infested mind says it’s because he’s afraid of breaking her. Afraid of breaking what they have. But he tries to ignore it and instead focus on the warmth in his cheeks. On the light, happy beating of his heart. Maybe being careful isn’t such a bad thing.

“I bet she is.” Keith agrees. There is an emotion in Keith’s voice that Lance can’t quite place. Keith licks some stray peanut butter off of his thumb, refusing to meet Lance’s gaze. “So, did you make a move, then?”

“Well, I kissed her today. For the first time.” Lance blushes as he says it. “I told you I’m taking it slow.”
“Right, right.” Keith smiles at him. It looks gentle. “Well, I’m happy for you. It’s been awhile since you dated anyone halfway decent.”

Lance grins. “Hey come on, that’s not fair. Nyma was as decent as they come.” He says sarcastically.

Keith chuckles, rolling his eyes. “Was that before or after she sucked you dick in a bathroom stall?”

Lance flicks frosting at his face and Keith doges it effortlessly. The small smile on his face is getting bigger. Lance loves the sight of it. It’s comforting to him, to know that Keith is happy.

“So what’s been up with you?” Lance asks, sucking some frosting off of his thumb. “I feel like we haven’t talked about you in a while.”

Keith shrugs. “I have to write a speech for Shiro’s wedding and it’s stressing me out. Apparently the Best Man makes a toast, or something.” He mumbles. “But I might just hire someone to--”

“Snickers! No!” Lance shouts, flinging another piece of brownie at him. Keith dodges it again, not as gracefully this time.

“What?” He defends. “You know I suck at that mushy stuff! And also at writing.”

Lance scoffs. “So what? You can’t hire someone else! It has to come from the heart!”

“Oh my god, that’s such a Lance thing to say.” Keith says, but he’s smiling.

“It does. He’s your brother!”

Keith rolls his eyes. “I mean, I’ll write like, a draft, with the main ideas, but then I’ll just hand it off to someone--”

“Let me help you.” Lance says, nodding excitedly. “Yeah! I can help!”

Keith blinks at him. “Shiro knows you too well. He’ll know you wrote it.”

“Ah, except I won’t write it. I’ll just give you some ideas!” Lance is standing up now. “Come on, I love this shit! It’ll be so fun.”

Keith bites his lip. Lance can tell he’s trying not to grin. “Really? You’ll help?”

“Hell yeah, man!”

“Cool, let me go get my laptop.” Keith scrambles out of his chair and runs back into his room. Lance hears him shuffling around. He re-emerges with his laptop in hand and a small blush on his cheeks. Ever since Keith admitted his crush, he’s been blushing a lot more. Lance wonders how just one person managed to make him go soft. But whatever. It’s a nice blush. It...suits him.

They both move over to the futon, sitting cross-legged next to each other. Keith balances his laptop on his knee.

“This is what I have so far.” He says in a monotone voice. Lance leans into his to get a better view. Keith’s skin is burning hot.

“Jesus, man. Do you have a fever or something?” Lance asks, leaning in closer and pressing a cold hand to Keith’s burning forearm. “Are you dying?”
Keith sighs shakily. “Probably.” He says, staring down at Lance’s hand with concerned eyes. He reaches down and pushes it away. “Come on, stay focused.” He says, voice strained.

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “...Okay.” He says skeptically. There it is again. That weird, strained, monotone voice. Keith is almost always monotone but this...is different.

Lance sighs and scoots in even closer because Keith is holding the laptop really far away. He leans down and rests his chin on Keith’s shoulder, squinting at the text. “Could you move the laptop closer?”

“Huh? Oh. Yeah.” Keith pushes it forward. There is only one line typed, in small, Times New Roman font.

_Shiro. I can’t believe you’re getting married._

Lance giggles. “Poetic.”

“Shut up.”

“You have so much material, Snickers! Their story is so beautiful!” Keith’s shoulder is tense under his chin.

“I don’t know how to...talk about their story. What even is their story? They just...started dating. That’s it.”

“What do you mean?” Lance exclaims, sitting up. He watches Keith visibly relax as he moves away from him. That...is strange. “Their story is incredible! Buff science nerd who is actually a huge softie meets the hardass, career woman who doesn’t need a man and they fall madly in love! Do you even remember the day Shiro met her? We were playing video games and he came downstairs and physically unplugged the xbox to tell us about it. He was so gone! And she didn’t even remember his name the next time they ran into each other! I mean, imagine!”

Keith blinks owlishly at him, like he doesn’t understand. “Really?”

“Well yeah! You don’t remember?”

Keith purses his lips. “I mean, sort of. But I didn’t think that was romantic.”

“He was so excited!”

“I guess you’re right...” Keith looks back at the screen, clearly distraught. Lance rolls his eyes and grabs the laptop off of his lap.

“Clearly there’s a lot to do.” He grumbles, shoving Keith playfully.

xxx

The smell of Lance’s cupcake bodywash is swirling all around Keith’s head. He can’t take it. He
can’t think clearly. It makes hunger curl up tightly in his gut. Lance’s skin is cool and smooth where their arms are pressing together. Lance’s lips have a light coat of sweet, peaches n cream lip balm on them. Lance’s long fingers are delicate as they curl absentmindedly on Keith’s thigh.

Lance went on his fourth date with Olivia today.

Keith curls his hands into fists and tries to ignore the urge he has to reach out and run a hand through Lance’s soft hair. God, this is painful. It gets worse every day. He thinks about texting Kevin. Fucking it all out of his system. But Lance is still his best friend. His best friend who he hasn’t seen much of recently. And he loves spending time with him more than anything, even if it means a little bit of internal agony. So he clenches his jaw and tries to breath as Lance casually touches him in the most delicious, addictive ways.

“Hmm how about you talk about their first date? Didn’t Shiro accidentally take her to a restaurant that closed down because of a rat infestation?” Lance asks, breath dusting across Keith’s face. Keith nods, not trusting his voice.

“You could make it really funny! And charming. Like—“ Lance keeps talking. Keith can tell that he’s excited by the tone of his voice but it feels muffled. He feels himself zoning out, letting his gaze scan over Lance’s bright blue eyes and short, wispy lashes. It’s like he’s trying to make up for all of the years he looked at Lance and never actually saw him. He’s overwhelmed by what he sees now. Jeez, maybe he should text Kevin. It’s a quick fix but it usually works. And Lance has got Olivia anyway.

Lance says something that apparently he thinks is funny, and his eyes crinkle at the corner when he laughs. His nostrils flare a little. His barely crooked teeth peek out from pink lips. God, Keith wants to reach out and touch his face. Just a small touch. Just to feel that cold, soft skin underneath his fingertips. Lance’s breath is hot on his face. Even after such a long, and probably gross day, his breath smells good. It smells like chocolate. Keith wants to die.

Lance’s voice goes soft and snaps Keith out of his daydream. “And then they fell in love.” He says, voice a little raspy. “Against all odds. They fell in love.”

Lance’s gaze holds his and Keith’s heart leaps into his throat. Say something. Say something. Stop making this weird. His heartbeat feels like a jackhammer in his chest. Lance just keeps looking at him, like he’s trying to see inside his head. His bright blue eyes have gone cloudy. They dart around Keith’s face. Keith’s fingers twitch, desperate to do things that he really, really shouldn’t do.

Lance takes a breath, probably about to say something, when Keith finally snaps. Before he realizes it, his hand is on Lance’s cheek, sweeping a thumb across his cheekbone. Lance freezes underneath his touch the second it happens, eyes going a little wide. Keith has probably touched Lance’s face a thousand times but it seems so different now. The softness of it is no longer something that makes him roll his eyes, thinking about all of Lance’s unnecessary lotions and serums. It’s something he admires now. It’s something he likes. And instead of this touch quelling the hunger in his gut it just makes it worse. Like feeding a forest fire. Keith doesn’t even realize he’s holding his breath until Lance chuckles incredulously.

“You alright there, Snickers?” He asks, placing a hand on top of Keith’s and pulling it off of his face. “Got caught up in the moment, huh?” He smirks. “I get it, I tend to have that effect on people.” It’s entirely joking. Totally teasing. Like he’s giving Keith a second chance. An opportunity to explain his completely abnormal behavior.

Keith finally, finally, gathers enough courage to snap out of it. He smiles. “Don’t flatter yourself. You just had something gross on your cheek. Like dried up frosting or something.”
“Ew, really?” Lance face scrunches up and he wipes a hand across his cheek. Keith chuckles.

“Nah, I got it. It’s gone now. So, want to write down everything you just said for me?”

“Keith, no! What happened to ‘come from your heart?’”

Keith groans. “I can’t.”

“Oh stop whining.”

“I can’t! I don’t have a heart.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“Really, I don’t! There’s nothing there!”

Lance smirks. “Oh yeah? Then what about your big, warm and fuzzy crush on Huuuunk?” He says teasingly, poking Keith’s cheek. “You do have a heart.”

Keith sighs defeatedly. Lance really isn’t going to forget about that, is he? He’s so fucking. “I’m...this conversation is over.”

“Running away from love?” Lance questions dramatically as Keith stands up, dusting himself off.

“I’m going to get groceries.” Keith says emotionlessly. Because he is definitely not doing the first thing, okay?

“Oh! Oh I’m coming, too. I have a list of stuff I need.”

Keith shrugs. “Fine.”

Lance holds up a finger, signaling Keith to wait, and scurries into his room to change into more casual clothes. The door shuts and Keith lets out a shaky breath, unlocking his phone.

Every fiber of his being practically screams when he types out a text and sends it to Kevin.

xxx

12 Grade

“Okay, ready?” Lance asks, clutching the envelope tightly in his hands. “On three.”

Keith looks at him, panicked. “Maybe we should get dinner first.” He suggests hurriedly.

“Snickers, come on. We gotta know, one way or another. On three, okay?”

Keith nods reluctantly. They both received their application responses from Garrison University this morning, and Keith tossed it to the side when he found it. He doesn’t want to know. Because if he didn’t get in, it would suck for a lot of reasons. It’s the only school he applied to, first of all. Second of all, he would have to get a full time job at the golf supply store across the street from his house. Third of all, it’s where Lance is probably going; and Keith...doesn’t want him to go.
“Are you sure we can’t just make some cookies or something first? Maybe go for a drive? Eat some string cheese?” He asks desperately.

“One…” Lance starts, ignoring him.

“Lance…”

“Two…”

Keith huffs a nervous breath, looking down at the envelope.

“Three!”

They tear open the envelopes in their hand and toss them aside. After about four seconds of speedy scanning, they both look up at each other with wide eyes. Lance looks like he’s biting back a grin.

“Yes?” He asks Keith, in a quick, rushed breath.

Keith grins so hard his face actually hurts. He nods.

“Ah! Yes! We got in, we got in!” Lance tackles him into a hug, which is something that doesn’t happen very often, and Keith chuckles into his shoulder, feeling overwhelmed with relief.

“Mamá!” Lance shout, letting go of Keith and running up the stair to his parent’s room. “Mamá, I got in! I got into Garrison!”

Keith shakes his head, still grinning like a maniac as he reads through the rest of the letter. He doesn’t know what he did right in his life to have this work out. And it’s true that he never cared about where he would end up for college, but being with Lance really, really doesn’t hurt.

Lance comes back downstairs, still buzzing with energy. “We gotta celebrate, man! It’s a Friday! Is there a party or something we can go to?”

Keith shrugs. “I heard someone talking about a party at Mary’s. You know, that girl with the red hair?”

“Oh, yeah! You think we can sneak in?”

“Worth a try.” Keith says, smiling.

“Sweet! Oh man, this is awesome! We’re going to college!” Lance jumps up and down excitedly, dancing around the kitchen. Keith lets out a full-blown laugh at the sight of it, feeling on top of the world. High school is over. It’s finally over. He’s dizzy with happiness.

xxx

Mary’s house is way too small to be hosting a party with over a hundred people. The living room is crowded and hot. The air is thick and smells like sweat and beer. Keith is excited, though. He is determined to have a good time tonight. Things are looking up and after a shitty year, he really just wants to do one thing; celebrate. He stays close to Lance as they weave through the crowd in the living room and make it to the kitchen, where there are bottle of vodka and tequila covering the countertop. Lance grins excitedly at him. Keith has never drank anything before, so his stomach
twists nervously as Lance pours the clear liquid into two shot glasses. It smells like nail polish remover. Keith’s nose wrinkles as he brings the glass closer to his face.

Lance looks at him encouragingly, with a soft smile, and raises his glass. “To college.” He says happily. Keith clinks their glasses together.

“To college.” He says back.

The shot burns as it goes down. It tastes like shit. Keith coughs a couple times and Lance laughs at him.

“Charming.” He says. Keith slaps his cheek lightly.

Almost immediately, Keith feels the warmth from the shot spreading through his body. Lance is already pouring another one.

“How many are we having?” He asks innocently.

“As many as it takes, Snickers!” Lance exclaims dramatically, raising a glass to Keith. “As many as it takes!”

Keith giggles, picking up the shot glass and throwing it back. It feels rebellious. Far more rebellious than he’s ever been in his life. The second shot burns less than the first. It makes him feel even warmer.

Laughing maniacally, Lance starts pouring another.

Five shots later, Keith can feel the drunk coming on. He feels weightless. The walls are moving slightly, back and forth. Every time Lance says something, he feels like laughing. Lance has a flush in his face and a wide grin, shouting things to Keith that he doesn’t really understand but laughs anyway. There is a comfortable heat in his body, making him feel like he wants to sleep. It makes him feel like he wants to curl around something. He feels like he’s sitting by a fire. His words are lazy and slurred. He has been smiling for so long that he thinks his face is permanently stuck like that.

He doesn’t know quite how long they’ve been here. It feels like hours that they’ve just been stumbling around drunkenly and talking to random people. Keith clings to Lance’s shirt and he doesn’t really know why. It feels like a reflex that seems natural to him, even if it isn’t. His drunk fingers like the comforting feeling of the heat radiating through Lance’s clothing.

Lance isn’t as far gone as he is. Keith can tell. Lance has had more experience with alcohol, after all. Keith knows how stupid he sounds when he talks but he can’t seem to do anything to change it. The words tumble out of his mouth and they make no sense. Lance laughs into his ear, never leaving his side.

They both lean against the far wall in the living room. The lights are dim and Keith doesn’t know what’s going on, so he keeps Lance’s shirt bunched up in his fist. Lance turns around to face him, leaning in so that he can hear.

“Erica is here.” Lance says, voice dull. Keith rolls his eyes.
“That bitch. I hope she didn’t get into college.” He spits. Lance snorts a surprised laugh.

“Damn, Snickers! That’s cold.”

“What? She was mean to you! Fuck that.”

Lance bites his lip, holding in a laugh. “Oh my god, you are so drunk.”

“I wanna give ‘er a piece of my mind.” Keith says. And he thinks it’ the greatest idea ever, because *fuck* that girl. But Lance grabs his forearm as he’s standing up.

“Woah there tiger, hold up.” Lance says through a laugh. “I don’t think you should be giving anyone a piece of anything right now.” Lance’s words are a little slurred. Keith can tell the alcohol is getting to him too.

Suddenly, Lance’s face turns sour, eyes trained over Keith’s shoulder. Keith thinks he’s about to barf for a second, and then when it doesn’t happen, he raises an eyebrow at him. Then there is a finger tapping on the base of his neck. Keith turns his head to the side as the person who tapped him emerges.

Scott Marren stands in front of Keith and Lance, arms crossed over his chest, clearly drunk and glaring angrily. Keith, also very clearly drunk, looks at him with wide eyes, remembering the last time they were together. He remembers the musky, pine smell of Scott’s sweater. The rough feel of his lips. Something twists deep within his gut.

“Hey.” Scott says, and he doesn’t sound happy. He completely ignores Lance, eyes focused solely on Keith. “Hey. Pretty boy. The *fuck* did you do?”

Keith scowls. “What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know, you tell me!” Scott shoves into Keith’s space, speaking angrily through gritted teeth. “You tell anyone what happened between us? *Huh*? Because I don’t think it’s a fucking *coincidence* that the minute your ass--” He shoves Keith shoulders. “-- leaves my house, I hear a rumor going around that I’m *gay*.”

He feels Lance freeze up next to him. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. The cat is out of the bag now. Anger pools in his stomach, mixing with the alcohol and clouding his judgement. There are two ways to go about this. Scott’s face is swimming in his drunk vision and his heart is beating furiously in his ears so he picks the worst one, obviously.

“You mean, you’re *not* gay?” He asks loudly.

Scott scowls at him. “Shut your mouth.” He growls.

“Sorry,” Keith stands up taller, raising his voice even more. “Sorry I *misunderstood*. Usually when people stick their tongue down your throat, it means they find you attractive. And you did that to *me*, remember?”

The whole room starts to quiet down slightly. Clearly Keith has had no trouble drawing attention to himself. Scott looks around, fuming, and then his angry gaze falls back on Keith.

“That *never* happened!” He shouts.

“Oh, it didn’t?” Keith yells, leaning aggressively into Scott’s personal space. All logical reason has been thrown out the window. Keith knows, deep down, that he should stop talking. But holy *shit*,
he’s drunk. He’s drunk, and hurt, and pissed off. So he lets the words come crashing out of his mouth. “Well thank god for that. Was th’ worst hookup I’ve ever had, anyway! Hopefully I can forget about your dick as quickly as you have!”

There is a collective gasp across the room, more pleasantly surprised than shocked. Scott grabs Keith by the collar. “Watch your mouth!” He yells, furious.

“Woah, hey!” Lance says angrily, trying to intervene, but one of Scott’s friends pushes him out of the way.

“Shut the fuck up. You were begging for it.” Scott spits in Keith face. “Couldn’t keep your hands off of me. You’re the slut, not me!”

Keith smirks through his anger. “Maybe.” He says. “But that means you admit that it happened.” He leans in impossibly closer. “And you liked it.”

Everyone in the room shouts a loud, drunken “OOOOOH” as Keith smirks even further. He doesn't have much time to revel in his drunken victory before Scott is landing a punch clean across his jaw.

Keith is so drunk that it actually doesn’t hurt that much. He hears Lance shriek and somehow ends up on the floor, looking at the ceiling as it spins.

“Fuck you, Kogane.” Scott says from somewhere above him. Keith actually grins at the words, feeling oddly triumphant that Scott admitted to knowing his name. Wow, this alcohol stuff is great. He almost feels like laughing. His eyes flutter shut. Actually, sleeping sounds nice.

“Keith? Keith! Snickers!” Lance is shaking him awake from somewhere far away. Keith cracks an eye open and sees Lance’s face, hurt and worried.

Fuck. Right. Lance.

He sits up groggily and grabs Lance’s hand, standing up all the way. “Outside.” He grumbles drunkenly, tugging Lance behind him.

They manage to find the screen door that leads to the backyard. There is a couple making out on the deck. Keith pulls Lance further away from them, closer to the forest. The grass is cold and wet and he plops down onto it. He feels it soaking through his pants. Lance sits next to him and Keith glances over at him, feeling ashamed. Lance sighs angrily. It’s so cold that Keith can see his breath, foggy against the pitch black sky.

“The fuck, Keith?” Lance asks. It sounds hurt. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

Keith swallows hard, suddenly feeling a little nauseous. “I…”

“You hooked up with Scott?” Lance shrieks. “When the fuck did that happen? How did that happen? What were you thinking?” He repeats, this time with a gaze that is piercing into him.

Keith scowls. “I really don’t want to talk about it.”

“I mean, when did you even have time to talk to him?” Lance asks, voice getting higher pitched with every word.

Keith sighs. He knows Lance. He knows this will never be resolved if he doesn’t provide an explanation. And he really, really wants it to be resolved. “I…joined prom committee.”
Lance just stares at him. “You what?” He runs his hands down his face, making a choked noise. “What? How could you not tell me?”

“It wasn’t any of your business.” Keith says, but it’s a weak response. He knows it is.

“Um, excuse me? You just got punched in the face! Pretty sure that makes it my business!”

“What? How?”

“Because I care about you, you dumbass!”

This makes Keith pause. His anger dissipates in a second. Lance is looking at him with a pained expression, like admitting that was hard for him. Keith takes a deep, shaky breath, lowering his voice so that it comes out less icy. “Look, I had a crush and it was driving me crazy, okay? I know you told me he was bad news. And you were right. But I just, really liked him. And I was desperate… and honestly really really horny,” Wow, how has Keith not even sobered up a little bit? The grass is still swirling around him in dizzying circles, “and he was nice to me. It was stupid, okay? I agree, it was stupid. I’m already mad enough at myself.”

Lance opens his mouth to say something but Keith’s word vomit continues, cutting him off.

“But the only person I’ve ever kissed is you, Lance. And we’re graduating! Like, I should have more experience, right? Whatever. Can we please forget about this?”

Lance blinks at him, looking mildly shocked. “I think...that’s the first time I’ve ever heard you say the word ‘horny’.” He says.

Keith sits frozen as his drunk mind processes the words. Then he bursts out laughing, hiding his face in his hands. The cold air feels good on his hot skin. He hears Lance starting to laugh too. “Like literally, ever. You’ve never said that word out loud before.”

Now they are both laughing. Keith’s butt is soaked, all the way down to his underwear. It’s freezing out. His jaw is starting to throb. He doesn’t care. Because he’s going to college. With his best friend. And he was determined to have a good time tonight. Guess what? The night isn’t over.

They both quiet down and Lance puts a warm hand on his shoulder. “You’re an idiot, Snickers.” He says fondly. “But...It’s not like the people I hook up with are much better so…” He shrugs. “Welcome to hell.”

Keith giggles at that, suddenly remembering Erica and her stupid, annoying face. Well, he feels much stronger than that, but he’s too drunk to try and think of an eloquent description for his anger. He pitches forward and wraps Lance up in a hug, because fuck anyone who ever made Lance sad.

“You deserve…” Pause. Try again. “You deserve to be happy.” Keith mumbles sloppily into Lance’s shirt. Lance laughs loudly, wrapping his arms around Keith’s middle.

“Oh my god, I’m never letting you drink again. You’re a hot mess.”

Keith laughs happily, pulling away and flopping backwards onto the grass. He stares up at the sky. Lance is next to him in a second.

They stay silent for a while, just laying there. Keith finally feels a little more grounded. The sky is only moving a little bit. He closes his eyes. He can hear Lance breathing steadily next to him. The sound calms him down even more.
“College.” Lance finally says, after a very long silence.

Keith swallows. “Yeah...college.”

xxx

*Present Day*

Keith may or may not be hiding for his life in the Frozen Foods section at the supermarket. It’s not that he’s *avoiding* Lance, necessarily. He just thinks that maybe it would be better if he got some space. To think of a game plan. A strategy, for how the fuck he’s going to make it out of this crush alive. It’s just a crush, right? It should’ve been over weeks ago. Why is it *taking* so long?

He picks up a bag of frozen chicken nuggets and just stares at it, mind elsewhere. Kevin hasn’t texted him back yet. He sighs. Maybe he should actually try to get to know Kevin. Maybe he’ll be *incredible*, just like *Olivia*.

Not that Keith is bitter, or anything.

“Keith?”

Keith whirls around, the bag of chicken nuggets still in his hands, and sees none other than fucking *Hunk Garrett* standing in front of him. He’s got a basket in one hand filled with expensive ingredients Keith doesn’t recognize.

Keith suddenly feels the urge to scream, which he hasn’t felt in many, many years. How does this shit happen to him? It’s not like he thought he’d never run into Hunk again, but he’s not *ready*! He doesn’t have a fucking *strategy*!

Keith must be staring at him like a madman, because Hunk raises a scared eyebrow at him, very confused. “Hey, man. You alright?”

“Oh, uh, yeah. Yeah, I’m fine. Fancy meeting you here.” Keith looks around frantically, praying that Hunk goes away before Lance shows up.

“Yeah, you too. Those are really good.”

“What are?”

“The nuggets? The ones you’re holding? They’re really good. They’ve got oregano in the crust. Incredible flavor.”

Keith looks back down at the nuggets. God, Hunk is such a good guy. He should really tell him the truth before things get out of hand. “Oh, yeah. I’ve been wanting to try them.” He tries a tentative smile, looking around again. Then he takes a few steps towards Hunk, lowering his voice. “Listen, Hunk, there’s something I need to--”

“Oh, man, it’s *Hunk*! Keith, you didn’t tell me you found Hunk!” Lance’s voice booms from behind them. Keith’s stomach falls to his feet. Fuck. Where the hell did he come from? Keith scanned the perimeter fifty times.
Lance is looking back and forth between Keith and Hunk like he’s just found buried treasure. “Watcha guys talkin’ about?” He asks, giving Keith a suggestive look. Keith fights the urge to roll his eyes. Here we go. It’s only going downhill from here. Lance has the subtlety of a nuclear bomb.

“Nuggets.” Hunk says happily. “The one’s Keith are holding are the best. I used to get them all the time in college.”

“Oh, really?” Lance asks. “Keith loves nuggets. Like, he ate them all the time in college too. Looks like you guys have that in common!”

Keith groans inwardly. Hunk chuckles. “Really?”

“Yeah! So Hunk, what brings you here?”

“Cooking dinner for Pidge tonight. She’s got an exam tomorrow and she’s flipping out so I thought she’d appreciate a home cooked meal.”

“That’s really sweet of you.” Lance says.

Hunk shrugs. “You know I love cooking for company. Do you want to come along? I’ve got enough food.”

Lance looks at Keith and his eyes scream “oh my god, now’s your chance!” to which Keith raises an eyebrow at him, pretending not to understand. Because there’s no way he’s going to let this happen. Something’s gotta give. He shrugs, turning to Hunk. “I don’t think--”

“I can’t make it.” Lance cuts him off, rather dramatically. “But Keith has been talking about your cooking all week! You should go, Keith!” Lance says, grabbing Keith’s shoulder and shaking him lightly.

Keith takes a deep breath and fights the urge to slap Lance across the face. Hunk is looking at them both like they are insane.

“Uh, okay. Cool. It’s going to be ready at like nine thirty. That okay?”

“Do you need help cooking? Keith, you can help him cook!”

Keith actually rolls his eyes at this. Hunk chuckles a little nervously. “Uh, no I don’t need help. I’m okay. But Keith, I’ll see you at nine thirty?”

“Yeah, sure. Thanks.” Keith says, sounding a little more irritated than he wanted to.

Hunk smiles kindly at him and walks away. Keith waits until he’s out of sight before turning on Lance.

“Are you insane?”

“I just got you a date!” Lance shriek-whispers. “You should be thanking me!”

“Pidge is going to be there too. It’s not a date.” Keith says, crossing his arms over his chest. “God that was embarrassing! He thinks you’re crazy.”

“A small price to pay to help my best friend find love!” Lance says, grinning. “Man, I’m good.”

“You’re really not.” Keith deadpans.
“You’ll regret saying that when you’re making out with Hunk tonight!”

“Oh my god shut up.” Keith scolds, slapping a hand onto Lance’s mouth and scanning their surroundings for any sign of Hunk. “Have you no shame?”

“Nope.” Lance muffles into his hand, grinning. “We gotta get you dressed! You gotta look spiffy as hell! I have an idea.”

Keith sighs defeatedly, dropping his hand. Lance’s smile, although annoying as hell and almost colorless under the bright, fluorescent, supermarket lights, is still as beautiful as ever. Keith’s heart clenches. “I hate you.” He says. And he really does mean it, even if the reason is I hate how beautiful you are.

Asshole.

xxx

“This is the one.” Lance says, holding up a crisp, pink button down shirt. “This is perfect.” He looks down at Keith, who is laying face-first on his bed. “Come on, Snickers. Pay attention! This is important! You’ve got a date with you crush tonight!”

Keith groans and rolls over, eyeing the shirt with an unamused expression. “Lance, you’ve gotta be fucking kidding me.”

Lance frowns. “What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s pink.” Keith says curtly. “How long have you known me? What am I, Pepto Bismol?”

Lance chuckles at Keith’s serious expression. This boy seriously needs to chill. “But it’d look so good on you! Really. Just try it?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Fine, fine. Whatever.” Lance rolls his eyes. He knew Keith wouldn’t try it. But Keith has been acting so strange recently that he thought he’d give it a try anyway. He sighs and cards through the shirts in his closet. His eyes fall on a deep maroon button down.

“Ah-hah!” He shoves the shirt into Keith’s face. “This is the one! It’s perfect! Because it’s all red which is super romantic but then it’s dark, because it’s you.”

“I resent that.”

“Just try it.” Lance pouts. “Please?”

Keith studies him for a moment. His face softens slightly and he sighs, a blush coloring his cheeks. Lance takes note of that.

“Fine. Give me the damn shirt.” He grabs it out of Lance’s hands and starts changing. He pulls his black t-shirt over his head and Lance sees a glimpse of the small, barely-there tattoo on the back of Keith’s neck form their freshman year of college. His hair is long enough to cover it now, but the
shirt ruffles it just enough for Lance to see the corner peeking out. It’s a simple tattoo. Just small, black, blocky print. It says, “Patience Yields Focus”, which is something that Shiro used to say to Keith all the time as he was growing up, especially when his god-awful temper started to surface. The whole thing can’t be bigger than a quarter. Lance has a sneaking suspicion that Keith has forgotten that tattoo is there, what with it always being behind him.

“I remember when you got that.” Lance says, pointing to Keith’s neck. Keith tilts his head to the side questioningly. “Your tattoo. On your neck. I was there when you got it, remember?”

Keith’s hand automatically goes to cup the back of his neck. “Oh. Right. I seriously forgot that was there.” Keith says, chuckling a little. The blush on his face deepens. Lance purses his lips, skeptically.

“Did your parents ever find out about it?”

“Well, Shiro obviously told them when he found out.” Keith says, rolling his eyes and fiddling with the shirt in his hands. “But they were surprisingly okay with it.”

Lance gets up and starts walking towards Keith. “Can I see it?” He asks.

Keith turns around and looks at him with a petrified expression. The red shirt is clasped tightly in his hands. “What?”


Keith blinks at him. “Uh...right. Sure.” He turns around and uses one hand to lift the hair at the nape of his neck. Lance leans in and looks at the blocky lettering. Keith was a little shorter-- less muscular, too-- when he got this. No that Keith has filled out a little more, the tattoo looks even smaller.

Lance reaches out and runs a finger over the ink. Keith twitches at the contact. “Remember when the swelling wouldn’t go down? You thought you were dying.” He reminisces with a smile, running the pad of his thumb over the flat ink again.

Keith just hums lowly, but doesn’t say anything. His shoulders are tense. His skin is burning hot. Why is Keith’s skin always burning hot these days?

Keith suddenly jerks away from his touch. “You’re tickling me.” He says. It sounds panicked.

“Oh. Sorry.” Lance responds, not really knowing what else to say. “You sure you don’t have a fever or something? You always hide it when you’re sick. Drives me crazy.”

“I’m fine. Just...nervous to go to Hunk’s.” He makes a sour face, shrugging the red shirt onto his shoulders.

“Oh, man. Don’t be! It’ll be great.” Keith finishes buttoning the top button and then smooths his hands down his torso, pressing the shirt close to his skin.

“Well?” He asks. “How does it look?”

Lance trails his eyes down, and then up again. Keith really cleans up nice. Like, really nice. Lance briefly wonders why Keith doesn’t dress like this more often. He grins. “You look amazing, Snickers. He won’t be able to resist you.”

“How exciting.” Keith says flatly. “Can I go now?”

Well?" He asks. "How does it look?"
“Cologne!” Lance says, snapping his fingers. “Don’t forget cologne. Here, I have a really good one. Let me get it for you.” He scurries into the bathroom and grabs his favorite cologne, before running back into his room and seeing Keith laying facedown on the bed again.

“Hey! What gives? Come on, get excited! This is my favorite cologne. I have been told on multiple occasions that it makes me *irresistible*.” He smirks at Keith, who lifts his head and gives him a death glare. He reaches forward and sprays a puff of the cologne in Keith’s general direction. Keith sniffs, and then sits up quickly. There is a pained expression on his face, but his eyes are soft when they meet Lance’s.

“It smells like cupcakes.” He says quietly.

“Yeah! It’s my favorite. It’s technically vanilla, but yeah. Anyway. You’re finally ready!”

Keith takes a deep, long breath and lifts himself off of the bed. “Well...off I go then.” He says, sounding unsure of himself.

Lance is so excited for him that he can’t stop grinning, even after the door has shut behind him.

xxx

Keith smells like Lance, and it’s making him crazy. Every time he moves, he gets a whiff of it. How is this fair? First, Lance runs his stupid, pretty fingers all over the most sensitive part of Keith’s neck and then he covers him in his smell? It’s like Lance is actively trying to torture him and he doesn’t even realize it. Keith debates just walking into Hunk’s apartment shirtless to try and get the smell off of him. He doesn’t do that, of course.

He knocks softly on Hunk’s door, praying that this was all a big mistake and he can just go home. All his life, he’s maintained a certain composure around other people. Strong, confident, collected.

But now he feels like his composure is crumbling a little more every single day. He is no longer calm and collected. He finds himself second guessing his decisions more often than not, which he has never, ever done before. And now just going to a simple dinner is making him want to hide underneath his bed. He sighs, knocking again.

Hunk answers almost immediately this time, grinning brightly at him. “Keith! Hey man, you look great! Come on in.”

Keith smiles at him and walks into the living room, sitting at the table where a very nervous Pidge is stationed. Her hair is messy and her glasses are slightly crooked. She is mumbling incoherently to herself as her worried eyes scan the textbook pages.

“Hello.” Keith says, snapping her out of her trance. Her head jerks upwards.

“Oh. Hi, Keith.” She says, sounding miserable. “You eating dinner with us?”

“Yeah.” He leans over. “What’s the test on?”

“Thermal Physics.” She practically groans it, covering her face with her hands and letting her head fall onto the table. “It was fun twelve hours ago. Now it’s hell.”
Keith smiles slightly. “Why don’t you take a break? Eat with us. I’m sure Hunk is making something really good.”

She looks at him with crazy eyes. “A break? Are you insane? My exam is in—” She looks at her watch, “—Thirteen hours! Holy shit! It’s not enough time!”

“Pidge, for the love of god.” Hunk says, entering the room and practically pushing the textbook off the table. “You’ve been studying for eight days straight. Have a meal, okay?” In the place of the textbook, he puts down a bowl of roasted potatoes. Pidge stares blankly at them. Keith can’t help but chuckle.

“I’m sure you’ll be fine.” He says. “I’m gonna go help Hunk in the kitchen.” He stands up and makes his way over to the kitchen, where he sees Hunk stirring something on the stovetop, humming softly to himself. Keith feels nervous, because he’s going to have to say something soon, before things get too weird. But telling him might also make things weird. It’s just...a weird, weird situation.

“Hey, Hunk.” He says, nervously stuffing his hands into his pockets.

“Oh! Hey, Keith. You really don’t have to help me, it’s okay.”

“No I know. I just…” He sighs. How the hell is he going to say this? “I just wanted to talk to you about something.”

Hunk chuckles. “Is this about what happened at the supermarket today? Because I feel like that was awkward. Wasn’t it?”

“Yeah…look. It’s about Lance.”

Hunk turns his head towards Keith, looking very interested. He shuts the fire off of the stove. “Yeah, Lance was acting super strange, right? I mean I’ve only known you guys for a couple of months but that…didn’t seem normal.”

Keith debates telling another lie. Saying something crazy like “lance is hopelessly in love with you” or “Lance is adopted” which is completely untrue and irrelevant to everything. He settles on the truth.

“Yeah, he was acting weird. It’s because…I might’ve told him a lie that…involves you.” He swallows hard, watching Hunk’s face twists into more confusion.

“Me? What about me?”

Is Keith really going to confess this to another person? Someone other than Shiro?

Hunk looks lost. Keith bites his lip. Hunk deserves to know the truth.

“So you know how I, like, pretty much grew up with Lance, right?” He asks. Hunk nods. “Well, recently I’ve sort of discovered that I…” Hunk’s expression is open. He waits patiently. Keith fiddles with the inside of his pocket. Just say it. “I might have... feelings for him.” He says uncomfortably. Both of Hunk’s eyebrows shoot up.

“Oh?”

“Yeah. And I know this is a little awkward because we’re like, not that close but, uh...Lance was pushing me. Like, asking me to tell him who I liked, like a fucking twelve year old. He wouldn’t let it go. And I freaked out and said…” Keith sighs. “...you.”
To Keith’s surprise, Hunk actually grins at this. “Wow.” he says.

“I’m really sorry. We were going to your restaurant for dinner and it was the first thing I could think of, and I’m usually good at thinking on my feet but, like, having feelings for your best friend makes it hard to do anything logically and I just--”


Keith takes a deep breath, eyes trained on the floor.

“I’m not mad at you, jeez, what kind of monster do you think I am?”

Keith looks up. “Really?”

“Nah, man. Sounds like you’ve been beating yourself up enough for the both of us.” He chuckles, running a hand through his hair. Keith blinks at him.

“I have been.” He says. Pidge groans miserably from the other room. Hunk laughs.

“I think Pidge is going to die if we don’t go sit with ther, but...this conversation isn’t over.” He says, pointing squarely at Keith’s face.

Keith swallows. “W-what’s left to say?” He asks, sounding exhausted. "I told you the truth. Now we just have to find some way to pretend this didn't happen."

Hunk wraps two rags around the hot handles of the pot and hoists it off of the stovetop. "I think we can do more than that." He says. “Clearly you and Lance care about each other. I haven’t even known you for a year and I can see it.” Hunk blows some crumbs off of the lid of the pot. “It’s in the way you look at each other. Sickeningly obvious.”

Keith flushes furiously, holding a hand out to help Hunk carry the food. “I guess.”

“And it looks like you’ve noticed your feelings. Which is awesome. Good on you.”

“...Sure.” Keith says, un convinced. “But Lance doesn’t feel the same way.”

They make their way to the table and Hunk continues talking, slamming the pot onto the tablecloth. “Whatever you say.” He says. “But by involving me, you have officially gotten me invested in this, so what’s about to happen is mostly your fault.”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “What is my fault?”

Hunk smiles warmly. “ Keith, if Lance truly believes that you’ve got a thing for me, then...we might have an advantage.” He takes off his oven mitts and hangs them neatly on the small, silver hook next to the table.

Keith huffs incredulously. "Excuse me?"

“That’s right. We’re going to make him notice.”

Chapter End Notes
thanks again, lovelies!
Chapter Summary

1) College angst version 1
2) thirsty keef
3) Hunk again
4) Lance is maybe, sort of, possibly, in the tiniest way, subconsciously, the smallest bit, kind of considering. maybe
5) classic "spots that turn me on" scene that i put in every fanfic to dramatically increase sexual tension

Chapter Notes

ive been messing around with with chapter for freaking ever and its driving me nuts so im just going to post it cgdsiuvcwovbwsna

i just gotta say something to y'all. YOU ARE AMAZING...seriously. the comments that I have been getting on here and on tumblr have been insanely sweet, genuine, and wonderful. I have been incredibly busy and there was, for some reason, and overwhelming increase in comments on the last chapter and I didn't get to replying to them. I feel horrible because I usually reply to all of them before posting a new chapter but It would've taken me days and I didn't want to wait that long to update if I already had the chapter written!

I will probably go through and reply to your comments throughout the next couple of weeks. Just know that I have read every single one and love you all so dearly! they make my day--every time i get an email that someone commented it seriously makes me grin like a moron. i just love you guys. thanks for sticking around my craziness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Freshman Year (College)**

“Hello? Snickers?” Lance asks excitedly over the phone. He’s sprinting down the stairs of his dorm building, excitement almost overflowing out of his chest.

“Lance, where are you?” Keith answers, sounding just about as excited as Keith can sound. “I’m standing outside of Brady Hall.”

“I’m coming! Just give me like two minutes. Is Brady Hall the one next to the giant statue of that fat guy?”

Keith chuckles. “You mean the headmaster’s office? Yes. It’s got ivy growing up the side.”
“Cool cool!” Lance’s feet are carrying him so fast he almost can’t keep up with them. “I’ll be there soon.” Move-in day has been incredibly exciting. Lance brought way too much stuff for his tiny dorm room, which he was kind of expecting. He ended up having to store some of it away; even the floor length mirror with the neon blue frame, which he was super excited about. But it doesn’t matter! Because he’s officially a college student. No parents, no rules, no high school. And now he’s buzzing with excitement because Keith is here; and they haven’t seen each other all summer.

After finding out that they both made it into Garrison, Lance and Keith had a long discussion about being roommates. They both agreed that maybe, for the first year of college, they should branch out and try to meet new people. Also, Lance’s older sister always advised him to never live with his friends, because he’ll end up “wanting to slit their throats” by the end of the year. So Lance and Keith had both agreed to be put with a random roommate.

Keith’s parents then proceeded to break the news that the whole family was going to be spending the summer with Keith’s aunt, who has a condo in Florida. They wanted to spend quality time together before Keith went off to college. It was a cute notion, really. But after three months without seeing Keith, Lance misses him more than ever. He sees a brick wall covered in ivy and feels the grin spreading across his face.

Keith is standing at the front door of the dorm building. He’s wearing his classic black v-neck and jeans. He still has his phone pressed to his ear and he’s scowling into the sunlight, looking utterly confused. His hair is a little shorter than it was when he left. Probably freshly cut. He’s got a light sunburn on his cheeks. When he sees Lance running towards him, his face melts into a grin.

“Snickers!” Lance shouts, tackling him, quite ungracefully, into a dangerously tight embrace. “Oh my god I missed you!”

Keith giggles into his chest. “Hey, Lance.”

“Never go to Florida again.”

Keith hugs back. “I’m not planning on it, I don’t think.”

“Good.” Lance squeezes tightly before letting go. “Look at you! New haircut?”

Keith is still grinning. He lifts a hand to his eyes to block out a bit of the sunlight. “Yeah. My mom said that my mullet was...in bad taste.”

“Sounds like your mom.” Lance says fondly.

“Yeah.” Keith laughs, taking a step back and looking at Lance. “Of course I sit on a beach for three months and you somehow manage to get a better tan than me.” He scoffs. “I’m just pink.”

Lance shrugs. “Yard work with my dad. You know how it is.” Keith smiles at him, rolling his eyes. Lance jumps happily. “Ah! I can’t believe you’re here!” He exclaims. “Have you walked around campus yet? We gotta go try the cafeteria.”

Keith bites his lip, looking up at the building and moving towards the door. “Okay, I just have to get my wallet. Wanna come see my room?”

“That depends. Is it more or less boring than your room at home?”

Keith stops walking and turns around, frowning. “I can’t believe I missed you.”

Lance gasps. “You missed me? Awwwww--!”
“Oh my god, shut up.” Keith huffs, turning on his heel and walking up the stairs. Lance follows him, giggling happily into his hand.

xxx

“What is this?” Keith asks, horrified. He pokes the concoction in his plate and grease comes out of the other side. “I thought the label said ravioli.” His face scrunches up in pure disgust. He attempts to push a piece of “ravioli” to the side of his plate but it’s completely stuck. “Is this seriously what we have to eat for the next year?”

Lance stares down at his less than impressive piece of pepperoni pizza. The cheese is more orange and brown than white. He leans over and sniffs it. “Ugh. It smells like bowling-alley pizza that was left out too long.”

They eventually had made their way to the campus cafeteria. It smelled like feet when they walked in and was completely packed with other freshman students. Lance and Keith had given each other a hesitant look, before somehow pushing past the large groups of people, finding something to eat, and squeezing in between two long tables in an attempt to sit comfortably. Lance can see the complete distaste in Keith’s expression. He really, really doesn’t want to be here. Lance is a little disappointed too. He really thought that the cafeteria in college would be different than the one in high school. It turns out that having more food options doesn’t make the food less shitty.

Keith hesitantly lifts a bite to his mouth. He chews for exactly six seconds before he’s spitting into a napkin. “Oh shit, that was horrible.” He says, distraught. “I’d rather eat toilet paper.”

Lance nods, looking at his pizza apprehensively. “Can we get out of here, please?”

“Do you know any good food places around?”

Lance shrugs. “No. I don’t think there’s anything around here. We’re literally in the middle of nowhere. Oh! But I saw a gas station a few miles out.”

Keith sighs, pushing his plate away from him. “We don’t have a car.”

“We can walk, it’s pretty close.”

Keith nods slowly. “Yeah… let’s do that.”

They stare at their food for one more minute before finally giving up, pushing themselves out of their cramped table and booking it out of the cafeteria.

The walk only ends up being about twenty minutes. Keith tells him about how boring it was down in Florida. But he talks about his family like he already misses them. Lance thinks it’s sweet. Keith never really admits that his family is a big part of his life. He’s not open about it like Lance is. But Lance has learned to be able to read the signs; the small twitch on the corner of his lips when he talks about fishing with his dad, the way he ducks his head when he talks about food his mom makes.

Lance talks about his summer, working with his dad for pocket change. He tells Keith about his summer fling; a girl named Hannah who ended up having a boyfriend he didn’t know about. He ranted about it for a bit because of course, like always, Lance thought they had something special and like always, he was wrong.
When they get to the gas station they are sweaty and exhausted. But Keith jumps excitedly when he sees the hot foods section. “They have pizza! And wings!”

Lance laughs. “Yeah but don’t get too excited. It’s gas station food.”

“Compared to what I just put into my mouth? This’ll be great.” Keith grabs a takeout container and starts putting heaps of trashy, greasy food into it. “Isn’t this what college is all about, anyway?”

“I guess so.” Lance says with a smile, joining Keith at the counter. “We’re going to get so fat here.”

“Maybe we should take up running.” Keith suggests. They both look at each other for a moment before dissolving into giggles.

“Maybe not.” Lance says.

After they pay, they take their food outside. It’s a nice day. A little hot, but mostly really nice. There aren’t any picnic tables or anything, which Lance thinks is simply absurd, so they settle down on the edge of the dirty sidewalk, watching the cars drive by.

Keith’s face is already covered in barbecue sauce. Lance looks at him in utter shock as he tosses a clean wing bone into the empty compartment of his container.

“What? I was starving.” He says defensively.

Lance laughs again, which he feels like he’s been doing a lot today. He can’t help it. He’s just really happy to see Keith again. “You’re an animal.”

Keith shoves him. “Leave me alone.” He says through a mouthful of food.

They spend a few minutes watching the road, too busy chewing to say anything. Lance loves the feeling of the sun on his face. The pizza tastes so good, despite the fact that it’s practically dripping in grease.

“What’s your first class on Monday?” Keith muffles around a wing.

“Finance. At eight AM.”

“Gross.”

“And then freshman writing seminar at three.”

“That’s worse.”

“What about you?”

Keith licks some sauce off of his finger. “Behavioral Science at ten thirty.” He says. “I think we might have writing seminar together though.”

“Really?”

“Not sure. I have to check.”

“Cool.”

Lance goes to work on the taquitos, humming happily when he takes the first bite. Wow, this is good shit. He may die twenty years earlier than he should, but it’s almost worth it. He feels Keith looking
at him and turns, raising an eyebrow. “What is it?”

“Nothing.” Keith says, shaking his head and biting into his pizza. “Just good to see you again.”

Lance smiles. “Yeah, you too.” He raises a taquito to Keith, in the form of a toast. “To freshman year?”

Keith grins, tapping the taquito with his pizza. “To freshman year.”

xxx

Present Day

“What are you getting so dressed up for?” Keith asks. “It’s just Shiro and Allura.”

“It’s a client meeting, Snickers. I have to look professional.”

With just two weeks left before the wedding, Lance has been working like a dog to get everything set up. Keith is convinced he’s only gotten twelve hours of sleep over the course of the past week. But that doesn’t stop Lance from still looking his absolute best at any given moment in time. Keith sighs.

“They’re not going to care what you wear.”

Lance shrugs. “I have to make them think I’ve got everything under control.”

“But you do.”

Lance has an uneasy face on. “I know but... I don’t know. Maybe I don’t.”

“You do.” Keith walks up behind Lance, who is still staring worriedly into the mirror. He tries his hardest to ignore the close fit of Lance’s suit. How the sky blue tie brings out his eyes. “And even if you don’t, which I highly doubt, Shiro and Allura will help you. You know they will.”

Lance lets out a long, tired breath, eyes trained on Keith's face in the mirror. “Yeah. I guess you’re right.”

Keith moves out of the way. “Of course I am. So, let’s go?”

Lance takes a short, nervous breath. “Yeah. Let’s go.”

x

Shiro and Allura look exhausted, but happy to see them. Allura greets Lance with a desperate, relieved hug, as if to say “thank god you’re here we have no idea what we’re doing”. Even though Allura technically works at an event planning company, she is more the manager than an event
planner. She only really knows the basics. Keith smiles sympathetically at Shiro, who looks like he’s about to topple over in five seconds. Keith had no idea planning a wedding was so stressful. How does Lance keep it together? He does it for a living.

“Lance, it’s so good to see you.” Shiro says. “Allura’s parents have been freaking out and we don’t have any answers for them.” He pauses. “Also, it’s just good to see you. In general.”

“My father desperately wants to be involved.” Allura says with a tired smile. “He’s been begging for the details.”

Lance smiles confidently. “Oh man, no worries. Let’s just sit down and lay this all out, yeah?” He holds up a giant, thick white binder. “I’ve got it all in this baby.”

“Wonderful!” Allura claps happily. “I’ve made us some tea. And cookies.”

Keith and Lance exchange a look.

“The cookies are from Wal-Mart, don’t worry.” Shiro reassures them. Allura may be wonderful at being a manager, but she’s awful in the kitchen. Last time she tried to make cookies, they all ended up with food poisoning.

Laughing, they make their way to the dining room table. Lance slams the binder dramatically onto the table. They all take their seats around it. Keith grabs a cookie and stuffs it in his mouth. He’s just here as a spectator, anyway.

“Okay, so it took a while but I finally managed to get in touch with the bouquet designer who did the wedding Allura liked. Remember, the one in the magazine?”

Allura gasps. “Really?”

“Yeah, so I showed him some of my designs and we kind of worked together to come up with this.” He slides the binder over to Shiro and Allura. “These would be lined up along the aisle and these,” he points, “will go around the perimeter of the reception hall.”

“Oh they’re beautiful, Lance!” Allura grins.

Shiro nods. “Really, they are.”

“And since there’s going to be so many flowers, I thought the centerpieces should be different, so I contacted—” Lance keeps talking, on and on. Confidently. Professionally. Beautifully, Keith thinks. He can’t take his eyes off of him. Lance smiles a little as the words come out, like he’s excited to share his work. He gestures animatedly, trying to visually show what the reception hall will look like. Keith gets caught up in the passionate glint in his eye. The small laughs as Shiro and Allura react. The faint blush from his initial nervousness turning into a pleased one. Keith feels a proud warmth fluttering in his stomach. He is struck with the urge to wrap Lance up in his arms. To plant stupid, fluffy kisses into his hair. To say painfully cheesy things that make him hate himself and breathe in the smell of buttercream frosting.

He snaps out of it when he notices Shiro giving him a strange look. Kind of like a warning; you’re being way too obvious right now, Keith.

Jerking his gaze back down to his feet, Keith feels the heat in his cheeks.

“And then I was researching photographers and I compiled a couple good ones for you to choose from.” Lance continues, completely unaware of Keith’s internal struggle. “This guy is from New
York and actually photographed at a couple celebrity weddings. He’s super pricey but I think I know a guy who can get me a discount. This guy is a bit cheaper, and he does a bundle with engagement photos as well. Because you guy haven’t done that yet, which is insane.” Lance adds, sounding mildly irritated. “Oh! And this woman is incredible at editing. She can do those funny pictures where it looks like a t-rex is chasing you. Or something.” Lance giggles lightly. Keith feels like dying. “I might want that for my wedding.” Lance says wistfully.

“That second one with the bundle looks good.” Shiro says. “I think we should really get those engagement photos taken.”

“Cool!” Lance says something down in the binder. “I’ll call him tomorrow. Okay, moving on. In terms of food, we already know that Hunk’s restaurant is catering. But have you been in touch with the manager? Shiro told me he’d call.”

“I did. His name is Coran. I think we have a meeting with him tomorrow.”

“Oh, good.” Lance says, sounding relieved. “Because we need to work out a budget for that.”

“Can I see the cakes?” Allura asks innocently. “Please?”

Lance smiles. “Of course.” He flips through a few pages in the binder. “I worked on these with the cake designer. She’s brilliant, her name is Shay. We exchanged sketches and managed to get a few of these concepts out. The due date to pick one is really soon, though. So…” He pushes the binder towards Shiro and Allura. “Pick away.”

As Shiro and Allura discuss the cake designs, Keith gets up and moves towards the kitchen. He feels like if he stays in one place right now, in such close proximity to Lance, he’ll explode. Ever since talking with Hunk, he’s been extremely paranoid. As more people find out about how he feels, it becomes more and more terrifying. Because if Lance ever finds out…

Keith exhales shortly and messes with some of the cookie crumbs on the counter. He bunches them up into a pile. Then destroys the pile. Then bunches them up again. Over and over and over again. He doesn’t even hear anyone coming into the kitchen, but jumps when he suddenly hears Lance’s voice.

“Oh, uh. I didn’t know you were in here.” Lance says, wrapping his arms around himself as he walks towards Keith. Keith whirls around and studies him questioningly.

“Yeah I’m just...cleaning.” He lies. Lance looks a little tense. Completely the opposite of how he looked outside at the table. His shoulders are drawn and there’s a worried crease between his brows. “Are you alright?” Keith asks, concerned.

Lance takes a nervous breath. “I think I’m…” He stops in front of Keith, rubbing a worried hand over his face. “I think I’m freakin’ out a little, Snickers.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” He asks, trying not to sound too aggressive. “You’re amazing.” It comes out wrong and he blushes, quickly correcting himself. “Like, you’re doing amazing.”

Lance doesn’t seem to care about his little slip up. “I feel like I don’t know what I’m talking about.”
He replies frustratedly.

“Lance, come on. You’ve been planning this for months. You’re the expert.”

“I don’t feel like one.” Lance mumbles, sounding a little irritated. “And if this wedding goes wrong, it’s going to be my fault, you understand? My fault. They’ll never forgive me. They are trusting me with this.”

“As they should be. Because you are incredible at what you do.” Keith says firmly. “And they are grateful.”

Lance visibly swallows. “I just...don’t feel like I can do this. People need to stop telling me that I can. It’s...ridiculously untrue.”

“Lance…” Keith says gently, watching the small quiver in Lance’s lower lip. It looks familiar to him. He can’t believe he was so wrapped up in his own thoughts that he forgot, for a moment, what Lance is really like. How Lance can go on and on for hours, sounding confident, almost cocky, and still find a way to hate himself at the end of the day. This isn’t the first time Lance has felt this way, and it won’t be the last. There is a tightness in Keith’s chest that reminds him, quite shockingly, that Lance is human. That he is struggling. That he has his own battles. For a second, Keith’s little crush doesn’t seem like the biggest problem in the room anymore.

“Lance.” He tries again. “You know that you always worry, about all of these things. But in the end, they always end up being okay.” Keith says, voice low. “Even if it’s not… your ideal version of okay.” He watches Lance’s face crumble a little bit more. His heart hurts. “Shiro and Allura would never, ever blame you.” He swallows, crouching down slightly to try and meet Lance’s eyes. “I mean, they don’t care as much as you think they do. They love everything that you do. And… the love each other.” Lance glances up at him. “They just want to get married.”

Lance looks at him, gaze unwavering, for an uncomfortable amount of time. Keith shifts under his eyes, wondering in complete paranoia, if he accidentally said something like “I can’t stop thinking about kissing you.” But he doesn’t think he did. He didn’t, right?

“Man.” Lance finally says, lips twitching upwards in a smile. “What’s gotten into you, Snickers?”

Keith wills the blush to leave his cheeks. “What are you talking about?”

“Listen to you, talking about love and marriage like Dr. Phil on steroids. You’ve gone soft.”

“Wha-- I was trying to make you feel better!” Keith scowls, crossing his arms over his chest. “I have not gone soft.”

“You look pretty soft to me.”

“I’m not.”

Lance reaches out a finger and pokes Keith’s cheek. “Huh. You feel softer, too.” He tilts his head to the side, smiling teasingly. “Must be all the exfoliation.”

“That exfoliation did nothing!” Keith argues. Lance purses his lips and pokes Keith’s cheek again.

“I disagree. I think it made your face feel like a baby’s bottom. And do you know how a baby’s bottom feels, Keith?”

“I swear to god.”
Keith bites his lip, suppressing a laugh, and takes one step closer to Lance until there is very little space between them. He can’t help it. It’s too tempting. He wants to be as close as possible. He doesn’t even care that his skin is on fire because the smell of Lance is so comforting he barely even notices. “I hate you.” He says, unable to keep the grin off his face.

A giggle bubbles out of Lance’s mouth and he shakes his head, stepping slightly away from Keith. “I hate you too.” He says through a smile, making his way to the door. Keith attempts to calm down his rapidly beating heart as he watches Lance’s back. Lance stops at the doorway and turns around, giving Keith an earnest look.

“Thank you, Keith.” He says, voice serious.

Keith nods, smiling in the softest way possible.

God he hates it when Lance is right.

xxx

“Okay, so I say we break this up into categories and subcategories.” Pidge says, like an intellectual, pushing her glasses up her nose. “Then divide those subcategories into action steps and result steps.” She whips out small dry erase board and slams it into the table. “Using this!”

“Pidge…” Hunk says, sounding exhausted. “I get that experimentation is your thing and all but...Is that really necessary?”

“This is love we’re talking about, Hunk!” She exclaims. “In case you didn’t know, love is actually a series of very complex yet completely rhythmic chemical reactions that occur in the brain in a specific--”

“Please don’t make this worse for me than it already is.” Keith groans, hiding his face in his hands. “I already can’t believe I’m here. Also, it’s not love. Stop calling it that.”

Last time Keith talked to Hunk, he told him he had feelings for Lance. After discovering that Keith used Hunk as a “cover crush”, Hunk had said that he was going to help Keith get Lance to realize those feelings for himself-- which is insane because Lance does not have those same feelings, but…

Keith is curious, okay? That doesn’t make him a criminal.

Hunk gently reaches out and plucks the dry erase board from Pidge’s hands. “I think we’re going to take a different approach.” He says gently. “A more...genuine one. First I just want to get a feel for what the situation is like.”

“The ‘situation’ is that I have a massive crush on him and he sees me like a brother. Or like, a second cousin. Or a tree. Brick. Or something else equally not sexy.”

“Well, it’d be nice to get Lance’s view on that, right?” Hunk says, smiling. “I’m getting kind of sick of yours. Too negative.”

“I’m being realistic.” Keith argues, for the fiftieth time.

Keith raises his eyebrow. “What? How will that help anything?”

“You know! Bro talk? Lance seems like the kinda guy who loves bro talk. I’m right, right?”

Keith huffs in confusion. “You’re going to… bro talk to Lance?” He rubs his hands down his face. “God, I should go.”

“Dude, I just want to get feelers on the situation. This isn’t covert operations for the FBI.”

“There is no situation!” Keith shouts, exasperated.

Hunk rolls his eyes. “Then why did you come here?”

Keith blinks. “I just…I-I wanted…”

Hunk smiles smugly at the silence that follows. “Exactly.”

xxx

Freshman Year (College)


The door swings open and Lance’s roommate, Kyle, is staring at Keith with an unamused expression. “For the last time, Lance isn’t here. He went to the library to study.”

Keith scowls. “He’s not there either, Kyle.” He spits back. It’s only been about three months since school started and Keith has already made enemies; one of them being Lance’s roommate Kyle. They were okay at first, but apparently Keith “drops by too much” and “seems super pretentious in his all-black attire”. At least, that’s what Keith has heard being said about him, and he’s pretty sure it’s Kyle’s doing.

“Well you already checked here a million times so how about waiting in the hallway. Cool? Good.” Kyle slams the door shut in Keith’s face and Keith clenches his fist, trying not to lose it.

Jesus, where is Lance? Keith hasn’t heard from him in two whole days. Not even a text. And Keith knows from experience that Lance tends to disappear like this when he has anxiety attacks. He panics as he tries to think about the last place he saw him.

They were in the library a few days ago. Lance was talking about his mother’s cooking. He said he was stressed about his first Finance exam. Or something like that. He said he was craving a taquito.

Then it dawns on Keith. He sighs. The gas station.

He throws on a black hoodie and marches out of the dorm building, still fuming slightly at how Kyle treated him. Jeez, how does Lance live with that asshole? Clearly the star quarterback on whatever
irrelevant high school football team he went to in the middle of buttfuck nowhere. Keith rolls his eyes. No wonder Lance doesn’t want to stick around.

The walk to the gas station feels a lot longer without Lance with him this time around. He shoves his hands in his pockets and sighs. It’s starting to get a bit colder as summer turns to fall. Keith knows that this is Lance’s favorite time of the year, which makes it odd to him that Lance has been pulling these disappearing acts more often than not over the past couple of months. This is the farthest he’s gone though. Usually Keith finds him next to the dumpster behind his dorm room or in the furthest back corner of the cafeteria.

He sees the dinky gas station sign, lit from a distance. Low and behold, there is Lance, sitting on the edge of the sidewalk. Keith jogs up to him.

“Lance!” He calls out. Lance looks up at him with nervous eyes.

“Snickers?”

Keith pauses in front of Lance, catching his breath, before settling on the sidewalk next to him. “I was wondering where you were.” He says, making sure not to sound accusatory.

Lance sighs, hugging his knees to his chest. “Wanted taquitos.” He says, a little distantly. “How’d you know I’d be here?”

Keith shrugs. “I remembered you wanting taquitos.”

Lance snorts. “When did I become so transparent?” He asks. It’s meant to come out as a joke, but it falls flat. Keith scooches a little closer.

“Why’d you really come out here, Lance?” He asks, carefully.

Lance sighs, letting his head fall forward slightly and ruffling his hair with his hands. “Remember in junior year, when I wanted to go to Manhattan? Or California? When I wanted adventure?”

Keith nods slowly. “Yeah?”

Lance scoffs. “I was stupid. I was really really stupid, to think that I could do that. I don’t want to go anywhere, Keith.” He picks up a pebble and tosses it away from the sidewalk. “I just want to go back home.”

Keith hums. “I know, it’s hard being away from home.”

“No, it’s more than that.” He bunches up his sweater sleeves so that they cover his hands. He holds them close to his chest. “It’s only been three months and I already can’t handle it.”

“Can’t handle what?”

“Everything. The work, the professors, the campus gym where half the machines don’t work, the shitty food, the asshole roommate. The stupid creaky mattress. The fact that there’s no A/C. How the library is always crowded and we have to carry around our student ID’s everywhere and my dorm keys keep getting lost in my backpack and did I already say the work? ” Lance’s voice breaks. “I don’t know how I ever thought I’d be able to handle this, especially in some other place like Manhattan. Or San Diego, or whatever. I can barely handle it here. And I just hate-- ” he takes a shaky breath, bringing his cloth-covered hands to his mouth and running them over his lips. “I just hate that I keep setting myself up for success, like I actually expect it. Why do I always expect it? I should know who I am by now.”
Keith just stares. He watches a tear fall from Lance’s right eye. It’s so subtle he barely even notices, but it catches the fluorescent light from the lit sign above them. Lance lifts a sleeve and wipes it away, sniffing. “I just think that...the world is too much for me. I wasn’t made to be able to handle this shit. I’m not...equipped. For life.”

Keith knows that Lance’s anxiety had gotten a lot better throughout high school, but now it looks like the move must have triggered it again. It really hurts Keith to see Lance this way. He takes a shaky breath, not really knowing what to say. He notices Lance is shivering slightly and slides in even closer to him. Feeling oddly vulnerable, and a little clueless about comforting his friend, he lets his head fall onto Lance’s shoulder. Lance stops shaking almost immediately.

“I’ve seen you go through worse.” Keith says softly.

“I don’t feel like I have.” Lance responds, voice even quieter.

“You have, trust me.”

A sigh. “I’m going to fail my finance exam.”

Keith shrugs. “Then fail it. You’ll make up for it with the next one.”

“I’m going to get really fat here.”

“We’ll get fat together so neither of us notice.”

“I’m going to lose my student ID.”

“The office is right next to my dorm. I’ll get you a new one.”

Almost as a sign of resignation, Keith feels Lance’s shoulders relax under his cheek.

“I feel like I’m dying.” Lance says.

Keith swallows. “I know you do…” He says. “But it’ll be okay.”

“How do you know that, though?”

“You kidding me? We got through high school.” Keith smirks. “This’ll be nothing.”

Lance sighs, sounding exhausted. “I really, really hope you’re right, Snickers.”

xxx

Present Day

Lance is napping on the couch when a loud knock on the apartment door startles him awake. Is that Keith? No, wait, it can’t be. Keith said he was going into work today for extra hours. Lance sighs, getting up tiredly and scratching his stomach. Who could it be?

He opens the door and a very happy Hunk is standing on the other side of it, holding two huge bags
of chips and beaming. “Hey man!”

“Hunk!” Lance says excitedly. “What are you doing here?”

Hunk shrugs. “Just thought we could hang out. You know, it’s Sunday. We don’t have anything else to do. Restaurant is closed today.” He walks into the apartment and places the food onto the table. Lance can’t stop smiling.

“Okay, sure! What are you feeling?”

Hunk shrugs. “Do you have any video games?” He looks around the apartment, seeming a little distracted. “Is Keith here?”

Lance freezes. Hunk is asking about Keith! Oh boy, that’s got to mean something, right? Stop. Don’t get carried away. “He went into work for a few hours today. He should be back in the afternoon.” He says.

“Oh. Okay.” Hunk looks disappointed and Lance can’t be imagining it. It’s obvious.

“Why?” He blurts, which is a completely inappropriate reaction. But Hunk doesn’t seem to mind. He just smiles.

“I was just...looking forward to seeing him.” He says, shrugging. Lance clenches a fist to keep his excitement in check.

“Yeah, sorry man. He’s out for a while. He said he had a lot of hours to make up.”

Another shrug. “Okay.” Hunk’s mood has decreased noticeably. Lance looks at him in confusion.

“Is everything...okay, man?”

Hunk looks at him with big, conflicted brown eyes. “It’s nothing...it’s just…” He sighs. “I didn’t come here to talk about this.”

Lance almost falls forward with urgency. “To talk about what?”

“It’s really not a big deal.”

Lance is way too interested now. Could this have something to do with Keith? “You can tell me, dude! I mean, I know we haven’t been friends for very long but...I’m a great listener!”

“I promise it won’t be. I’ll help you out, I swear. How are we going to enjoy video games if something’s bothering you? Lay it on me!”

Hunk smiles shyly at him, and then sighs in defeat. “I…”

Lance sits in the chair across from Hunk and scoots forward. “Yes?”

“I was just wondering...if Keith is single.”

Lance starts screaming internally. “Uh, yeah man! Keith is single. Why do you ask?” His hands jitter nervously and he clamps them together. It’s happening it’s happening…
“Really?” Hunk’s face lights up. “I-I don’t know. Do you think it’d be weird if I like, asked him to lunch? Is it weird that I’m asking you that?” Hunk groans. “I have no idea what I’m doing.”

“No! Dude, totally! I think Keith would really like that!” Keith is going to be so fucking excited!

“No, I think it’d make him really happy. I know he seems like a hardass but he’s actually a huge softie. Kind of a closeted romantic.” Lance winks.

“No. I mean….Well, yeah. Of course I do.”

Hunk, for some reason, feels a little thrown off by that response. That’s not normally how people talk about Keith. “…Seriously?”

“Well, of course.” Hunk says happily. He rests his chin in his hand. “He’s just, like, a subtle guy. You know? But I...think it’s endearing. You don’t see it?”

“No. I mean….Well, yeah. Of course I do.”

Lance jumps in his seat. “Hell yeah I do! Listen carefully, okay? Because he’s not just some cliche tinder date, and he hates when people assume that conventional shit will work on him.” Lance starts, just letting his mouth run rampant because he’s got no control over it anyway, and he’s just so excited!

“He thinks people who order salads on first dates are stupid. Like, seriously, he hates it. Order something that makes it obvious you aren’t trying super hard to impress him. Also, he hates restaurants where the silverware is set out on the napkin instead of wrapped up in the napkin; he thinks that either the restaurant is too fancy for him or the silverware is dirty. If there is ever a lull in conversation, just say something snarky about someone else in the restaurant. Nine times out of ten, he will have already had that thought about that specific person and then you can talk shit.” Lance puts a hand to his chin, humming.

“Sounds good, I--”

“Oh! Complement how he looks.” Lance interjects. “He likes to pretend that he doesn’t care how he looks but he actually does, especially when he goes out with someone he likes. Never ever talk to him about his job. He doesn’t hate his job, he just hates talking about work. He thinks it’s a waste of time and he will probably get up and leave if you ask him, like, ‘so Keith, what do you do?’ Like, I’m not kidding. He hates that shit. And he loves ordering appetizers. It’s more important to him than the actual meal. If there are mozzarella sticks then get them without even asking him. He’s lactose intolerant but willing to suffer for those because he loves them more than life itself.” Lance giggles, realizing he’s a little winded from his blabbering. “Don’t get him flowers. He’ll barf. He thinks it’s
the biggest cop-out ever. He always automatically hates people when they get him flowers. If you want to get him anything, he’s got a *major* addiction to Peanut Butter Snickers. Like, a borderline unhealthy one. I was able to restrict his intake but if you make him relapse I won’t mind.” Lance grins, biting his lip. It takes him a moment to realize he’s blushing. He lets out a bit of nervous laughter at Hunk’s shocked expression. “Sorry, that was a bit too much. But, it’s been fifteen years of information, ya know?”

“Holy shit.” Hunk says slowly. “Well...thanks Lance. He sounds just as complex as I knew he’d be.” It sounds fond. Lance suddenly feels a little irritated. There’s no way Hunk managed to pick up on all of that just by talking to Keith a few times. Those are things that are really *specific* to Keith, and Keith alone. Hunk did *not* know them.

“Yeah.” Lance pauses, backtracking and catching his breath. “He’s... well there’s a *lot* more.” He says, trying not to sound defensive. “But I think your date will be great, regardless. Just go on and do it before you chicken out! Okay?”

Hunk’s face breaks into a grin. “I will! I will, I promise.” He says, laughing. “But let’s not talk about this anymore. Video games?”

Lance’s nerves are buzzing and he can’t seem to calm down. He nods, taking a deep breath. “Yeah! Yeah, let me set it up.”

xxx

**Hunk**

*You are both so stupid*

Keith looks down at his phone in confusion. That is the vaguest text he’s ever received in his entire life. He waits for another text, explaining what happened, but he doesn’t get one.

**Keith**

*Is that good news?*

Five minutes go by. No answer.
Keith

...Hello?

xxx

*Freshman Year (College)*

College parties are just high school parties on crack. Keith decides this wholeheartedly as he travels through the frat mansion, trying to find something to do. Lance disappeared about half an hour ago, to play a drinking game with some of the fraternity guys. Keith passed on that glorious opportunity; the guys were really cute but way too drunk for his sober ass, so he decided to just watch Lance walk away with them. Probably to check out girls, or some other thing Keith doesn’t care about.

Keith didn’t really want to come to this party, but Lance insisted. And since Lance has been so stressed lately, Keith just really wanted him to have a good time. He looks around for some familiar faces. He sees April from his freshman seminar class. He sees Veronica from his management class. He sees Oscar, who he met at the gym a couple weeks ago. All acquaintances, none of which he’s very interested. He sighs. He really doesn’t want to go find Lance, because he doesn’t want to be a wet blanket. Lance loves it here and is probably having a great time. He’s in his element. Keith sighs, taking out his phone, ready to send a text to Lance to let him know he’s heading out. But something catches his eye.

There is a couple making out on the staircase. A little violently, actually. And normally Keith wouldn’t care, at all, but he freezes with his feet practically rooted to the ground because…

One of them...is Lance.

And the other one...is a boy.

Keith blinks, over and over and over again, trying to make sure that what he’s seeing is correct. But nothing changes. That person is still Lance, and he’s still sucking the face off of a person who is very much not a girl. Keith can’t seem to move one way or the other. What is happening? Is Lance...does Lance like... What is happening?

Lance separates from the boy and smiles slyly at him, clearly drunk. Keith swallows hard. Lance looks into it. But he’s drunk, right? He could just be making a stupid, drunken mistake.

But the boy says something and Lance smirks, and it looks downright filthy. Then Lance is leaning in again with purpose, like he really, really wants it. And Keith…

Keith needs some air.

He stumbles out of the house, a little shocked by how freezing it is outside. It’s the dead of January. There is snow on the ground. So it really shouldn’t be surprising that Keith is suddenly cold, but it is. He wraps his arms around himself, suppressing shivers. Hasn’t he learned by now that he always ends up outside during parties? Why does he keep going to them?
He starts walking in the direction of his dorm, opting to just text Lance when he gets there because Lance seems...preoccupied, anyway.

With a guy.

Lance is making out with a guy.

It’s not that it never occurred to Keith that maybe Lance’s sexuality was...a little fluid, but those were usually just notions. Guesses. Entertaining ideas. He always told himself afterwards that he was just making things up. That’s crazy, he would always say. Lance is so girl-crazy.


“Snickers! Hey, where’re you goin’?” Lance calls behind him. Keith blows his bangs out of his face and whirls around, watching Lance run drunkenly towards him.

“Sorry, you looked like you were...having a good time.” Keith says. And he can’t help it if he’s frowning a little. “I’m really tired.”

Although he is wasted, realization dawns on Lance’s face at Keith’s implication. “No...nonono Keith, ‘m sorry if you saw...” He mumbles. “I wasn’--”

“Lance, how could you not tell me?” Keith asks, sounding a lot more hurt than he anticipated. There aren’t any heat behind his words. “I trusted you with my secret in high school. And that was really hard for me.”

“I know I know, was gon’ tell you, I swear.” Lance slurs, shaking his head. “I really was. Jus’ didn’t really know, like, for sure yet.” Lance pouts. “I’m too drunk for this.” He mutters, covering his face in his hands. “Can we talk tomorrow?”

Keith sighs, shaking his head. “Goodnight, Lance.” He says, a little too passive aggressively, as he turns around and keeps walking. He hears a small whine in protest but continues on his way, feeling a throbbing ache in his chest that always seems the surface when things aren’t completely cool between him and Lance. The past few months have been tense for both of them. Lance finally confronted his parents about his newly-emerging anxiety and they got him to a psychiatrist. He only recently started taking a low dose of medication, and it takes about a month to start helping, so he’s still in a bit of a funk. Keith hurts when he thinks about it, because he really just wants Lance to get better.

But he can’t ignore the note of aggravation in his chest when he thinks about Lance kissing that frat guy. How long has Lance been considering boys? How long has he been keeping it from Keith? Why would he keep it from Keith? Keith came out to him in such an embarrassing way. He knows what is was like. Did he think Keith would judge him? Did he not trust him? Was he...ashamed? Why does that hurt so much to think about?

When he gets to his room, he crawls into bed, feeling exhausted. He wills himself not to think about it anymore. He knows that eventually, they’ll talk it out. But he can’t shake the uneasy feeling. He hates that some trashy frat boy found out about Lance’s sexuality before he did. It feels impersonal. It feels sad.

He feels like Lance deserves better.

He recognizes sleep creeping up on his and welcomes the tired, heavy feeling.
“Keith…. Keith…” Keith feels someone shaking him awake. “Keith, please wake up. Please?”

Keith groans, turning around and stuffing his face into his pillow. He doesn't have to look to know it’s Lance. “Go away.” He mutters, mostly out of impulse. He cracks his eye open and sees his alarm clock. 4:28AM. He groans again. “It’s four in the fucking morning, Lance.” He hisses, disgruntled. Lucky for him, his roommate is never around. He feels his bed dip and Lance sits on the edge of it.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t wait to talk to you. Just please…let me explain.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Are you still drunk?”

“No. No, I’m not, I promise.”

Keith sighs, sitting up and leaning his back against the rickety headboard. Lance looks exhausted. Probably already feeling the hangover. He’s in blue, fluffy pajama pants and a gray shirt. His hair is mussed up and there are bags under his eyes.

“I’m really sorry.” He says softly, closing his eyes and shaking his head. “That was not how I wanted to tell you. I...was incredibly immature about it.”

Keith looks down at his hands in his lap, not really wanting to reply.

“Keith, you’re my best friend. Ever. Of course you were going to be the first person I told--”

“Are you ashamed?” Keith asks sadly. “Embarrassed? That you’re gay?”

“I’m not gay.” Lance says, frowning.

Keith scoffs. “Whatever, Lance.”

“I’m not gay, I’m bisexual, okay? And no. I’m not ashamed to be.” His face softens. “Because you taught me not to be, Keith.”

Keith glances up at him. “Saying nice things doesn’t excuse you not telling me.”

“I wasn’t sure of myself.” Lance repeats, starting to sound annoyed.

“Give me a break.”

“I wasn’t. I couldn’t decide for a while. It was hard...for me to understand.”

“How does that make any sense?”

“It doesn’t.” Lance bites, suddenly icy. “Not everybody can be like you, okay?” He snaps, irritated. “Not everybody can know exactly what they want, every second of every day. It’s a bit more complicated in my head, alright? I’d think you’d at least understand that about me by now.” He sighs frustratedly. “There’s a reason you came out long before I did. It takes me longer! Show some empathy, for once in your life.” He stands, clearly getting more and more fed up as he talks. “God, this was supposed to be an apology, but you’re not even trying to listen to me.”

Keith blinks up at him, thoroughly shocked at the outburst. His chest feels tight. “Lance--”
“Screw you, man. Looking for an explanation? This. This is why I didn’t tell you.” He gestures angrily at Keith. “Because you couldn’t ever understand what this took for me. You see everything exactly how you want to see it. Well now, see me! Leaving! In a rage!” Lance punctuates his rant by stomping out of the room and slamming the door forcefully behind him.

Keith sits, upright in his bed, completely stunned. Guilt twists relentlessly in his gut. He wants to try and tell himself that Lance is overreacting, but there’s no way he can deny that this is his fault. Lance’s words ring in his ears. He doesn’t want to believe Lance is right, but he knows he is. Lance must’ve been stressing about this for months. This was supposed to be a big moment for him. A moment of pride. But Keith couldn’t meet him halfway. Keith couldn’t even attempt to see it through Lance’s eyes. And now they both feel like shit.

It’s times like these when he really, really doesn’t feel like he deserves Lance.

He wants to get out of bed and run after him. He hugs his arms around himself, panicking a little. He’s never had to do damage control at this magnitude. This is the first time since he became friends with Lance where he’s afraid that if he knocks, Lance won’t answer.

He decides to give it a couple of hours. To let Lance cool down. To think about what to say to him.

It’s going to be a painful, painful couple of hours.

xxx

After Keith eats a very depressing breakfast of oats mixed with room temperature water, he gathers enough courage to walk to Lance’s dorm. He stands in front of the door, staring blankly. His nerves are twisting painfully. He feels it in his fingertips as they jitter. This is the first time he’s ever been nervous to talk to Lance. It’s a strange, suffocating feeling and he decides he hates it. One way or another, this has got to end. He lifts a hand, knocking softly.

Kyle, of course, is the one who answers. His consistently angry face melts into one of relief when he sees Keith. “Oh thank god, please talk to him. He’s driving me insane.”

“You suck, Kyle! You asked me what was wrong and I told you!” Lance shouts from somewhere behind the door.

“Yeah, you told me for four fucking hours.” Kyle turns back to Keith, eyes pleading. “I’m leaving now. Please, man.” He grabs a jacket and shoes from the floor next to him and pushes past Keith, escaping into the hallway. Keith slides into the room behind him.

Lance is in bed, covers pulled up over his nose, revealing only two seething eyes as they land on Keith. “Go away.” Lance muffles into his covers.

“No.”

“I don’t want to talk to you.”

“Too bad.” Keith sits down on Lance’s bed and Lance flinches away like he’s been burned. Keith sighs. “Lance.”

“Didn’t you see me leave in rage?”
“Yes.”

“Then why are you here? Take a hint.”

Keith flinches. “You’re being a baby.”

“Well you’re being an asshole.”

“I’m trying not to be.”

“And your hair looks stupid.”

“Well maybe it’s because someone woke me up at four AM!”

“That has nothing to do with your stupid hair!” Lance shouts, sitting up and pulling the covers away from his face.

Keith growls and grabs the pillow out from under Lance’s head, hitting him in face. Lance yelps. “I’m trying to tell you something!” He shouts, hitting Lance again.

Lance tries to make a grab at the pillow, swearing under his breath in Spanish. Keith pushes him away. “Will you just listen to me?”

“Why? Because you listen to me all the time?”

“No! Because I’m trying to tell you that I’m proud of you!” Keith swallows, shoving the pillow at Lance and finally letting go of it. “I’m proud of you, asswipe.” He says again, a hint less angry. He tries to catch his breath. “And I’m sorry. I was hurt, but I didn’t have any right to be. I know...that you would’ve told me eventually.”

Lance freezes for a moment, studying him. His expression is skeptical, but Keith can see it beginning to soften. “Yeah. I would’ve.”

“When I told you I was gay, you were incredibly accepting...and understanding...I mean, all you did was listen to me. And I...should’ve returned the favor. You deserve that much. I’m sorry, okay?”

Lance sighs. He sounds exhausted. “That’s not even the point.” He crosses his arms over his chest. “Keith, you don’t have to understand what I’m going through all the time. That would be impossible. But you’ve gotta stop pretending that I’m like you, to make things easier for yourself. Because I’m not like you.”

“And you don’t have to be.” Keith says, a little desperately.

“You’ve got to be more comfortable spending time with a brain that isn’t yours. Not everything is going to make sense to you. Stop being so angry when something doesn’t fit into your crazy strict realm of reason. There are going to be a lot of things that don’t. You can’t be a dick about it every time.”

Keith wrings his hands nervously. “I know.” He admits.

“People are going to be different. Try to understand. Even if you don’t understand at all, just try.” Lance rubs his eyes. “Because it hurts, a lot, when you look at me like I’m crazy.”

“I...didn’t realize I did that.” He says, heat building behind his eyes. “I don’t think you’re crazy at all.”
“I know you don’t...” Lance says quietly. “Most of the time, at least.”

Silence stretches between them. Lance lays back down and stares at the ceiling, clenching the blanket to his chest. Keith feels his muscles loosening, ever so slightly. He takes a deep breath, nudging Lance with his elbow. “Move over.”

“What?”

“Move over. Come on. Let me in. I only slept for like, half an hour.”

Lance groans, rolling his eyes and moving to the side, making room for Keith. Keith lays down next to him, grabbing some of the covers from Lance and bunching it up at his chest. They lay shoulder to shoulder, staring at the cracked, bland, stucco ceiling.

“I’ll try.” Keith says, voice barely above a whisper. “I promise.”

“I know you will.” Lance replies gently. “I know it’s hard for you. And I’m sorry...you know. For the way you found out. It was insensitive.”

“I’m sorry too.” Keith is so relieved he could cry. “So sorry.”

He feels Lance relax next to him. The air is light again; just like that. Keith feels the weight lifted off of his chest. He turns his face to the side, stuffing it into the pillow. It smells sickly sweet. For some reason, it’s comforting to him.

“Hey, Snickers?”

“Yeah?”

“This is really, really gay.”

A beat passes. Then, Keith bursts out laughing, shoving the rest of his face into the pillow. He feels warm when he hears Lance laughing too, trying to muffle the noise into the covers.

xxx

Present Day

“You look nice.” Lance says, as soon as Olivia opens the door. Because she does, as usual. Her hair is up in a messy bun. She’s wearing a pastel yellow shirt and a pair of ripped jeans. Lance feels like he tried too hard with his outfit. Or maybe didn’t try hard enough. This shirt is more teal than blue, which makes him a little uneasy. Because blue is kind of like, his thing. But he attempts to shrug it off as he steps into Olivia’s apartment.

Olivia lives in a modest, cute loft. It’s looks like it’s straight out of a catalog, with some kind of hipster aesthetic. There are string lights hanging from the ceiling. Everything is made from brick and worn wood. There is a bit of a musty smell in the air, but it’s not unpleasant. It kind of smells like a campfire.

“Hey handsome.” She says happily. “I’m glad you could make it. I’ve been dying to just chill for a bit.” She grins at him. Her teeth are so white they’re almost blinding.

“Oh, me too.” Lance says. “It was a killer of a week.”

“Well it’s a good thing it’s over then. I was thinking we could watch a movie?”

Lance shrugs. Deep down, he really isn’t in the mood. He was kind of hoping for something a little different. Maybe he was just hoping to talk. Just talk. He likes talking. But there’s no way he can say that. That’s coming on way too strong, isn’t it? She’ll be freaked out. “Movie sounds good.” He says with a smile.

“Cool! I picked out some of my favorites.” She says, crouching down and rummaging through a cabinet that looks like it’s filled with DVDs. Lance smirks. *Cute,* she still uses DVDs.

She walks up to Lance and holds out her choices. Lance scans his eyes across them, feeling incredibly unenthused.

“These are all...super depressing?” He states, but it sounds more like a question.

Olivia giggles. “Yeah, I’m not really a fan of ‘feel-good’ movies. You know how it is.”

Lance blinks at her. As usual, he *doesn’t* know ‘how it is’. What the fuck are you talking about?

“Why’s that?” He says instead.

She shrugs. “I don’t know. I mean, *fine,* they end up together. And it’s nice and stuff but... of course it was going to happen. That happens in every movie, ever. Why should I pay money to watch it happen again?” She holds up a copy of ‘500 Days of Summer’. “That’s why I *love* this one. Because you expect them to finally get together, but it doesn’t happen! And it’s really well done. One of my favorite directors.”

Lance swallows hard. When he watched ‘500 Days of Summer’ for the first time, he almost broke down Keith’s door afterwards, with tears streaming down his cheeks and snot all over his face. He had grabbed Keith by the shoulders and shouted, “Love is dead! Love is dead! Everything is meaningless! Fuck that movie! Zooey Deschanel is a bitch, Snickers!”

Olivia’s voice brings him back to the present. “Lance?”

“Huh?”

She chuckles. “I asked if you like this movie? If not we can watch something else.”

Sirens go off. Panic mode. “Oh yeah, one of my favorites.” He lies through his teeth.

Her face brightens beautifully, and the lie seems worth it for a minute. “Oh, great! Because a lot of people don’t like this one. It’s not for everyone.”

Lance nods in agreement, plopping onto the couch and praying to whoever is out there that he makes it through this without blowing snot all over Olivia’s pretty shirt. Olivia puts the DVD in and then joins Lance on the couch. She squeezes in close to him and he sighs happily, wrapping an arm around her waist. It kind of feels like middle school, but he did promise he’d take things slow this time around. And although Olivia smells amazing and has her cute face nuzzled into his neck, he intends to keep that promise. Because no matter, what, he isn’t going to screw this up. There haven’t been any problems yet. And he knows they’ve really only been going on dates for a few weeks, but they’ve gotten closer really quick. And he has to make sure it’s not his version of “quick”. Because
that usually ends in disaster.

So far, he’s learned a lot about Olivia; which has been great because it leaves him less time to say anything too embarrassing about himself. He’s learned that she loves cooking, and she studied management in college because she wants to open her own cafe someday. She has two younger sisters. Her parents are divorced. She is interning in the marketing department of a local chain restaurant, and actually enjoys it more than she thought she would. Her favorite color is yellow. She’s a vegetarian. Her favorite season is summer.

Small things. But really nice things.

And it's just going so, so well.

xxx

Snickers Kogane

I ordered chinese food and im bored

Lance giggles at the text. The walk back to his place from Olivia’s actually isn’t too bad. It cuts through a beautiful park, so usually he spends some time walking around. But today it looks like he’s needed elsewhere.

Lance

On my way

Snickers Kogane

Could you pick up forks

Lance

...we dont have forks?
I dunno. I don't feel like getting up

Lance scoffs, rolling his eyes.

Lance

No

Snickers Kogane

Fineee

Lance chuckles, stuffing his phone back into his pocket. It’s been a couple of days since Hunk told Lance about his crush. Lance has been waiting for the perfect time to tell Keith. He can’t wait. Keith really does deserve a good guy like Hunk. And Lance thinks they would actually be pretty great together. A unique pair, but great nonetheless.

It’s been so long since Keith actually, truly, dated someone. Lance can’t remember the last time Keith ever genuinely had feelings for anybody. That’s probably why the current situation seems so...new. Like a side of Keith that Lance never quite got used to. It’s because it doesn’t happen very often.

Lance pushes through the apartment door, shamefully holding a handful of plastic forks because once he sits down he won’t want to get up either.

“Hey.” Keith’s monotonous voice comes from the futon. “Before you sit down could you get me the Cinnamon Toast Crunch?”

“I finished it this morning.” Lance says sadly, plopping his ass down on the creaky futon next to Keith. “Sorry, Snickers.”

Keith looks at him with a broken expression. “What? How could you do that to me?”

“I’m sorry!” Lance defends, unable to suppress his giggle. “I was all out of cheerios. Would you by chance have something to do with that?”

“Are you accusing me of eating your bland, pathetic excuse for a breakfast cereal? You’re out of your mind.” Keith says, huffing.

Lance grins at him and then leans over their small, ratty coffee table, where there is a spread of shitty
chinese takeout covering the entire surface. “Man, what’s the occasion?”

Keith shrugs, leaning forward and uncovering some of the containers. “I was starving. Figured you’d be starving too. You’ve been out all day.”

“Awww thanks, Keith!” Lance says dramatically. “Wow, so considerate!”

Keith snorts, but he’s smiling. “Wanna watch something?”

Lance bites at his nail. “Nah. I haven’t really been in a ‘watching things’ mood this week.” He says casually. Especially not after watching 500 Days of Summer. “Can we just talk instead? I feel like talking.”

Keith shrugs. “Sure. As long as you start. Cause I’ve got nothing.” He brings his knees to his chest and nestles into the corner of the futon, lifting a carton of lo mein to his face and stuffing a bite into his mouth.

Lance smiles at him, and a comfortable warmth settles in his chest. Yeah... for some reason, Keith always understands.

xxx

Keith most definitely did not buy all this chinese food to make tonight feel like a date. At least, that wasn’t his initial intention. He just wanted to eat his misery, really. Lance was out with Olivia and he really wasn’t in the mood to think about it. He thought about getting trashed but he has work tomorrow. So binging on chinese food seemed like a...semi logical option.

But he’s glad he texted Lance. Because Lance looks especially beautiful today. It almost makes Keith feel regretful, like he can’t believe he missed so many hours of the day where he could’ve been looking at him. Lance has got on a teal and white striped shirt that makes his skin look deliciously golden in comparison. The teal brings out the green notes in his blue eyes. Snug, dark wash jeans cling to his long, long legs. His hair is ruffled by the wind. And Keith doesn’t know what the fuck kind of romance writer has made camp in his brain, but he’s somehow convinced he’s never seen anyone so fucking breathtaking.

Lance grabs a carton of orange chicken and reaches in with his fingers, popping one into his mouth. Keith grimaces.

“You’re a disgusting human being.”

Lance shrugs, licking sauce off of his index finger. Keith watches his pink lips, face heating at an alarming pace. “It tastes better this way.”

“What about the forks?”

“Those are for you, your highness.” Lance grins at him, bright eyes and barely crooked teeth. “You know I eat chinese food like this.”

“Yeah.” Keith says. “And I hate you for it.”

Lance laughs. “Love you too.”
Something twists painfully in the pit of Keith’s stomach. He clears his throat. “Well, you wanted to talk.” He says, shoving more lo mein in his mouth. “So talk.”

“Hmm.” Lance studies the orange chicken. “Oh! I have a secret.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Oh my god. How old are you?”

“No no wait, hear me out. It’s about you.”

Oh man. Keith knows this is about Hunk. “What? Me?”

Lance bites his lip excitedly, nodding. “Yeah! Guess who dropped by a couple days ago while you were working?”

Keith raises an eyebrow. Hunk. “Shiro?”

“No!”

Keith sighs. “...Allura.”

Lance rolls his eyes, sighing dramatically. “No, who cares about them!” He says, gesturing wildly. “It was Hunk!”

Keith blinks. There is definitely more than one way to go about this. He never really discussed the terms with Hunk. He isn’t even really sure what Hunk and Lance talked about that day. But he figures that Hunk is pretty determined now. So, he decides to just go with his own, slightly selfish, gut.

“Oh, right!” Keith says, smiling. “He told me that yesterday.”

Lance’s face fall slightly into one of confusion. “What?”

“Oh my god, did I forget to tell you?” Keith asks, feigning shock. “Hunk and I went on a date yesterday.”

“What?” Lance blinks owlishly at Keith. “What? How could you forget to tell me that?”

Keith shrugs. “I’m trying to...you know.” He says. “He’s worth it.” He doesn’t know where the response comes. If it comes from bitterness, or pent up desperation, or all of the useless pining that has been hollowing Keith out for the past couple of months. Because he knows, deep down, that Lance doesn’t actually care. But he finds satisfaction in telling Lance about another boy, even if it’s completely fake. A very dark, dried up part of Keith feels content with the confused shock on Lance’s irresistible face. Because Lance will never feel the same way about him. And Keith knows that. But he sure doesn’t look ecstatic about having to share Keith with anyone else, either.

And Keith counts that as a win.

“Oh. Wow.” Lance says. “Who are you and who ate Keith?”

Keith chuckles, shrugging. Despite his small power trip, his fingers still ache to trace the delicate features on Lance’s face. He clenches his fist. “Okay, shut up. Can we talk about something else? Please?”
Lance smiles at him. “Sure, but this conversation is not over.” He points accusingly at Keith. “You know I need to hear everything.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “I’ll tell you later.” He says, sending himself a mental reminder to actually come up with a story and tell Hunk about it. Lance pops another piece of chicken in his mouth and picks up his phone. Keith doesn’t realize how dark the room has gotten until Lance’s phone screen lights up his face. Keith tries not to stare to openly. He really needs to get a grip.

Lance gasps out loud at something on the screen. “Oh my god. Keith, do you remember that guy you hooked up with in junior year? Freddie?”

Keith smirks. “There were two Freddies.”

“The one who smelled like weed all the time.”

“Yeah? What about him?”

“He just got engaged! Oh my god.” Lance shoves his phone in Keith’s face. “Look at this! How adorable!”

Keith grabs at the phone and squints into the bright light. “Woah.” keith says. “That’s...actually really impressive. I thought he’d be alone forever.”

Lance giggles. “ Says the guy who hooked up with him for two whole months.”

“Oh my-- are you judging me? You literally spent four months hooking up with a guy who got turned on by watching the Discovery Channel.”

“Jeremy was so hot!” Lance defends, tossing a fortune cookie wrapper at Keith’s face.

“Jeremy was weird, Lance!” Keith laughs.

“He was so good in bed though.”

“I don’t understand how.” Keith says incredulously. “Whatever happened to ‘don’t stick your dick in crazy’?”

“That’s the worst advice ever. Crazy people are the best in bed. It’s scientifically proven.” Lance eats another piece of chicken, nodding like he agrees with himself.

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“That’s the worst advice ever. Crazy people are the best in bed. It’s scientifically proven.” Lance eats another piece of chicken, nodding like he agrees with himself.

“Okay but the Discovery channel?” Keith’s stomach flutters as he watches Lance giggle.

“Alright, fine , you have a point. But he knew all of my spots! It was like he had a sixth scent.”

Keith freezes with a bite of lo mein balancing on his fork. He lowers his hand. “Your spots?”

“Yeah, you know. Like, the spots that turn me on the most.” Lance says. “I think it’s a guy thing. Because whenever I hook up with girls, they like, can’t find them. At least not as fast as guys can. My sex life got infinitely better after I came out.” He laughs.

Keith stares, fork clattering back into the takeout box. “You...have spots?” Shit, he’s blushing. This whole conversation is a horrible idea. He should shut up right now.

“Well, yeah? Doesn’t everybody?“ Lance raises an eyebrow teasingly. “Don’t you?”

“I...don’t know. I mean. Probably?” Shut up, Keith. Shut up shut up shut up. Curiosity wins.
“What...are your spots?”

Lance huffs incredulously, shifting so that he faces Keith. “That’s a little private, don’t you think?” He asks, with a teasing smirk face on his face.


“I’m kidding, Snickers.” Lance chuckles. “I’m surprised we’ve never talked about this before, to be honest.”

Keith swallows. “Oh.” He’s already blanking, head drifting back to the dream he had all those weeks ago. The dream he’s forced out of his mind. The one he’s tried so hard to never think about again. Lance’s clouded eyes. Small hums. Broken moans, muffled into Keith’s neck. Keith wills himself to sink even further into the corner of the futon. His face is on fire.

Curiosity continues to win.

“Well, what are they, then?”

Lance grins. “Alright, listen closely. Then afterwards, we can compare notes.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Obviously the first one,” Lance starts, completely ignoring Keith’s question, “is on my neck. But I feel like that’s everybody.”

“Where on your neck?” Keith sits up slightly, moving in closer. Because he’s dying to. Because his body is screaming to be close to Lance. The moment he smells vanilla cupcakes, he realizes how close he is. Lance’s eyes dart down at the small space between them and then back up to Keith’s. He looks confused for a moment, but melts into a casual easiness. He tilts his head up and points to the hollow at the base of his throat. “Right here.” He says. “It’s kind of an awkward place but. You know. In the moment? It makes things interesting.

Keith stares, mouth dry. There’s no way he can survive through this conversation in one piece. “Really?” He rasps.

“Yeah.” Lance sends him a side smile. “Second one is also super weird.”

“How many are there?”

“Six. You don’t have six?”

“I had no idea this was a thing, Lance.”

Lance hums. “Right. Well, the second one is my back.” Lance pauses, tapping his chin. “Well, my lower back.”

Keith knows Lance’s back by heart, and completely by accident. He grew up watching it change. He knows the spatter of freckles on Lance’s shoulder blades. He knows the small dimples at the base of his spine, right above his waistline. He imagines, in a flash of a moment, running his tongue along the small dips and feeling Lance squirm underneath--

“Yeah I don’t think that one is as common.” Lance rambles on. “But either way, usually that’s the first one guys figure out. Cause of like...the proximity. You know. To my ass.” Lance chuckles.

Keith’s skin is buzzing. He can’t tell if he loves this or hates this. Heat pools in his stomach. He feels

Lance smiles at him, unfazed. “Well the next one would be my nipples. Obviously. But some people don’t care about their nipples as much as other people. So it’s not that much of a given.”

“Right.” Keith mumbles. “Obviously.” Maybe he should text Kevin before his mind starts spiralling.

“And then the little spot below my belly button. You know. Happy trail and all that.”

Keith feels like his mouth is watering. His heart rate is picking up. He can feel the blush all the way up his neck and prays Lance doesn’t notice. “Yeah.”

“How many was that?”

“Four.”

Lance gives him an amused look. “Someone’s been paying attention.”

“What?” Keith says, a little too defensively. “I’m just curious. This is a new concept for me.”

Lance hums. “Fifth is...god you’re going to think this is weird. You ready for this?”

“Tell me.” Keith says urgently.

“The back of my knees.”

Keith swallows, nodding. Trying to memorize these facts that he will never put into practice. Trying to commit the sound of Lance’s smooth voice to memory as he talks about all the things he loves in bed. It makes his heart roar. It leaves a tingling in his fingertips.

“And the last one?” He asks, curling a bit of the ratty futon into his closed fist.

Lance blinks slowly at him. Sleepily. With a hesitant movement, he lifts an arm between them and turns it over, pointing to inside of his wrist. “Right here.” He says quietly. Keith glances up at him, feeling like all the walls in his head are crumbling to the ground. It’s a dust storm. It’s chaos. Lance’s eyes are soft. They look a little nervous, especially compared to the bravado he was sporting just moments before.

And holy shit Keith can’t take it anymore. He feels like his heart is beating inside his skull. He reaches out shakily and grips Lance’s wrist, pulling it a little closer to his chest and trailing his first two fingers along the delicate, soft skin there. It feels warm. He watches the muscles fluctuate under his touch. “Here?” He asks carefully.

Lance chuckles a little breathlessly, like he wasn’t actually expecting Keith to do it. “Yeah.”

Lance smells so sweet. Keith is convinced that if he leans forward and licks at Lance’s neck, his skin will taste like sugar. It makes him dizzy with desire. His heart thobs. There is actual fire in his veins. He aches with the craving for it. Sighing a little shakily, he runs his fingers over the inside of Lance’s wrist again, not really thinking clearly. Thoughts clouded by something else. He feels Lance’s pulse flutter under his touch. When he looks up, there is a soft flush in Lance’s cheeks.

“I-I mean…” Lance starts, not moving his hand away. “Usually, like...after sex, it feels nice. Sometimes people kiss it. You know. Or lick it. Or...whatever. I don’t know. It’s weird.”

Keith hums, wanting desperately to do much more than that but finally coming to terms with how dangerous this is. How stupid it is. Because Olivia. And Hunk. And...the very small fact that Lance
just doesn’t see him that way. He drops Lance’s hand, laughing a little and trying desperately to get the heat in his pants under control. Jesus, he literally touched Lance’s wrist. Is that all it takes now?

“Wow.” He says, and he nearly dies from shock when his voice comes out normal. “Jeremy knew all of these?”

Lance grins at him, the slight tension in the room breaking. The only evidence that Keith didn’t dream the whole thing is the small blush, still lingering in Lance’ cheeks. “Yeah. I’m telling you. Crazy people are the best in bed. He knew within like seven minutes.”

“Should I hand out brochures to all of the people you date?” Keith asks teasingly. “You know, with illustrations and written descriptions. Perhaps an instruction manual?”

Lance laughs, shoving him. “Fuck off, Snickers. I told you this in confidence.”

“You’re right, some of those are super weird.”

Keith chuckles. “I can’t help what I like!”

He takes along breath of relief. Perfect timing. He texts back saying he’ll be over in a couple hours. He may not be coping in the best way possible, but if he lays in his bed and thinks about Lance’s sensitive nipples for more than two minutes he’s going to blow his fucking brains out. He sighs, getting up and starting to clean the takeout containers from the table. He feels Lance looking at him.

“Where are you going?” He asks sadly.

To fuck someone who looks like you. “I’m just cleaning up. You gonna help me?”

Lance sighs. “No, not really.”

Keith laughs, throwing a napkin at Lance’s face as he walks towards the kitchen. “Well thanks.”

He’s tossing the containers into the trash when Lance appears in the doorway.

“You going to bed?”

Keith glances at the clock. Jesus, how did it get so late? It’s almost midnight. His phone vibrates with another text from Kevin. “Yeah, sleep sounds good.” He lies. “You?”

“Yeah, I’m beat.” He lingers at the door for a moment. “Hey...this was fun.” Lance says, smiling with satisfaction. “Thank you for the food.”

Keith looks up from the garbage can. “No problem.”

Lance inches away from the doorframe. “Goodnight, Snickers.”

“Yeah, goodnight.” Keith turns towards the sink, opting to pretend to do the dishes until he can sneak out. Lance continues to stand in the doorway, just a little bit further away. Keith pauses, looking at him and raising an eyebrow.

“What is it?”
Lance shrugs, pouting a little.

“What?” Keith asks again.

“Nothing, it’s just, now would be a great time for a hug.”

Keith scoffs. “Why?”

“Because we’re having a moment, man! A friendship moment. And I think we need to hug it out.”

“I really don’t think that’s necessary.” Keith says, fighting down a blush and turning back to the kitchen sink.

“Come on, why are you like this?” Lance whines, voice coming closer. “You know you want to.”

“I really don’t.” Keith lies. Lance’s footsteps get even closer until Keith knows he’s right behind him. Keith doesn’t turn around. He can feel the heat radiating from Lance’s body.

“Well, I’m not going to force you.” Lance says, with a quieter voice now that he’s closer. His breath puffs against the back of Keith’s neck, making his skin tingle. “I’ll just stand here until you give in.”

Keith swallows. “Come on, this is stupid.”

“Just one hug, man.”

Keith takes a deep breath, finally turning around and glaring up at Lance, who is much closer than he thought he was. He smells cupcakes and wants to bury his face into Lance’s neck. Sighing in defeat, he steps forward and wraps his arms around Lance’s waist.

“That’s it, bring it in. See? Not so bad.”

“Fuck you.” Keith mumbles into his shirt, for various different reasons. But the sweet smell of Lance’s fabric softener is familiar and Keith revels in the warmth of Lance’s skin coming through his shirt. In a terrifying moment of realization, he finds himself thinking that he could stay like this all night. That this is truly what happiness feels like. He doesn’t even want to have sex with Kevin if it means staying here wrapped up in Lance’s stupid, annoyingly comfortable arms.

Lance lets go and Keith’s body screams in protest at the loss of touch. “Look at that! You are one step closer to being an actual human now.” Lance jokes, grinning. “How does it feel?”

Keith scowls at him. “Get out of my kitchen, asshole.”

Lance shrugs and walks out the door, laughing obnoxiously.

Keith’s heart is throbbing painfully in his chest.

There’s no way he’s making it out of this alive.

Chapter End Notes

watching 500 days of summer will make this chapter make more sense but...also dont
watch it if you have a fragile heart hahah

<3
Wedding Cake

Chapter Summary

Some dude named Dylan, Lance's 'sophomore year' bender, shallura wedding, dare i say mutual pining?

Chapter Notes

~//CHAPTER WARNINGS//: drug/alcohol use, anxiety attacks, vomiting, a somewhat toxic relationship~

this chapter is 18k and ive lost control of my life
my best friend got married this weekend so i was feeling inspired to write this chapter
i may or may have not have wrote a section of this while mildly tipsy on a plane *hides face in shame*

thank you to all of you who have supported me-- both by just reading my work and finding me on patreon. You are all amazing <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sophomore Year (College)

Lance stares down at the essay in front of him. He spent seven dollars getting this piece of shit printed out and spiral bound, only to have it marked up within an inch of its life with angry, red pen. The small, aggressive yet elegant cursive on the corner of the paper reads ‘See me after class.’

Lance’s hands shake. This is the third assignment he has gotten back this week with a grade below a C. It’s only Tuesday. He has somehow managed to fail three times and the week isn’t even halfway over. He glances up at his professor, who is laughing at a joke that a student told in the front row of the lecture hall. A very unfamiliar emotion—something between anger and bitterness—coils tightly in Lance’s stomach. God, fuck this professor. Fuck that asshole who always sits in the front row, kissing ass and answering every single question. Lance scoffs to himself. He bets that the essay on that boy’s desk isn’t scribbled on with red pen. Maybe it’s in blue pen instead. Maybe it’s got a giant A+ on the front cover. Maybe the teacher’s note says, ‘great job’, instead of the unfriendly message Lance received.

The professor proceeds to tell the class that he was very impressed with how the essays turned out. Lance clenches a fist. Everybody in this room did well. Everybody but him. They probably all know, too. They all can probably tell. They are probably judging him. The anger swirls around in his gut, mixing dangerously with the large dose of self loathing that was already settled there before he walked into the room. He feels so frustrated he could cry. He thinks about his family for a moment; how they are paying for his education. How he is squandering it because he’s just not smart enough. He thinks about his fleeting optimism; how seven days ago he sat down to write this actually
thinking it would be a success. How stupid does one have to be to keep failing, and failing, and failing before they realize that maybe, that’s all they can do?

Lance doesn’t realize he’s stood up until he notices that the class has fallen silent, all eyes looking back at him. He looks down and sees his books and papers piled messily into his arms, and he holds them close to his chest. He knows he’s scowling. He can feel the strain in his features. Everyone needs to stop looking at him like he’s some kind of wounded animal. He needs to get the fuck out of here. His fists clench even harder against his books. He wants to shout. He feels the overwhelming urge to toss his textbook at his professor. To scream, “Fuck you! Fuck you fuck you fuck you--” because he’s so frustrated and he’s so fed up with failing and how is it fair that some asswipe with a bad comb-over can make him feel like such horse shit?

He’s storming out of the classroom angrily before he even realizes it. Frustrated tears fill his eyes as he pushes out the door. His heart beats rapidly in his chest. It thumps against his ribcage. It vibrates in his ears. He feels lightheaded. He knows that these are signs of an anxiety attack. He knows, deep down, the this is his anxiety talking. That things aren’t as bad as they seem.

But it doesn’t matter what he knows, because what he feels is so much more real.

He keeps pushing forward and doesn’t stop walking. He doesn't know where he’s going. He doesn’t care. He tosses his essay into a trash can and continues past it. His heart still thumps angrily. Fingertips burning with the urge to curl into a fist and smash into the nearest expanse of drywall. He fights the urge.

Fucking anxiety medicine. He’s going to flush it down the toilet when he gets home. It hasn’t been doing shit. Why is he still miserable? Why can’t he get these stupid, stupid thoughts out of his head? Why does he still feel like he’s dying when he’s literally medicated to feel better? Is he really that untreatable? Is he past the point of no return? God, he hates that medicine. He hates the medicine, and the rapid beating of his heart, and the fuzziness in his vision. He hates the anxiety, the sadness, the anger, the loathing, clawing at his heart and splitting his chest open, painful and unforgiving. He hates it. He hates it.

And he hates himself.

God, he hates himself.

He passes the cafeteria. He passes the library.

He blinks and realizes there are tears falling from his eyes.

Slowing to a stop, he has a moment of clarity. A brief, surprising moment, reminding himself that he needs to get a grip. He takes a long, shaky breath, willing himself to calm down.

He thinks about texting Keith, but Keith’s grandfather passed away two days ago, and Keith has completely dropped off the face of the earth. He is really shaken up about it; his grandfather practically raised him. Lance has more memories with Keith’s grandfather than with Keith’s own parents. And he knows that Keith needs comfort, but he also knows, even moreso, that Keith needs his space. His fingers twitch over their text conversation, but he sighs in defeat. Keith can’t handle even more depression right now. It’s not fair to him.

He tries to think of someone else to text. But there’s nobody else who would be able to help him like Keith does.

“Hey. Lance, is it?”
Lance turns around to an unfamiliar face. A boy stands in front of him, smiling tentatively. He’s actually taller than Lance, by about an inch, which Lance isn’t used to. He’s got shaggy, dark brown hair and big, brown eyes. He fills out his shirt nicely. His pants are black and snug. Lance raises an eyebrow. He decides he’s attractive. How does he know Lance’s name?

“Yeah?” Lance says, anger still lingering a little from class.

The boys holds out a hand. “Hi, I’m Dylan.” He says. Lance stares down at his hand, not really in the mood. Reluctantly, he takes it.

“Hi?” He says skeptically.

“I’m in your Intro to Lodging class.” Dylan explains. “I noticed you seemed upset today, I just wanted to make sure you were alright.”

Lance blinks at him, pleasantly surprised. “What?” He asks, not being able to stop himself.

“That essay was tough for you too, right? I got a C on mine. It was hell to write, too.”

Lance doesn’t understand why he is having so much trouble processing what is happening. This stranger is being...so nice to him. This... hot stranger. “Yeah...I didn’t do too well on it.”

“I think that professor is a dick. He’s got it out for me, I swear.” Dylan says casually. Making conversation. Being friendly. Lance blinks again, feeling a little caught off guard.

“Yeah, I think so too.” Lance replies. “He pisses me off sometimes. I just had to get out of there today.”

“Yeah, I totally feel that.” Dylan says, smiling. “I left early too.”

Lance nods, feeling himself, strangely, start to smile too. His anxiety is still tugging at his chest; a dull, angry throb that is begging to be felt. He studies Dylan’s grinning face, pushing it down. “That class is hard.”

“All of my classes are hard.” Dylan replies.

“Yeah. Same. I’m so exhausted and it’s not even the end of the week yet.”

Dylans smile melts into a shy quirk of the lips. “Wanna say fuck it? Get a drink with me?”

Lance is a little floored by the suggestion. Kind of smooth, very appealing. He tries not to let the shock show on his face. Ten minutes ago he was sobbing and now he’s getting drinks with a hot guy. Life is strange.

“Why not?” He says, shrugging nonchalantly. Intro to Lodging is an evening class, so it’s not that early to be drinking. It’s seven PM. That’s an acceptable time to get a beer with someone right?

The small, anxious voice in the back of his head nearly explodes. You don’t know this guy. He could rape you. He could kill you. He’s probably just being nice to you because someone paid him. There’s no way he actually thinks you’re attractive. He’s got to have so ulterior motive. It’s a trap Lance. Think about how much work you have to do. Is drinking really a good idea? Leave. Leave. Leave. Go home.

“There’s a bar that just opened really close to campus.” Dylan says. “It’s apparently a shithole, but I just really need a beer.”
Lance painfully swallows down the fear. “I need one too.” He says, being honest. “Real bad.” He falls into step beside Dylan and they start walking.

“So, what’s your major?” Dylan asks. Again with the friendly conversation.

“Hospitality.” Lance answers. “I have extended family who owns a hotel in California. I used to help them out there as a kid.”

“Nice.” Dylan nods. “I’m thinking of going into the restaurant business. Maybe opening my own club or something.”

“Club?” Lance giggles. “What the hell are you doing in Intro to Lodging?”

Dylan smiles sheepishly. “To be honest? I’m totally in there by accident. It was definitely supposed to be something else. But I’m getting business credits for it so.” He shrugs, blushing a little.

Lance laughs. “Amazing.” He jokes.

They continue talking about their classes. Dylan is technically majoring in business management. He says his classes last year were easy, but this year they are killer. Lance just nods along, thankful for the distraction. Thankful to hear about somebody else's life, because his is a fucking disaster.

Dylan digs a hand into his pocket and pulls out a joint. He raises it to Lance. “Wanna smoke?”

Lance looks at it a little hesitantly. He’s never smoked weed before. But this seems like the perfect time to do it. His body is practically begging for something to calm him down. He’s sure that taking one tiny hit won’t hurt him. And who says no to a joint from a hot guy? Not Lance.

“Yeah, sure.”

He watches Dylan light the tip of it and take a drag. His eyes fall shut. He holds the smoke in for an impressively long amount of time before blowing it out. Lance studies him, fascinated. He hands the joint to Lance.

Lance puts it to his lips, nervous. He almost doesn’t go through with it. But the voice in his head is still shrieking, and he wants to cover his ears because he can’t fucking take it anymore. He breathes it in, feeling the warm, burning smoke fill his chest.

For a moment, it feels pleasant. Hot. Then it catches in his throat and he doubles over, coughing. He can hear Dylan chuckling.

“First time?” He asks.

“Yeah.” Lance chokes out, nodding with tearful eyes and bringing the joint to his lips, determined to try again. He breathes it in for a second time and, knowing what to expect, doesn’t cough again.


Lance blinks slowly, feeling warm all over. This guy is definitely flirting with him. He watches Dylan take another hit. He doesn’t know if it’s the weed, or the moonlight, but Lance can’t help but think that this guy is his guardian angel. He showed up just when Lance needed someone. And he’s gorgeous.

Okay, it might be the weed.

Dylan passes the joint back to him. Lance grins excitedly, feeling relaxed for the first time in months.
When they get to the bar, Lance is high. He’s so high, that he almost doesn’t even notice how shitty the bar is. It’s like a scene from a Freddy Krueger horror movie. It’s pretty empty, too. Well, not empty—it’s full of people. They are just not as closely packed as they usually are. But he just thinks it’s funny. He can’t stop giggling. Dylan feels warm next to him, as they make their way over to the bar. He hears Dylan ordering shots. It sounds far away and too close, all at the same time. Lance blinks slowly. Lazily. The heat in his face, in the air, in his fingertips, is burning and delicious. Dylan takes a shot and Lance watches his throat bob as he swallows. He wants to kiss that neck. Dylan smells like caramel and Lance feels like he can almost see it, in some sort of heightened sense of awareness. He feels like it’s shimmering on his skin. He wants to lick it off.

Oh god, now he’s starving.

He downs the shot that Dylan somehow placed in his hands when he wasn’t paying attention. It doesn’t even burn when it goes down. He can barely feel it. He sways back and forth pleasantly, reveling in the silence that has settled in his mind. No screaming voice. No pestering self loathing. Just warmth. Warmth everywhere. The warmth of Dylan’s hand on his thigh. The warmth of the thick, sweaty air. The warmth of the lingering feeling of smoke in his lungs.

Dylan hands him a second shot.

He takes it.

His heart beats slowly. Calmly. He feels sweat beading on his forehead, but he doesn’t care, because the tiny droplets are forming on Dylan’s forehead too, and it actually looks really sexy. Lance bites his lip. Dylan raises an eyebrow at him.

“What is it?” He asks.

Lance shrugs. “Mmm, nothing.” He says.

Dylan smirks, eyes darting around Lance’s face. Lance wants to nibble on his lips.

“One more shot?” Dylan asks.

“Two more.” Lance says, smiling even bigger.

“Maybe three.”

“Three sounds great.”

The shots are placed in a long line in front of them. Dylan takes them consecutively, one after the other, after the other. Lance has never done that before in his life, but he’s feeling like this is a fitting opportunity to start.

He picks up the first glass, downing it. Dylan chuckles in his ear.

He slams that glass down and picks up the second one, downing it. Dylan’s arms wrap around his waist from behind him.
And everything gets hazy.

The rest of the night comes to Lance in flashes. He’s standing at a table with a bunch of strangers, laughing loudly at something he doesn’t remember. He’s at the bar again, with Dylan’s hand sliding up his shirt. He’s outside the bar, cold air biting at his nose. He’s got Dylan pushed up against the freezing cold brick and he is **finally** kissing his neck, biting at the skin there. His face is in Dylan’s hands. Dylan is saying, in a low, rumbling voice, “I think you’re *exquisite*, Lance McClain.” His eyes are darker under the night sky. Lance’s heart thumps pleasantly, as hands roam all over his body. *Exquisite...* 

And then vomit.

Vomit on tiled floor. On his chin. On his fingers. His head is pounding. His shoulders are shivering. He looks around for Dylan but can’t find him. He hears Keith, from somewhere far behind him, or above him, swearing frustratedly. It sounds distant.

A warm, wet towel cleaning off his hands. Cold, familiar fingers intertwining with his, holding them steady and running water over them.

Keith’s pale face. Large, violet, worried eyes.

*Pretty eyes.*

A soft, warm pillow pressed against his cheek as he falls into a deep, deep sleep.

xxx

Keith is about to fall asleep when his apartment door bursts open. He’s almost positive it is Lance. They have only been living together for a short time but Keith has already learned that Lance is much more of a night owl; always staying out late in the library and coming home at ungodly hours. Keith hasn’t really been around lately to study with Lance, so he’s not sure what his schedule is like. Ever since his grandpa died, Keith hasn’t left his room. He knows that eventually he’ll have to face the world again, but his heart feels far too weak.

Lance left for his ‘Intro to Lodging’ class hours ago, and hasn’t come back. It makes Keith feel relieved at the sound of the door opening. However, he hears a voice he doesn’t recognize and shoots upwards into a sitting position.

“Hey, *hey*, which one is your room? Lance?”

A muffled answer from the boy in question.

Keith pushes his door open and sees Lance’s limp body draped over an absolute stranger. Some guy with messy, dark brown hair and pants that look like they’re way too tight on him. Keith scowls.

“Who the fuck are you?” He spits, a little too defensively. “What did you do to him?”

The boy jumps slightly at his voice. His face falls. “*Shit*, are you his boyfriend? I *knew* he had one. God dammit.”
Keith stomps up to him. “What did you do?” He practically growls it, eyeing Lance’s lifeless body.

The boy looks scared. “Look, n-nothing, man. He just got really drunk, okay? We might’ve smoked a bit too. He...threw up a couple of times.” Upon seeing Keith’s eyes burning a hole into his head, the boys adds, “He just needs to sleep.”

Keith wraps his arms around Lance’s waist, hoisting him upwards. Lance falls against him. He smells like weed. And vodka. And cigarettes. Keith wrinkles his nose and nearly pushes the guy out the door. God, the last thing he needs right now is to have to worry about Lance. And now Lance is running off and getting cross faded with self proclaimed heartthrobs in tight jeans. Keith sighs, walking in the direction of Lance’s room.

“Keith.” Lance mumbles it into his neck. It sounds more like a garble than a word. “Feel sick again.”

Keith pauses. “Are you going to throw up aga--?” Lance makes another garbled noise into his neck and Keith books it to the bathroom. They barely make it to the toilet. Vomit gets all over the floor.


“Mmhmm.”

Keith grabs a washcloth from the shelf, wetting it and leaning down towards Lance. He can worry about the mess on the floor later. Right now he just needs to get Lance cleaned up. He grabs Lance by the collar, pulling him into a sitting position against the wall. Lance’s face melts into one of pure relief when Keith lifts the washcloth to his chin.

“Why did you do this, Lance?” Keith asks softly, knowing he isn’t going to get an answer.

Lance’s breath is evening out, like he’s already falling asleep. He’s shivering, which is concerning, and Keith desperately wants to get him under some covers so he stops. When he finishes with Lance’s chin, he goes to work on the mess on Lance’s hands. Lance sighs contentedly as Keith hold his hand up.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you today.” Keith mumbles, mostly because he knows Lance can’t really hear him. “I should’ve texted. Asked if you were okay. I’ve been...distant...and I’m so--”

“Pretty eyes.” Lance breathes, cutting Keith off. Keith glances up and sees Lance’s eyes open, staring down at him. He huffs, way too exhausted to put up with whatever shit Lance is trying to pull right now.

“Okay, Lance.”

“Shit…’m sorry, Snickers.” Lance mutters. “Sorry sorry sorry…”

“Come on.” Keith says, grabbing Lance’s wrists and standing up with him. “You’ve gotta get in bed.”

“Bed…”

“Yeah. Bed.”

Lance burrows himself under the covers and Keith stands, staring down at him nervously. He doesn’t want to leave. What if something else goes wrong? What if Lance vomits again?
Keith is way too tired to go back to his room and worry all night. He climbs into bed with Lance, turning away from him and gripping the covers at his chest.

“G’night, Keith.” Lance murmurs. And Keith wants to talk to him. To talk to Lance, not this weird, shelled out version of him. But he can’t right now. It makes an unpleasant feeling blossom in his chest.

“Goodnight, Lance.”

xxx

Present Day

“Good morning, Keith!” Lance’s happy, boisterous voice cuts through Keith’s deep sleep. A fluffy pillow hits him square in the face. “Today is the day! I have a million things to do and you are the lucky boy who gets to help me!”

Keith grumbles into his pillow. “No.”

Lance flops down onto the bed next to him. Keith is too tired to pull away when Lance rolls over, practically on top of him. “Come on.” Lance says loudly into his ear. “Your brother is getting married today! Get excited!”

Another groan. “What time is it?”

Lance hesitates for a long moment. “Uh...You know, does time even exist? Or is it just a construct set in place to make human beings feel like we have some semblance of control over our meaningless existence?”

“Lance, I’ll kill you.”

Lance clears his throat. “It’s...9AM. Except, like, four hours before that.”

Keith doesn’t reply.

“Come on, Snickers. I have an appointment at the other side of town at seven to pick up the cake.”

“Have fun with that.”

Lance gasps, offended. “Keith!”

“Okay, okay fine.” Keith grumbles, pushing Lance off of his bed. “I’ll be out in ten. Go away now.”

“Yay!” Lance scrambles out of the room. “Hurry up!”

Keith sighs as he trudges out of bed. The only person in the world who can wake him up at 5AM and actually get him out, is Lance. He throws on his black shirt and jeans, along with a hoodie, and then brushes his teeth. He can hear Lance messing about in the kitchen, probably fussing over something. He washes his face. Tries to fix his hair, a little helplessly. Of course it’s five in the morning and he’s still thinking about looking good for Lance. Because he’s an idiot.
Giving up, he walks into the kitchen with his hands stuffed in his pockets. It’s going to be a long day. He’s already exhausted and there are more than twelve hours until the wedding.

Lance is fiddling with something on the stove. His back is turned towards Keith.

“What the hell are you up to?” Keith asks, voice flat.

Lance swivels around, eyes wide, like he’s been caught. “No! It’s not ready yet!”

“What’s not ready?”

“Your breakfast!” Lance steps to the side and gestures wildly at the plate his body was previously covering. “I was trying to make you breakfast. Because I knew how grumpy you’d be.” Lance pouts adorably. “But I wanted to surprise you with it.”

Keith blinks at him, blushing. “You made me breakfast?”

“What?” Lance sounds uneasy. “You always do it for me.”

“Well yeah, but…” Keith walks over to the plate. He bites down a grin when he sees a smiley face made out of eggs and bacon. “Oh my god.”

“Ta-daa! See, It’s a face! And I was going to be all ‘oh hey Keith, it looks just like you’ and you were going to laugh the grumpiness away and it was going to be great. But then you got ready too fast.”

Keith stares, trying not to chuckle at Lance’s disappointed pouting. He can’t control the flush in his cheeks. God, he’s so fucking adorable. Keith wants to die. “It still is great.” He says cautiously, smiling. “Thanks, Lance.”

Lance’s face breaks into a grin. He’s such a child sometimes, but that’s what Keith loves so much about him. He grabs the plate from the counter and picks up a piece of bacon, taking a huge bite out of it. “Mmm, that’s actually not bad.”

“See? I’ve gotten better at cooking! What’d I tell ya?”

Keith takes another bite, savoring the average, bland flavor because it’s really not that delicious, but the smile blooming across Lance’s lips definitely is, so he smiles as he chews. “Shall we go?” He asks. “I think we’re getting late.”

Lance nods, clapping loudly. “Hell yeah!”

xxx

Lance’s car, as usual, is burning hot. Keith doesn’t mind anymore though. It’s something that brings him comfort now, as is anything that Lance does. Lance sings happily from the driver’s seat. He always says that he doesn’t like mainstream music but then loses his shit when he hears Nicki Minaj. Keith finds it endearing. He rests his head on the window and stares a little too openly at Lance’s grinning, singing face.

“I think you are more excited than Shiro and Allura are.” Keith jokes, a little fondly.
“Of course I am!” Lance replies, cutting off his own singing. “It’s a wedding!”

“What’s the big deal? They’ve been together for four years. They’ll continue being together after this. Nothing will change.”

“Oh my god, Keith. Could you be less romantic?” Lance groans, rolling his eyes. “I swear, flowers die when you walk past them.”

“I’m just stating a fact!”

“Weddings are such a big deal! The decorations, the music, the unconditional love? I’m telling you, Snickers. My wedding is going to be grand. People are going to be talking about it for centuries. The wallpaper is going to be diamond encrusted. The centerpieces are going to be made by famous sculptors all over the world. There will be flowers everywhere. There will be satin bows tied to all of the fucking chairs. Every single one of them.”

Keith sighs. “I literally want the polar opposite.” He says.

Lance chuckles. “Well it’s a good thing we’re not getting married, then!” It comes out as a joke. Keith clenches his fist. “Right.” He says, laughing nervously. Why should he care? It’s just a stupid crush. It’s not like he was planning on ever marrying Lance. That would be insane. That would mean something much, much worse.

“So…” Lance starts.

“So what?”

“So…are you bringing Hunk? You know, as your ‘plus one?’”

Keith purses his lips. He honestly forgot that he was allowed to bring a date. He vaguely remembers Shiro saying something about it, but he probably wasn’t paying attention. He’s sure that Hunk would be okay with it. He studies Lance’s face.

“Are you bringing Olivia?” He asks, dreading the answer.

Lance shrugs. “I was thinking about it. I asked her if she’d be okay with it and she said yes. Do you think it’d be cool to bring her?”

Keith grits his teeth. He wants to shout, No! But it isn’t his decision to make. It’s Shiro and Allura’s. And of course they would want the first girl that Lance has seriously liked in years to come to their wedding. “I don’t think it matters.” He says carefully.

“Cool.” Lance says, smiling. “I can’t wait for you to meet her. I think you’ll really like her.”

Keith nods, turning his head to look out the window. “She sounds great.” He says, heart clenching.

“She is.” Lance nods back.

Keith sighs. He doesn’t mean for it to sound as sad as it does. “Yeah, I am, by the way. Bringing Hunk.” He says, a little bitterly.

Lance shoots him a look. Something in between happiness and shock. “Oh really?” He asks.

“Yes. We decided on it last week. Shiro was really excited about it. Also, Hunk is kind of going to be there anyway, to watch over the food.” Keith feels uncomfortable saying it. He feels even more uncomfortable about the fact that being trapped beneath such a massive lie isn’t really bothering him.
at all. That’s how he knows how far gone he is.

“Well that’ll be fun!” Lance says, smiling. “Although you’re going to have to help me out with a lot of behind the scenes stuff. So I may have to pull you away a few times.” Lance says. It sounds a little strained. He must be anxious about the wedding going smoothly.

“Yeah, of course.” Keith agrees, trying to ease his nerves.

Lance’s expression falls into an easy smile. “Alright, we’re here. Stop number one: Cake!”

xxx

Lance is really in his element today. He has already dragged Keith to four places, running errands. And although Keith is literally the anti wedding planner, he seems to be holding up okay. He asks questions, staying engaged. He doesn’t even complain once. Lance can feel Keith looking at him as he discusses various details with the cake decorator, Shay. He feels comforted by Keith’s presence there, making sure he doesn’t have a meltdown. And he kinda likes it when Keith sees him in his element. It’s not that he feels the need to impress Keith, it’s just that Keith has seen him through some particularly dastardly times. Lance feels guilty for all the shit Keith put up with in college. The worry, and the frustration over Lance’s carelessness. He feels the need to show Keith that he’s more than okay now. That he loves what he does, and he’s got it together, and he’s good at it. That Keith doesn’t have to worry anymore. That he never has to worry like that again.

It’s been years, but Lance still believes Keith deserved better. Someday, he’ll make it up to him.

They drive to Shiro and Allura’s with the cake and additional decorations cramped up in the backseat. It’s 2PM and the wedding is at five. Shiro looks incredibly excited to see them.

“Lance! Keith!” He grins broadly. “Just in time! I was about to head over to the venue now. Allura is already there getting ready. She’s been there all morning.”

Lance grins back just as broadly. He isn’t going to mess this up. “We’ll follow you. All of the stuff is in my trunk. Don’t worry, the cake is well protected. I know exactly where to go when we get there, so you don’t have to worry about anything, okay?”

Shiro looks relieved. “Yeah, thank you Lance.’ He says.

“You seem nervous.” Keith says monotonously from behind Lance in his blunt, Keith-like fashion. “Stop that.”

“I can’t help it.” Shiro says, studying his fingers. “I’m getting married.”

Keith lifts an eyebrow like he still doesn’t understand what the big deal is. Lance rolls his eyes.

“Keith is particularly soulless today.” He drones.

“I’m not!” Keith defends. “I’m just as soulless as I usually am.”

Shiro chuckles. “Keith will be fine. There’s going to be an open bar.”

Keith grins. Lance sighs. “There’s also going to be the promise of eternal love, but a tequila sunrise
might be able to fill the void in Keith’s heart.”

Keith shoves him, smirking playfully, “Screw you, man.” He is blushing.

Again.

After a few more minutes of relatively meaningless conversation, Lance and Keith leave Shiro to take his own car to the venue. Keith falls asleep a few minutes into the car ride, so Lance just plays the music on low volume and sings quietly. He did wake Keith up at five, after all. And he doesn’t really mind, because Keith might be the quietest sleeper in the entire world. He barely moves. He barely snores. Lance used to actually fear for his life. He’s used to it now, though.

Even from the outside, the venue is beautiful. Lance has seen it a couple of times—once when he came to check it out by himself and the second time with Shiro and Allura. But there is something about seeing it on the actual wedding day that makes it so much more valuable. The wedding is in the reception hall at one of the most well known hotels, just outside of town. Shiro and Allura don’t make an enormous amount of money, but they both worked together to save up for his, which Lance thinks is amazing. He shakes Keith awake and they go to work, emptying the tunk and carrying everything to the reception hall.

His mind is buzzing with all of the details that still need to be taken care of. But it’s also buzzing with the excitement of the moment, because Lance has planned dozens of events like this since he started at Altea Event Planning but this is different. This is for people who he loves with his whole heart, and wants it to show in everything he does. He wants people to walk in and know how much he cares.

They enter the reception hall and Keith looks around, an expression of awe making its way to his face. Lance smiles smugly.

“Isn’t it great?”

Keith looks at him, crossing his arms over his chest. “It’s alright.”

“I think you mean amazing.”

The corner of his lip twitches upwards. “It’s a little bit better than alright.”

Lance chuckles. “I have been blessed with your approval. I can die happy now. Come help me with this monster of a cake.”

Keith laughs as they make their way to the corner of the room, where the cake is waiting to be moved. “Fine.” He says. “But this is the last thing I’m doing. God, I’m exhausted.”

“Oh shut up, you big baby. This is my life. You don’t get to complain.” They stand on either side of the cake. “On three, okay?”

Keith nods, bracing himself.

xxx

The remaining hours go by in a flurry of small errands, a few breakdowns from bridesmaids, and the
arrival of Hunk with boatloads of food loaded into the back of his catering truck. Keith feels incredibly relieved to see him. It feels a little safer when someone is around who knows the truth. And Hunk is a pretty great guy, too. Keith really lucked out, in terms of fake boyfriends. There are definitely worse people to fake-date.

“Hey, Hunk is here.” Keith says happily, waving at the boy in question as he enters the hall. Lance pauses what he’s doing, looking up and smiling. Hunk is already dressed to the nines in a black tux with a golden-yellow skinny tie. He’s got his hair gelled back. He actually looks really nice. Keith grins at him. “Hi.” He says.

“Hey, Keith.” Hunk says. Before Keith even knows what’s happening, Hunk is wrapping him up in his arms. “Good to see you again.”

Keith hugs back, feeling a little giddy with adrenaline because this is the most direct way of “making Lance notice” ever. He flushes as he pulls away, refusing to look at Lance’s reaction. He keeps his eyes trained on Hunk’s face. “We were just wondering where the food would be.” He says, making conversation. “I mean, it’s cool you’re here too but we really do only care about the food.”

Hunk laughs. “Of course, of course. Totally understandable.”

“Thanks for getting here on time, man.” Lance says through a smile. “I was super stressed about the food not being ready.”

“When am I ever late?” Hunk asks teasingly.

“Yeah, I don’t know what I was worried about.” Lance says back, jokingly. Then he looks back down at the bundle of ribbons he was fiddling with in his hand.

Hunk turns to Keith. He gives him a knowing smile. It’s comforting.

“You...look really nice.” Keith says, a little awkwardly. Because he hasn’t really done the whole “dating” thing in a while and he especially hasn’t done the whole “fake dating” thing either.

“Thanks!” Hunk says excitedly, looking down at himself. Out of the corner of his eye, Keith sees Lance glancing back up at him. “I haven’t worn this baby in a while. Last time I wore it was opening night at my restaurant.”

“Oh, sweet.” Keith says, meaning it. “That must’ve been awesome.”

Hunk gives him a once-over. “Where’s your fancy suit?” He asks, a little teasingly. Keith smirks, opening his mouth to answer, but Lance cuts him off.

“We’re probably going to get ready now. Just had to finish up a few things.” He says quickly.

“Oh.” Hunk replies. “Alright then.”

Keith raises a subtle eyebrow at Hunk, who looks like he’s holding in laughter. “Well, you two have fun.” Hunk starts. “I’ll be unloading fifty pounds of grilled chicken from my trunk.” Without warning, he lifts a closed fist to Keith’s cheek and swipes his thumbs across it. It’s a small, affectionate gesture. “Had an eyelash.” He mumbles sheepishly. Then he grins, a little smugly, at Lance, before chuckling and walking away. Keith blinks at Hunk’s retreating figure. Where does he come up with this stuff?

“Oh my god, Snickers.” Lance whispers loudly, leaning in close to Keith. “He really likes you.”
Keith laughs, trying to hide the blush in his cheeks at the sudden proximity. “You think?”

“Yeah!” Lance grins at him. “Oh man, now you’re blushing too! You’ve got it bad, man.”

Keith sighs defeatedly, searching Lance’s sky-blue eyes for any sign; any notion that maybe, he might feel the same way.

He doesn’t see anything.

“Yeah.” He says hoarsely. “I guess I do.”


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Sophomore Year (College)

Dylan hums into Lance’s mouth. “Holy shit, Lance…” He breathes. “Feels so good.”

Lance doesn’t really know what he’s doing. Truth be told, this is the first time he’s given a handjob to anyone other than himself and it’s actually a lot more difficult than it looks. The angles are all different. It’s messing with him. But Dylan sounds so hot like this. And Lance is way too high to be functioning properly, so he just goes with it. His mind spins as Dylan’s fists bunch up the front of his shirt.

Lance feels like he’s riding on the adrenaline of the moment. They are crowded into the back of a stairwell like a couple of preteens. Anyone could walk in. Except for the fact that it’s three AM and nobody probably will. Lance loves the forbidden feeling of Dylan’s hands traveling up his shirt. He love’s the white noise buzzing in his ears from the weed. The lazy, slurred feeling of the tequila. Alcohol pumps through his veins and he feels everything and nothing, all at once. It’s intoxicating. It’s such a relief. Because Lance has not had one anxious thought, all night, Not one moment of regret. Or self doubt. Everything is just the hazy feeling in his lungs and the sugary sweet taste of cranberry vodka on Dylan’s lips.

Dylan moans into his mouth and Lance feels like he’s on top of the world. He knows how good this feels. He does it to himself all the time. Dylan starts panting as he gets closer.

Deep down, Lance knows that he shouldn’t be doing this. But that’s what makes it so delicious. Maybe the mornings afterwards aren’t too great. But the last month that Lance has spent with Dylan has been the most amazing month of his entire life.

Even though there are only a few moments he can actually remember.

Ever since he met Dylan, his life has been a whirlwind of fearlessness. Adventure. Living while you’re young. Lance has always been too afraid to take risks like this. Now he, quite literally, gets off on it. Dylan introduced him to a whole new side of himself. One he didn’t even know was there. And he’s gorgeous, too. He has big dark eyes and thick, brown hair. His body is immaculate. Lance can’t get enough of it.

Lance doesn’t want to be the kind of guy that storms out of class, holding back tears. He wants to be this guy; making out with a hot stranger in the stairwell after a night of insane partying. This guy is
courageous. *This* guy doesn’t have anxiety. And Lance feels like he likes himself for the first time in a very long time.

Dylan comes into his hand and Lance pitches forward, smashing his lips into a kiss. The air is hot and thick around them. Lance is shaking, desperate to be touched. Dylan laughs, low and hoarse, as he leans down and kisses Lance’s neck.

Lance hums, closing his eyes. This is the stairwell he takes to get to his Finance II class. His Intro to Lodging class. Both classes which he hasn’t been to in weeks. But he doesn’t really care, because this feeling, or rather, lack of feelings, is worth it.

Keith is mad at him. They haven’t talked in days. Lance has made it a point not to come home. Every time he does, Keith is waiting at the door. He used to look worried. A few weeks ago, he would fuss over Lance every night. Making sure he was okay. Now, he just looks pissed. And Lance is pissed at *him*, too. Because he doesn’t *understand*. He’s never had to deal with the craziness that Lance has. The nonstop voice telling him he’s not good enough. He’s never had to take a medication every night that doesn’t even *work*. He’s never had to cry on a therapist’s couch, or leave class because he couldn’t stop the tears, or feel physically *sick* because he was so nervous about an exam.

Keith doesn’t get it. But Dylan does. So *fuck* what Keith thinks.

xxx

They somehow end up back at a club. Lance doesn’t remember how they got here. Dylan’s mouth was on his dick in the stairwell and now he’s sitting at a table, surrounded by strangers who look just as drunk as he feels. There are hot, sweaty hands gripping at his waist from somewhere. They’re not Dylan’s, but he likes the attention. The smell of sweat fills the air. Lance has never been to this club, he doesn’t think. The table is dirty. Bodies press up behind him. He feels the music thrumming through every bone in his body. God, he’s so high. Everything is registered as a sensation. Hot, sweaty skin pressed against the nape of his neck. The smell of strawberries as a girl drapes herself over his shoulders. The warmth of the colored lights, bathing Dylan’s face in a fuzzy, chaotic glow.

He tastes vodka. Feels the burn as it runs down his throat. But he doesn’t remember even ordering a shot. His lips are attached to someone else’s now. But it’s not Dylan. It’s the strawberry girl, he thinks. She doesn’t taste like strawberries though. She tastes like cigar smoke. He wonders what her name is. The room is spinning and he finds that he doesn’t even care.

He sees Dylan kissing a man’s neck on the other side of the bar. If his heart breaks, he doesn’t really feel it.

He is outside now. Dylan’s hands are on him again. It feels like *deja vu*. Cold, brick wall presses through the back of his thin tshirt. He shivers. “You’re gorgeous, you’re *gorgeous*, Lance…” Dylan mumbles, over and over and over again. It sounds like a song. Maybe it is a song. Is Dylan singing to him? Can Dylan sing?

This, he decides, feels like deja vu too.

xxx

*Present Day*

Lance looks down worriedly at the three bow ties in front of him. Navy blue, sky blue, and olive green. He sighs. He can never make these decisions himself. He always ends up regretting them. He looks over at the closed bathroom door. “Hey, Snickers?”

“What.” Keith’s monotonous reply comes muffled through the door.

Lance puts a finger on his chin. “Bermuda Triangle, Banana, or Doritos?”

Keith actually laughs a little. “Bermuda Triangle.” He says confidently from the other side of the door. “Although I gotta admit that one was a bit more challenging.”

Lance smiles to himself, grabbing the sky blue bowtie. “I’m getting better at stumping the great Keith Kogane?”

“Nah, don’t flatter yourself.” Keith says, laughing as he opens the door. “Okay, now answer honestly. Do I look stupid?”

Lance glances up at Keith.

And...

“Woah.” Lance says, feeling like a bit of an idiot for saying it out loud. Keith is wearing a pressed, black tux with a black button down underneath. Typical to what Keith usually wears to anything formal. And usually Keith wears a maroon bow tie. Or a red one. But the small bowtie gracing Keith’s neck is a bright, beautiful pop of violet.

Keith sighs. “Is it that bad?” He asks, uncharacteristically. As if Keith has ever cared how he looked. But then Lance remembers... right. Hunk. Keith reaches up to his neck. “I mean, I think the bowtie is a little--”

Lance takes a few hurried steps towards Keith. “No! No, don’t touch anything.” Keith blinks up at him with surprised eyes. Eyes even more purple than the fabric around his neck. It takes Lance a moment to realize that his reaction was a little bit dramatic. “You, uh…” Keith’s eyebrow slowly raises. Lance swallows. Jesus, what is wrong with him? “You look great.” It sounds like it falls flat, but Keith smiles anyway.

“Thanks.” He says. Then he tilts his head to the side, eyeing Lance’s bowtie. He reaches out and straightens it, chuckling softly. “Yeah.” He says, voice quiet. “I knew that Bermuda Triangle would be the best.”

Lance shakes his head slowly, biting down a grin. “You are a mystery to me.” He says in disbelief.

Keith shrugs. “Or maybe you’re just more predictable than you think.”
“Maybe.”

Sighing, Keith drops his fingers from Lance’s bowtie and holds his elbow out. “Shall we?” He asks, with an adorable smile.

You know. Adorable to...some people.

Lance links their arms. “Let’s go.”

xxx

Olivia is waiting for him downstairs. He greets her with a kiss on the lips. She looks gorgeous in a sleek, coral dress and Lance loves the smell of her perfume. Her blonde hair is down in loose waves that fall flawlessly over her shoulders. For a moment, Lance doesn’t feel worthy. It’s a familiar feeling. He pushes it down. He’s not going to let his paranoid thoughts ruin this day. He’s worked too hard for it.

“You look beautiful.” Lance says.

Olivia hums. “You’re not looking too shabby yourself.” She says teasingly. “Love the bowtie.”

For some stupid reason, Lance blushes at that. “Yeah, it was a good choice, I think.” He says, leading her into the reception hall.

“Lance.” Olivia breathes, taking in the reception hall and the small area put aside for the ceremony. “You did all of this?”

Lance smiles sheepishly. “I mean, not all of it.” He rubs the back of his neck. “But, uh. Most of it. Do you like it?”

Her eyes sparkle. “It’s absolutely beautiful! Wow, you are really talented.”

Lance laughs nervously. “Thank you.” He says.

“So, want to give me the grand tour?”

“Of course, m’lady.” Lance replies happily, holding out a hand. Olivia intertwines their fingers, giggling happily.

“Lead the way.”

They walk around the perimeter of the room. Lance points out some of the larger things he put together. He tells horror stories about tracking down the florist and having to pay twice for the photographer. Olivia laughs at his stories, which makes him feel giddy and warm. Her hand feels good in his.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Keith talking closely with Hunk. He sees the small, violet bow. He doesn’t know why, but he feels like one glance isn't enough. He’s pulling Olivia towards them before he even realizes.

“Keith! Hunk!” He greets. They both look up at him and smile. Hunk has got a hand on the small of Keith’s back. Lance, confusedly, has to fight to ignore it. “This is Olivia. Olivia, this is Keith, He’s
my best friend. We grew up together.” Olivia grins charmingly and shakes Keith’s hand.

“Nice to meet you, Keith.”

Keith sends her a tentative smile. But he’s always shy when he meets new people.

“And this is Hunk. He actually cooked the food here tonight! Super talented chef.” Lance continues.

“Hi, Hunk. I’ve only heard good things.” She says. “Can’t wait for dinner.”

Hunk grins bashfully. “Lance is apparently my free advertising.”

“You bet I am.” Lance says. “I’m excited for after dinner, though. Because of the open bar.” He smiles at Olivia. “Shiro and Allura really came through with that one.” When he sees Olivia’s unenthused expression, he nervously adds on, “If that’s something you’re into.”

Olivia smiles politely at him. “Oh, I don’t really drink.” She says. “Never have.”

Lance blinks at her. It’s not that he cares about Olivia’s choices, but what the hell would Olivia think if she knew about how he used to be? How he used to drink himself into oblivion, for weeks and weeks on end? How can Lance possibly show her that side of him?

No, this is good. This is a chance for him to kiss that side of himself goodbye. He hates that side of him. “Yeah, I don’t really drink either.” He lies. “I just thought you might want to know about it.” He smiles at her brightened expression and ignores the feeling of Keith’s eyes, burning a hole in the side of his head.

Keith opens his mouth to say something but the alarm on Lance’s phone goes off. His first instinct is to shriek with excitement, because that means it’s time to take their places for the ceremony. But Lance has a feeling Olivia isn’t into guys who shriek at the mere idea of a wedding ceremony. That’s probably a bit too much to handle after only dating for a month and a half.

“Oh boy, places everyone!” He says, with a normal amount of excitement. “The ceremony is about to start.”

He watches Keith and Hunk smile at each other, like they share a secret. Hunk holds out a hand and Keith takes it. It baffles Lance into silence. He’s seen Keith date a bunch of different guys, but usually they liked him a hell of a lot more than he liked them. He’s...never seen Keith act like this with someone.

He doesn’t know why, but he feels himself frowning a little.

xxx

The ceremony, admittedly, is beautiful. Keith doesn’t know if it is because the decorations remind him of Lance, or if it’s because he can see the love literally pouring out of Shiro’s eyes as Allura walks down the aisle. He doesn’t blame him. Allura looks breathtaking. Lance is probably drooling out of his eyes. Keith smirks. He remembers when Lance had the worst crush on Allura. He was so torn up about it he almost couldn’t sleep. But Lance has grown a lot since then, and when Keith glances at his face from where he is standing next to Shiro, he sees a soft, affectionate smile on it.
The air is light. Keith feels happiness fluttering in his heart. Pride and love for his older brother, who taught him almost everything there was to learn about growing up. His parents could only get a late flight, so they will be here for the reception, and Keith can’t wait to see them. He misses them so much. He sees tons of familiar faces in the audience; people he has lost touch with. There is something wonderful about being surrounded by people that remind you of home. It’s so comforting. Keith loves the feeling of having family around.

Shiro is looking at Allura with a warmth that Keith can only really describe as love. He has never been in love, but he can read it so plainly on Shiro’s face. Like his expression explains it all. And then Allura is smiling softly back up at him, and Keith feels like he’s seeing their relationship for the first time. As if Allura has always been Shiro’s very attractive roommate until suddenly there they are, gazing into each other’s eyes like lovestruck fools.

Shiro’s vows are actually a lot bubblier than Keith thought they would be. He’s never heard Shiro talk like this about anyone. Lance was right, apparently. Shiro had been in love with Allura from the moment he met her. Lance always knew. Lance has always loved the idea of other people being in love. He was invested, from the moment Shiro came home and unplugged their xbox to tell them about meeting her.

Allura’s vows are tearful. She huffs frustratedly in the middle of them, trying to get herself to calm down. Shiro giggles at her. Keith glances at Lance, expecting to see him crying. Because that’s just what Lance would do in this situation. But Lance is biting his lip, clearly resisting the urge. Keith then remembers Olivia is there, which makes him angry; because this girl is robbing Lance of one of his most valuable pastimes. Crying at weddings is one of Lance’s favorite things to do. He always keep tissues in his pocket, like he’s ready. He’s ready to shed those happy, happy tears.

He smiles sheepishly at Olivia, who gives him a kind look.

She’s not a bad person. She’s just not Lance’s person.

Not that Keith is. That would be...

They kiss. Everyone cheers, snapping Keith out of his reverie. Lance stands up, whooping loudly and whistling through his fingers. Keith laughs uncontrollably, feeling weightless. Happy. Full of warmth. Shiro grins at Allura when they separate and then leans forward again, like he can’t get enough. Confetti falls from somewhere in the ceiling, and Lance looks up at it, proud. Because it was probably his decision. Keith watches the small white flakes fall into his brown hair, his eyelashes, his cheeks. He watches Lance laugh and it makes him feel hot all over. Lance is so irresistible without even trying. It’s breathtaking.

Shiro and Allura exit the aisle and the crowd of guests spill out of the seats, following them into the reception hall. Everyone is still cheering. Keith searches the crowd for Hunk, still giggling a little to himself. He feels a hand rest on the small of his back and turns around, expecting it to be Hunk. Lance’s arms fling around him before he can even turn around all the way. Lance’s face presses into his neck. The heat spreads to the rest of his body in seconds.

“Congrats, Snickers!” Lance muffles into his collar. “You are officially a brother in-law!

Keith laughs, hugging Lance back. He feels way too giddy to even care that Olivia is looking at them both like they are insane. “Thanks, Lance.” He says, grinning and maybe indulging himself by pressing his face into Lance’s the fluffy hair on the side of Lance’s head. He breathes in the smell of vanilla cupcakes. His heart feels full.

Lance pulls away too soon. “It was such a beautiful ceremony.” He says, eyes glinting. But Keith
can tell Lance is holding back. He looks down and sees Lance’s hand holding Olivia’s. He suddenly feels a little unwelcome. It’s stupid, and he knows it is, but he can’t help it.

“Have you seen Hunk?”

Lance’s face crumbles a little. Keith wonders why that is. “No. He’s probably looking for you though.”

Keith swallows, nodding. “Yeah.” He says. “Probably. I’ll see you inside?”

“Sure thing.” Lance replies, starting to pull Olivia towards the reception hall. He stares, a little forlorn, at Lance’s disappearing figure. God dammit. When will he stop feeling this way?

“Hey, man.” Hunk’s voice sounds from behind him. Keith turns around, coming face to face with Hunk’s sympathetic smile. “I’m sorry. I know it’s hard to see him with someone else.”

Keith sighs. “This is my brother’s wedding.” He says. “Tonight isn’t about me. It’s just…”

Hunk nods. “Hard?”

“Really hard.” Keith stuffs his hands in his pocket.

“But it’s totally working.” Hunk says smugly.

“What?”

“Lance. He’s totally not okay with this.” He gestures between the two of them.

Keith raises an eyebrow. “Shut up.”

“No, I’m serious! God, are you really that oblivious? You’re both insanely obvious. He scowls whenever I get closer to you.”

Keith shakes his head. “I really don’t believe you.”

Hunk sighs. “Fine.” He says, rolling his eyes. “But I’m telling you.”

“Today is a happy day. So, let’s not…dwell. Okay?” Keith tries a grin. “Ready to go eat your amazing food?”

Hunk laughs. “I mean, I get to eat it every day.” Hunk says proudly. Keith scoffs, grabbing his arm.

“Oh shut up.”

xxx

Sophomore Year (College)

Keith stumbles out of bed when he hears the door open. His heart is beating out of his chest. Is it Lance? Is it Lance? Is it Lance? The question repeats over and over and over again because he hasn’t seen Lance in almost three weeks. And it hurts terribly—like a paper cut that isn’t healing.
Because a little over a month ago, Lance was an integral part of his everyday life. He woke up with him and slept when he did. He ate with him, talked to him throughout the day. They grew up together, for crying out loud. And now Lance is gone. Just completely gone, in the most horrible way. He’s been gone for so long that there aren’t even traces of him left in the small apartment, reminding Keith that he was once there. His room is clean. None of his dishes are in the sink. The bathroom doesn’t smell like his shampoo. The whole apartment has a gaping hole in it where everything Lance used to be. And Keith feels like he’s going to be sick.

Last time he saw Lance, he was stumbling through the front door, with a bottle of beer in one hand and a handle of vodka in the other. Something that seemed to be happening a lot, Keith remembers thinking. This was the third week in a row that Lance had come home at four AM, drunk out of his mind. And Keith doesn’t mind getting fucked up once or twice, but the person he saw that night wasn’t Lance. It was some person who looked like Lance, and sounded like Lance, but had no brain to call their own. Keith was fed up. So he did what he always does when he’s terrified. When he’s worried sick. He completely lost it, and started screaming at him.

Apparently a drunk and high Lance is impossible to reason with, because Lance ended up getting so angry that he actually threw his keys at Keith’s head. Keith had a red scratch on his cheek for weeks, reminding him of what happened, even after Lance disappeared.

And now the sound of the door opening makes Keith literally jump off the couch. The nervousness and pent up anger rise to his face, forming angry tears in his eyes, when he sees Lance stumbling into the front door. But he’s not alone. Drunk Douchebag Dylan with the tight pants follows close behind him.

Lance looks horrible. He’s lost weight. His hair is dull and his skin is a sickly color. There are bags under his eyes and his clothes look worn, like he hasn’t washed them in a while. Keith wants to punch him. He wants to sock him in the jaw. Slap him out of this stupor that he’s in. Anger bubbles and boils it’s way from his stomach to his chest, and he feels like he could kill a man when Lance looks at him, dead in the eye, and says, “Oh, hey Keith.” Like he hasn’t been gone for weeks. Like he isn’t fucked up out of his mind. Like none of this ever happened.

Keith scowls. He wants to say, “are you okay?” or “stay, please stay and never leave again. I don’t work without you.”

He actually says, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Lance’s face falls. He looks dazed from whatever substance he abused earlier in the night, but the anger in his eyes is still evident. “Thisszis my house, ass’ole.” He slurs.

Dylan holds his hands up in surrender. “Yo, chill man. We’re just getting some fresh clothes.” He wraps an arm around Lance’s waist. Lance is still glaring at Keith.

Keith’s heart breaks.

He can’t deal with this.

“Lock the door on your way out.” He growls, pushing past them and grabbing his keys. “Don’t you dare fuck on my bed.”

The door slams behind him and he shoves his hands in his pockets, finally letting the tears fill his eyes.
Lance hears the door slam shut and startles for a moment.

Sadness. Why does he feel sad?

He blinks lazily at the spinning room around him, and tries to comprehend where he is. Dylan’s arms are around his waist, somehow. He feels hot breath on his face. “Hey, don’t listen to him, alright? You’re totally fine. He’s an ass.”

Lance lolls his head to the side, confused. He sees red pajama pants on the floor. “Keith.” He says.

“Hey, no, forget that guy.” Dylan says softly. “Look at me, alright? I love you, Lance.”

Dylan’s face won’t stop moving. Lance needs to lie down. “Love you too.” He mutters, dizzy. His face falls into Dylan’s neck. He feels like he might pass out.

Keith.

Lance’s heart aches and he doesn’t understand why. It’s an unfamiliar feeling. Like he’s out of practice. His heart hasn’t done that in a very long time.

No. He’s supposed to be happy right now. In Dylan’s arms, with alcohol burning in his veins. This is happiness. This is carelessness. Adventure. Love. This is where anxiety goes to die.

Lance grips Dylan’s shirt, whimpering helplessly, trying to grasp for that happy feeling. The white noise. The calm before the storm. The warm, hazy blissfulness.

But the voice is back. It’s back, and he can hear it through his high. Through his drunken haze, he can hear that fucking anxious voice coming through, muffled and screaming all at the same time.

Keith.

Keith.

Keith.

Where is Keith?

xxx

Present Day

Keith’s parents arrive just in time for the reception. When he sees them hugging Shiro, he all but
sprints over to them, leaving Hunk to fend for himself. His mother sees him and sends him a huge grin, waving him over. When he gets to her, he gives her a hug.

“Mom.” He says. “I’m glad you could make it.” She smells like the house Keith grew up in; old cinnamon and a citrus. Keith feels comfort blossoming in his chest. He hugs his father immediately after, not even giving Shiro time to get a word in.

“How are you, son?” His father asks, letting go of him. “Survive through the wedding in one piece?” Keith laughs. His parents know him well enough to know that this isn’t really his thing.

“It was actually a very nice ceremony.” He says proudly, looking at Shiro.

“It was stressful up until it happened.” Shiro says, laughing lightly. “Thank god we had Lance to help us.”

His father raises an eyebrow, looking around. “Where is Lance? I miss that boy.”

Keith smiles, trying not to blush. “He’s here. I think he might be helping set up with the DJ.”

“He has barely sat still since the ceremony began. He’s buzzing all over the place, making sure everything is working properly.” Shiro says, rolling his eyes fondly. “If anyone could get him to take a break, it’ll probably be you guys.”

Almost as if it was planned, Keith feels hands gripping his shoulders from behind him and a loud voice in his ear. “The Koganes! The Keiths, but older! The Snicker ‘rents!” Lance shakes Keith.

“Keith! Your parents!” Before Keith can even reply to that horrific string of words, Lance is pushing past him and enveloping Keith’s parents in a massive, probably painful hug. He hears them laughing.

“There he is.” Keith’s mother says.

Lance pulls away. “It’s so good to see you guys!” He says excitedly. “Oh man, Keith misses you so much. He always talks about you.” Lance smiles sneakily. “Don’t tell him I told you that.”

“I’m right here, Lance.” Keith deadpans.

“And you heard nothing.”

Keith rolls his eyes but smiles slightly. Yeah...he does miss his parents. But he doesn’t ever talk about it.

Lance just knows.

Keith’s parents laugh. “You two are still exactly the same.” His mother says fondly. “Bickering like an old married couple.”

Lance chuckles. Keith tries to chuckle.

“Man, I wish my parents could make it! It would be like old times again.” Lance says. Keith’s father looks at him sadly.

“They better be getting a refund for those plane tickets.” He says, irritated. Obviously where Keith gets his temper from. “Who cancels a flight so last minute? In the dead of May?”

Lance shrugs. “I’ll call them tonight. But it’s nice that you are here! You’re little baby is all grown up!” He says, pinching Shiro’s cheek. Shiro groans, rolling his eyes. Keith’s parents laugh.
“Yes, he is.” Keith’s mother says, smiling fondly at Shiro. “We wish we could’ve made the
ceremony. But we’re sure it was beautiful.”

“Oh it was!” Allura’s voice chimes in as she appears next to Shiro. “And I only cried for a small
portion of it! Which I count as a success.”

“She’s lying. She cried for twenty minutes in the bathroom afterwards.”

“I’m happy to be marrying you!” Allura exclaims, defensively.

Shiro laughs as she shoves him. “Yeah, I know, I know.”

Lance’s phone chimes and they all turn around and look at him. He chuckles. “Sorry guys, that
means they need help in the back with the food.” He waves at Keith’s parents. “So nice to see you
again! I’ll be back in a bit.” He looks at Keith. “Wanna come with?” ‘Hunk will be there’ is kind of
implied.

Keith shrugs, smiling at his parents. “Alright, I’ll go help. I’ll find you guys later, alright?”

His mother pitches forward and hugs him again. “Okay. See you.” She says softly, which makes
Keith bite back a grin. His parents are typically not the most affectionate people, but they made him
everything that he is. They always loved him, no matter what. And although they are a lot less...
outspoken than Lance’s loud, boisterous family, they care just as much.

And they love Lance just as much.

x

Dinner is amazing, as usual. Keith doesn’t know how Hunk does it, but every single time he tries
something new it actually makes his insides melt a little. He’s sitting as a table with Lance, Olivia,
Hunk, and his parents. The silence surrounding the table has everything to do with the food that is
currently shoved in their faces. Keith is nervous because sometime within the next ten minutes he has
to stand up and tap on a glass, causing everyone to look at him as he fails to make a Best Man toast.
It’s not that he sucks at public speaking, it’s just that he took a public speaking class in college and
failed it. Which...may mean he sucks a little. Oh man, he sucks a lot. He really does.

Lance is telling Olivia stories about college, carefully leaving out the less tasteful parts—he tells her
about the holiday frat party in junior year without telling her about how he licked whipped eggnog
off of some random guy’s chest. He tells her that he stayed up all night with a girl watching 90210
and leaves out the part where he came home crying and shoving himself into Keith’s arms because
some character in the show named Annie didn’t end up with the right guy.

He feels someone bumping his elbow. He looks up and sees Hunk, leaning in incredibly close to his
face. “You alright?” He asks. His eyes say “play along”.

Keith smiles sheepishly. “Yeah. Just nervous about the speech.”

Hunk leans in closer, and out of the corner of Keith’s eyes, he sees Lance watching them.

“You’ll be great.” Hunk says encouragingly. “It’s family. You’re not here to impress, you’re here to
have a good time.”
Keith takes a moment to think about it, tilting his head to the side. Hunk raises an eyebrow at him. And Hunk is right. He really does have a point.

Lance’s eyes are still trained on him. He can feel it.

If Lance is going to have his fun with Olivia, then Keith can mess around too. It’s not really fair, because Lance truly doesn’t know what’s actually happening. But Keith is feeling particularly bitter, and it looks like Hunk is on the same page. Deep down, he knows Lance doesn’t care either way. But in an ideal world...

“Gotta make that speech now.” He says, making a show out of looking down at Hunks lips, to warn him. “Kiss for good luck?”

Hunk chuckles. “You’re evil, man.” He mutters, and it looks like he’s trying very hard not to look at Lance. He leans forward and presses a chaste kiss to Keith’s lips. It’s barely even a touch, but Keith smiles into it, satisfied with himself. Because he knows Lance is still looking.

And...so are his parents. But that’s a conversation for another time.

Keith stands up slowly after he separates from Hunk. His heart thuds nervously in just chest. He still has not looked at Lance, nor does he want to, because that stupid gorgeous face will most definitely make him lose his nerve. Taking a deep breath, he brings a butter knife to his wine glass and taps three times. The whole banquet hall fades into silence. Hundreds of eyes are suddenly on him.

He still doesn’t look at Lance.

“Uh.” Nice, Keith. Real nice. “Hi everyone.” He should’ve rehearsed this. He should’ve at least written notes. Or proofread the script in his head. “I’m Keith. Shiro’s brother. And, uh, the Best Man.” He places his wine glass back down on the table. Hunk reaches out and grips his wrist, squeezing it supportively. He feels himself smile. “For those of you who know me, you know that speeches...aren’t my thing.” He wrings his hands nervously. “I’m not very eloquent, and Shiro knew that when he made me his best man so...whatever is about to happen is his fault.” A low, rumbling laugh echoes throughout the room. It lifts Keith’s confidence. He swallows. “But, Uh, what I am good at, however, is stating the facts. So…” he glances at Shiro. “For those of you who look at the facts, the evidence was all there. This really was the obvious answer, even from the very beginning.” Keith nods lightly at Shiro. “And I don’t know a whole lot about things like this but...what matters is that Shiro did. Shiro knew the answer, from the very first minute, and...nobody could possibly be more thrilled...than I am.” He clears his throat awkwardly as the audience collectively says “awwww.”

And then Keith’s gaze fall on Lance, who is looking at him with wide, surprised eyes and a soft flush on his cheeks. Lance blinks at him, like he can’t understand what is happening. His skin looks golden in the dim lights of the banquet hall. His eyes are shiny. Keith wants so badly to kiss him.

He picks up his glass, lifting it into the air. “To Shiro and Allura.” He says, smiling softly at Lance before turning away.
The sounds of clinking glasses and cheering fills the air.

***

**Sophomore Year (College)**

Lance wakes up aching. There are fingerprints bruised into the skin on his hips. Hickeys throb on his neck, sore and tender. His head is pounding. His mouth is dry and rough. He feels like he needs to vomit, but he knows nothing will come out. He wants to stand up, but his vision is already spotting and his knees feel weak.

Worst of all, he is alone.

This is the fifth day in a row that Dylan fucked him and then disappeared the next morning, only to reemerge again in the bar after midnight. Clearly, he’s losing interest. Lance doesn’t blame him. He barely remembers what the sex is like, but it’s probably not that great. Not if it leaves him feeling like this. He reaches a shaking hand to his head, trying to breathe. What day is it? Does he even have class today? He wonders if he’s failing. He tells himself he doesn’t care.

Dylan was supposed to *love* him. This was supposed to be happiness. This was supposed to make him feel *normal*. Make him feel like everybody else. Everybody without anxiety. He just wanted to feel normal.

And Dylan loved him. He *said* it, every single day. All the time.

At least...Lance *thinks* he did.

Anger spreads like wildfire in Lance’s chest. Nobody is left. Dylan is gone. Keith hates him. His best friend, in the entire world, *hates* him. He hasn’t talked to Keith in two whole months. He wouldn’t be surprised if Keith cut him out of the lease. Changed addresses. Met a new and improved replacement and made happy memories with them.

The thought makes him want to scream. He wants to punch something. It’s the most aware of his emotions that he’s been in weeks. It almost hurts, feeling something with such intensity after feeling numb for such a long time.

He stands up shakily, looking around at the messy room he slept in. He never really looked at Dylan’s apartment while sober. Usually they are drinking again at this point in the morning. But Lance suddenly feels disgusted by what he sees. An old, open pizza box filled with greasy crumbs. Dirty underwear all over the carpet. A pile of weed in a small, metal plate on the nightstand, surround with crumpled, rolled up paper and a foggy, dirty bong.

Lance wrinkles his nose is disgust.

Now he *really* needs to vomit.

He’s got to get out of here.
Standing outside of his apartment door, Lance is convinced that this is how prisoners in Ancient Rome felt before they were released into the arena to be devoured by a lion. Pure, blinding terror. He reaches into his pocket for his keys and then realizes he hasn’t had those since a two months ago, when he threw them at Keith’s face.

Sighing, he lifts a fist. The knock echoes throughout the hallway. It echoes in his bones. Against the walls of his insides; as if reminding him how empty he feels.

Keith opens the door hesitantly. Lance feels an absurd rush of relief at the sight of him. Pale skin, black hair, soothing violet eyes. He feels a stab in his heart, so abrupt and painful, he swears he’s going to keel over and die.

Keith’s eyes train on him and darken, going from hesitant to seething in an instant. A snarl twists it’s way into his face. “What the fuck do you want from me?” He growls, eyes burning a hole into Lance’s face. “Never come back here again, you fucking prick.” He goes to slam the door but Lance stops him, a little desperately.

“Keith, no wait —“

“Fuck you, Lance. Fuck you !” Keith spits, charging back into the living room. Lance follows him in, nervously. “You really shouldn’t be here. I can’t even stand looking at you right now.”

Lance scowls. Angry tears burn behind his eyes. “If you would just —“

“Just what ?” Keith shouts, whirling around to look at Lance. “Lend you some fresh clothes ? You need a condom or something? Wanna come use the shower? God, go fuck yourself!” Keith’s voice cracks.

“I don’t need any of that shit!” Lance defends, getting increasingly frustrated. “I don’t even know what you’re talking about!”

“Of course you don’t! Because you’ve been so out of your fucking mind that you don’t even remember coming in here, every fucking week, stealing your own shit and trying not to get caught!” Keith is charging towards him now. “You’ve been so fucked up you don’t even remember anything you said to me—“ He shoves Lance’s shoulders. Lance stumble backwards. “You don’t remember vomiting all over our fucking bathroom— ” another shove. This one is harder. “Or making out with douche bag boyfriend on our fucking couch !” The last shove sends Lance backwards, slamming him into the wall. Rage clouds all of his senses.

“Oh give me a fucking break , Keith! You never even tried to hear my side of the story! As usual , you don’t want to listen ! Because you never want to listen!”

“Because I don’t fucking care why, Lance!” Keith shouts, voice breaking. “I don’t give a shit ! You fucked up this time, and you can’t keep using your feelings as an excuse. Stop acting like I’m the enemy here!”

“You’ll never understand how I felt. You don’t feel anything , ever! You’re just as fucked up as I am! You’re the one who needs help, asshole !”

“Well you’re the one who left !” Keith rasps in a choked voice. The words hang in the air for a moment. The heat dissipates from his words.“You left . My grandpa died and you left . You didn’t
even warn me. You didn’t even say goodbye. You just left because you’re so wrapped up in how fucked up you are that you couldn’t even think, for one second, that maybe I needed the help too!” Keith’s voice quivers. “And then you come in here within an inch of death and spit in my face, vomit on the floor and—” Keith’s face completely dissolves, tears filling his large, dark eyes. “And making me worry about you until I drove myself crazy because you—” a choked noise tears from Keith’s throat and he lifts a shaky hand, running it through his hair. “You were gone.” He blinks and tears fall down his cheeks. Lance’s heart clenches. He’s never seen Keith like this before. He’s never…

“Keith…”

“So fuck you.” Keith spits, tearful eyes suddenly filled with rage again. “Just fuck off, Lance. I don’t want to deal with you anymore.”

Lance watches Keith wrap his arms around himself, squeezing his eyes shut with anger and trying desperately not to cry. His thick eyebrows are scrunched together in rage. His shoulders shake.

Lance’s heart is breaking. And breaking. And breaking.

“It felt good.” Lance says, groundlessly. “It just…”

“Well that’s fucking great for you, Lance.” Keith mumbles, starting to walk into his room. “But it didn’t feel good to me.” The door slams behind him and Lance is left standing alone in the empty living room, with a suffocating feeling squeezing its way up his throat.

xxx

Keith can count, on one hand, the amount of times he’s truly cried in his life; which is why the feeling of sobbing into his pillow, so hard that he can’t breathe, is such a desperate concept to him. But here he is, tears soaking into the soft fabric beneath his cheek, and he’s trying to make sense of the emotional turmoil in his head but he can’t seem to organize it in any way.

The last thing he was expecting today, was for Lance to come home. He had a speech written in his head for the day he saw Lance again—he sometimes rehearsed it in the shower. Because it’s not like he just expected Lance to never come home again. He just always thought he’d be more prepared.

He really assumed he’d have it under control. He’s probably said the speech to himself a thousand times. It was a reasonable, stern, realistic, and sympathetic bundle of words. But seeing Lance is a lot different than talking to imaginary Lance in the shower. Especially a dangerously hungover Lance covered in hickeys and bruises. And it’s almost like Keith forgot just how obnoxious Lance can be sometimes; this time especially. It’s not Lance’s personality to swallow reasonable arguments and stern scoldings. Lance will always be a little immature in that way. And Keith really should’ve known that the moment he saw Lance; hollow eyes and dull hair and paling skin—he would lose his mind.

He doesn’t know how long he sits there, crying. It feels like hours. Because he is angry, and that is a fact. He’s furious. Livid. Exasperated.

But also exhausted.

And relieved. So relieved.
He misses Lance. He misses him so much his heart hurts. And Lance may be a mess right now, but Keith knows he is still Lance. Because he fought back. Because he jabbed Keith just as hard when Keith jabbed him. He hasn’t given up on himself. And Keith knows, reluctantly and angrily, that he will never give up on him either.

So he just cries.

The window goes from light to dark, making the room nearly pitch black. Keith doesn’t turn a light on. He doesn’t hear anything outside of his room and feels a painful surge of disappointment at the thought of Lance leaving, even though he told him to. To leave and to never, ever come back. He clenches the bedsheets in his fist. He meant a lot of the things he said, but that was not one of them.

His bedroom door creaks open softly. Hesitantly, like being treated with care. And Keith pauses, relieved tears filling his eyes.

He may have told Lance to leave, but since when has Lance ever done as he’s told?

The left side of the bed dips down as Lance joins him. He shuffles around for a moment, but then settles. Keith has his back facing him, and refuses to turn around.

After a very long and tense silence, Lance says, “I don’t think...my meds were doing anything. I...” a shaky breath. “I was miserable. And angry. And...I wasn’t in any shape to be helping you, or anyone else. I couldn’t even help myself.”

Keith doesn’t reply. He blinks at the wall in front of him, letting a couple tears fall.

“I should’ve been there for you. I don’t have any good excuse. It was...selfishness. It was just...what people don’t tell you about anxiety is it makes you selfish. Well, not in like, a superficial way. But it just makes you so... hyper aware of your problems that it almost feels like nobody else has any as bad as yours.” Lance’s voice is raspy, like he hasn’t used it in a while. Or maybe it’s because Keith hasn’t heard it in a while. “I was so desperate to get out of my head.”

Keith really wants to give Lance the cold shoulder. He wants to make him feel like shit. To shout things like “yeah, you were selfish, dickwad!” Or “just go fuck Dylan and leave me alone”. But what good would that do here? He squeezes his eyes shut and sniffles, trying to stop the next bout of tears.

“I’m sorry.” Lance says, and it sounds choked. “I miss you so much I don’t even know what to do. I’m...obviously a mess without you.”

Keith bites at his lower lip, eyes filling again. “You’re a mess either way.” He says, still irritated. Lance doesn’t answer.

“You could’ve died, Lance. And you wouldn’t have even cared because you were so fucked.” Keith sniffs. “And that’s the most selfish thing of all. But I would’ve cared.” Keith’s voice cracks. “So much.”

He hears Lance swallow. But no reply follows. He clutches the covers closer to his chest. “Why didn’t you tell me about the meds, Lance? Or call your parents? Or your doctor? Why do you always insist on suffering alone? You think you’re doing everyone a solid by keeping your shit to yourself? Well, you aren’t.”

More silence. No reply from Lance. Keith can only hears soft, hiccuping breaths coming from somewhere behind him. Small sniffs. He feels his heart crumbling. Minutes and minutes go by, and Keith waits for Lance to say something. Anything. He listens to Lance cry and cry and cry. His chest
aches. He feels his own eyes filling with tears at the sound of it.

Then Lance whispers, “Why can’t I be happy, Keith?” A shuddering breath. “Am I busted?” The words come out broken. Heavy. Like they’ve been dying to be let out.

Keith’s lip quivers. He answers softly. “I don’t know.” Because he doesn’t.

“Neither do I.” Lance says quietly. “But...I think I need to leave.”

At this, Keith finally turns over to face Lance. He bunches the sheets up against his lips. “Leave where?”

“Like...go home. For a bit. Like, for a month or something. I can’t...be here right now.”

Keith blinks at him, anger finally dissipating. “I think that’s a good idea.” He studies Lance’s profile, highlighted by soft, barely-there moonlight. His thin face is now so thin it’s starting to look hollow. His eyes are swollen. “You need your family.”

Lance nods softly. “You are my family, too.”


Tears wet Lance’s eyelashes, and he nods again. His lip quivers. “I’ll never do this to you again.” He whispers.

Keith leans forward, pressing his cheek into Lance’s shoulder. His shirt smells like weed and old beer; but there is still a small trace of his familiar deodorant lingering beneath all the filth.

“I know you won’t.” He says. And somehow, he means it.

xxx

Present Day

Lance stands at the edge of the dance floor, watching with pride as the guest spill into the space when the music starts to play. Everything is going so well; and he knows that the DJ is going to be great because he did extensive research to make sure he picked one of the best. The DJ is even Keith approved, which means he’s gotta be good.

Olivia stands by his side. She’s been wonderful tonight. Everybody who has met her, has loved her. Lance has never had a significant other that went so...smoothly for everybody, including him. He can’t complain, about anything. It’s new for him. It’s nice.

“Are we going to dance?” She asks, tugging on his wrist.

He laughs. “Yes, of course. I just wanted to make sure there weren’t any problems before I started having fun.” He looks across the dance floor and sees Keith smiling up at Shiro and laughing at something his dad is saying. For some reason, he feels warmth in his cheeks.
He was so shocked by Keith’s Best Man toast. It came out of absolutely nowhere. Lance even
helped him write it— but Keith had completely scrapped what they wrote together. He said
something completely different. Something that came from him and only him. And it was…

Lance doesn’t know what the fuck is wrong with him today, but he needs to get a grip. It’s that
stupid purple bowtie, okay? He’s not used to seeing colors like that so close to Keith’s face. It’s like
he’s in some kind of parallel universe where nothing is real. Or something.

Keith is attractive. He’s always known that. What’s the big deal?

Lance holds Olivia’s wrist. “Yeah, I think everything looks good.” He says, as if he actually
checked. “Wanna dance?”

“Yes!” Olivia smiles brightly at him, intertwining her fingers with his as they walk onto the dance
floor. A slow song starts playing, right on time. This DJ is so great. Lance feels giddy.

Lance places a hand on the small of her back, pulling her close and clasping their free hands
together. She smells almost as pretty as she look. Lance leans forward and plant small kiss on her
lips. She tastes like citrus. It’s refreshing, and a little expected. Like he didn’t even have to wonder
about it beforehand. She giggles.

“Feels like high school, a little.” She says.

Lance hums. “I didn’t dance with girls in high school.” He jokes.

She laughs. “I find that hard to believe. You’re far too handsome.”

“You should’ve seen me with my buzz cut and neon green braces. I was a lady killer.”

“Sounds amazing.” Her eyes are bright. Lance bites his lips, smiling.

“Oh you bet it was.” He says sarcastically.

Keith steps onto the dance floor with Hunk. They stand close together. Keith is grinning at him like a
fool. He laughs loudly and ducks his head at something Hunk says. Lance feels something twisting
in the pit of his stomach and he refuses to acknowledge it.

“So…” Olivia raises an eyebrow at him. “How long have you known Keith?”

“Hm?” Lance blinks back at her. “Oh, Keith? We met in like…pshh,” He shakes his head, thinking.
“Like first grade.”

“Oh, wow. that’s so great that you guys are still friends. I’m glad I finally got to meet him.”

Lance nods. “Me too.” Can they please not talk about Keith? “So why don’t you tell me about all the
lucky guys you danced with in high school?”

Olivia rolls her eyes, giggling. “Alright fine, but you’re in for a long and messed up story.”

Lance shrugs. “I’ve got time.” He says.

xxx
Keith laughs. “Wait, who?”

Hunk blushes, shaking his head furiously. “I don’t want to talk about this anymore, man.”

Hunk and Keith had both decided that dancing together would be fun, and also, according to Hunk, a perfect “next installment” in the plan. Keith had rolled his eyes, but decided to do it anyway, because Lance is mooning Over Olivia and his small, crippled heart can’t take it. Also, dancing is fun. So, whatever.

Hunk had started talking about the cake, which is stationed in the back corner of the room. He accidentally let it slip that the cake is “like, almost as beautiful as the person who made it.” To which Keith had replied, “Wait…what?” And now Hunk is looking away, face turning bright red, and Keith is more curious than ever.

“Wait, you know the cake decorator? What’s her name again?”

Hunk sighs defeatedly. “Shay. I went to culinary school with her. We were like, really close. Except she decided in the middle of the second year that she wasn’t interested in being a chef…but just liked baked goods a lot.”

“Wow.” Keith says, impressed. “She’s like, number one in the state for wedding cakes.” He pauses. “Well, according to Lance.”

“No, she is. She’s amazingly talented.” Hunk blushes more. “We were a good team.”


“We’re here for your pathetic love life, not mine, Okay? Don’t get sidetracked.”

“When was the last time you talked to her?”

“I said no distractions!” Hunk says nervously. “Now quick, laugh really loud like I said something super charming and funny.”

Keith chuckles, rolling his eyes.

xxx

After the dance, Olivia momentarily leaves to use the restroom and Lance leans back against the wall, feeling inexplicably exhausted. When Olivia said her story was long, she wasn’t kidding. He rubs his eyes.

“Having fun?”

Lance looks up and sees Keith, smirking at him. He sighs. “I’m beat, Snickers.” He says tiredly. “I feel like this whole event was taking up like seventy-two percent of my energy and now it’s finally happening and I have none left.” He laughs, rubbing his eyes again. “I’m going to sleep like a baby tonight.”

Keith smiles, joining him against the wall. “Everything has been great, Lance. You seriously outdid yourself. You should be proud.”
“Thanks.” He says. He picks at his nails, suddenly a little nervous. “You’re speech was…”

Keith laughs. “Oh man, can we not talk about it? I know, it wasn’t what we wrote. I’m sorry, it was dumb.”

Lance blinks at him. “No! No, Keith. I loved it.”

Keith laughs, eyeing him. When he sees Lance is serious, his smile falls. “Wait, really?”

“Yeah, dude! I don’t know what’s happened to you, but lately you’re like…” Even more good-looking than usual. Wait. No. No, that’s not what he wants to say. “You’re like, the love doctor or some shit, Snickers.”

Keith smiles. “Nah, no way.”

“You really are!”

He shrugs. “I might have my moments.” He says blandly, suddenly sounding very bored with the conversation.

A waitress walks by and offers them two tiny plates, with pieces of the wedding cake. Lance takes them excitedly. “Oh man, Keith. Wait until you try the cake. I almost screamed during the taste-test. It was so good.” He hands Keith a plate, who just stares at it with wide eyes.

“Is that vanilla?”

“Just try it. I promise you’ll like it.”

Lance watches as Keith picks a small piece off, lifting it to his mouth. As he chews, Lance notices and small smear of white frosting above his lips.

His...lips.

Lips.

Lance blinks a couple of times, trying to take his eyes off of the icing, but he can’t seem to look at anything else. Keith is saying something about the cake. He smiles and Lance watches as his straight teeth peek out from beneath his lips.

Olivia tasted like citrus.

He finds himself wondering, briefly, in a moment of pure insanity, what Keith would taste like.

Probably wedding cake frosting...mixed with something else--

“Do I have something on my face?” Keith’s concerned voice breaks Lance’s concentration. He blinked owlishly at him, trying to regain his bearings.

What...the fuck?

“Uh. Just a little…” he points to his own lips, indicating where the icing is. “On...like, above your mouth.”

Keith pouts a little, wiping it away with his thumb. He chuckles. “No wonder you were looking at me weird.”
Lance opens his mouth to say something. To defend himself. But he is interrupted before he can make any sense of what just happened. Hunk suddenly appears next to Keith. “Hey guys! Lance, this is all coming together beautifully. Good on you, man.” He turns to Keith, pointing at him in question. “Do a shot of tequila with me?” He asks.

Keith grins, pushing off the wall into a standing position. “Oh, totally. Wanna do a shot with us, Lance?”

Lance glances around hesitantly for Olivia. He told her that he doesn’t drink. Which is definitely a lie—because even though he may not drink like he used to, it doesn’t mean he doesn’t drink at all anymore. The last thing he would want is for Olivia to find out what he was like.

But...Keith is drinking. And he barely ever does that.

“Sure.” Lance says, smiling. The bar is hidden in the back somewhere. He can take the shot and find Olivia again before she finds him.

Hunk orders the shots and they all huddle, bringing their glasses together.

“Ready?” Hunk asks.

“To Shiro and Allura.” Keith says, holding up his shot glass.

“To Shiro and Allura!” Lance giggles happily, downing the shot. They all slam their glasses back down onto the bar, laughing.

xxx

Keith may or may not have snuck in another shot or two while Lance left to look for Olivia. He is pleasantly tipsy now—warmth spreading into his cheeks and his fingertips. He looks around for Hunk but gives up pretty quickly, deciding to just check out the dessert bar instead of waddling around alone like an idiot. Shiro looks busy talking with some guests Keith doesn’t know very well, but grins when he sees Keith. He nods politely at the guests, saying goodbye, and starts walking over. Keith waves.

“It’s the man of the hour.” He says in a corny voice.

Shiro laughs. “How you holding up?”

“I’m great.” Keith says, nodding. “Really great. Have you tried the tequila?”

“I have not. But I’m definitely planning on it once I’ve said hello to everyone.” Shiro grins at him. “I take it you have?”

“Possibly.”

Shiro studies his face. “So…” He starts. Keith shakes his head.

“Don’t wanna talk about it.”

“I mean, she’s pretty and all, but do you really think—?”
“I said stooopp.” Keith mumbles, rolling his eyes. “Don’t make me think about it.”

“Think about what?” A voice behind him asks. Shiro’s eyes widen slightly but return back to normal in a snap. Keith turns around and Lance is looking at them questioningly.

“It’s nothing.” Keith says, reaching behind him and smearing a hand down Shiro’s face. “Just the groom being his wise, philosophical self.”

Lance grins at him, head tilting slightly. He sends Keith a side smile. “You’ve been drinking, haven’t you?”

Keith snorts, but it turns into a giggle. Lance sighs fondly, shaking his head.

“Well now I gotta get on your level.” He says.

Keith pauses. “What about Olivia?” He asks.

Lance smiles sadly. “Well, it’s almost eleven, man. She had to go.”

“She’s not staying the night?”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “I think going to a wedding together is already a bit much for only two months of dating. She doesn’t need to sleep in a hotel room with me too.” He points over his shoulder. “To the bar?”

Happiness flutters in Keith’s chest, a little pettily, at the thought of Olivia being gone. “Lead the way.”

He watches Lance’s back, a little less subtle than usual. Lance really does have such an irresistible body. He wonders how anyone resists it. All these people, in this room. How are they not seeing how beautiful it is? How are they just living, going about their merry wedding activities, without tripping over their feet when they see him? He wonders if Olivia knows how lucky she is; that she gets to touch it and bury her face in his neck and god what Keith wouldn’t give to do the same.

They order drinks and lean against the bar, talking about absolute nonsense. Keith wants to tell Lance about Hunk’s crush on Shay, because it’s so good, but Lance thinks that Hunk likes Keith. And that won’t go over well.

Lance sips on his drink and Keith knows he’s trying to be careful. To gage his limits. Lance had to re-learn how to drink without totally destroying himself, which is something he’s gotten very good at now. When Keith sees how careful he is, it makes something melt deep within his chest. Because Lance promised he would never do anything like what he did in college, ever again; especially not to Keith. And Keith was right to trust him. Lance never goes back on his word. Particularly when it is for someone he cares about.

They order another drink and return to their tables. Keith stirs the caramel colored liquid in his cup, not really knowing what it is. He listens to Lance talk about his future wedding. He blabbers on and on about a venue somewhere in Prague, with diamond string lights hanging from the roof and brass centerpieces. He drones on and on about the cocktail hour, and the cake, and the absolutely necessary piccolo player. Keith, strangely, doesn’t feel the urge to roll his eyes. In fact, he feels oddly fond of what Lance is describing. Maybe it’s because he drank too much. Maybe it’s because he likes the sound of Lance’s voice.

Maybe it’s because he would never, ever want a wedding like that; but if Lance did, then...he would make the sacrifice.
The thought scares him awake, suddenly zoning back to reality. He takes a sharp breath. This is why he doesn’t drink very often. The last time he got drunk, he met Kevin, and that realization was a dick and a half to get over.

He really doesn’t need any more drunk realizations in his life.


Keith can see the tipsy flush in Lance’s cheeks. It looks adorable on him. How can he say no? He nods, letting Lance drag him by his wrist to the dance floor. Lance’s hand in warm and familiar, settles on Keith’s lower back. The other rises to meet Keith’s intertwining their fingers together. Keith places his hand on Lance’s back too, remembering what Lance said about the small of his back being one of his “spots”. Heat floods to Keith’s cheeks and he curses himself for letting his mind go there.

Lance blinks at him, looking a little lost. He visibly swallows. Then, he chuckles nervously.

“You’re actually pretty good at this.” He says, as they move back and forth. “But how? You never danced with anyone in high school.”

Keith grins. “Nah, but being a wallflower left time for observation. Scott was always really good at it.”

Lance snorts. “Scott Marren?”

“Yeah, he was a great dancer. I learned a lot from stalking him.”

“You sure did.” Lance giggles. “God, that guy was an asshole.”

Keith shrugs. “Can’t argue with that.”

Lance smiles at him, and it looks gentle. He feels Lance’s hand squeeze his slightly. His heart thuds so hard he might pass out.

Lance’s eyes are just so blue. He smells so sugary sweet. God, Keith is falling. He just keeps falling, and falling, and falling.

xxx

Lance really shouldn’t have had that last drink.

Keith is looking up at him with pretty, violet eyes. A drunk flush graces his cheeks and Lance has never felt more confused in all his life. Because Keith is attractive, but not just in the “oh yeah, Keith is my attractive friend” kind of way. Keith is actually gorgeous. He’s...like, a fine specimen. He’s got pretty, pouty lips. Long, dark lashes. His skin is pale and smooth, except for a small scar on his chin, left from the traumatizing pimple experience Keith had right before their senior pictures in high school. Lance never actually noticed that it scarred, but now that he sees it, it actually looks endearing. It looks like something that just helps make up Keith’s face, which he knows like the back of his hand.

He just doesn’t know why something so familiar looks so different right now.
Keith raises an eyebrow at him. “You feeling okay?” He asks.

“Yeah, ‘course.” Lance grins. Must be the alcohol.

Keith hums, pressing his hand a little firmer into Lance’s lower back. It causes them to press closer together. Lance feels heat springing into his cheeks at the touch. They’re dancing. It’s just dancing. He’s been in much more compromising positions with Keith. God, what did they put in those drinks?

“Do you remember Junior Prom?” Keith asks quietly, leaning in closer so Lance can hear him.

“When that bitch...Emily?”

“Erica.”

“Erica dumped you.”

“Yeah? What about it?”

Keith smirks. “I think we ended up being the best dancers there.”

Lance snorts. “Hardly. I knocked over the punch bowl. Remember?”

“How could I forget?” Keith grins, eyes glinting. “It got all over my fucking shirt.”

They both dissolve into a fit of giggles, clutching just a little tighter to each other. And Lance…

Lance feels the smallest, subtlest flutter, beating persistently in his chest.

It feels like happiness. It feels like…

No.

No no no no no no.

He knows that feeling. It...isn’t happening. He won’t let it. It’s just the alcohol. It’s just the romantic night. The purple bowtie. The slow, instrumental music. He’s under a spell, and it will break tomorrow. He knows this about himself. It’s not real. He’s just caught up in the mood of the night. Nothing but the mood.

It’s just Keith. What’s the big deal?

He knows that his romantic, fragile heart thrives in these environments. It’s like a drug. It makes him see crazy things.

He also knows that whenever he has feelings for someone, they leave.

And Keith is the one person in his life that he can’t afford to lose.

He’s got Olivia--and she hasn’t left yet.

He chalks it up to one giant, tipsy, wedding-night misunderstanding, and already starts to feel better as he lets go of Keith and steps away.

xxx
The night passes quickly, along with their level of sobriety. By the time 1AM hits, Keith is a little bit more than tipsy and Lance is definitely not close to sober anymore. They do their best to help begin the clean-up process, but after Lance knocks down the fourth centerpiece in a row, Shiro dismisses them. Clearly, they are going to do more harm than good.

Keith finds Hunk and hugs him tightly, thanking him for the evening. Even in his tipsy state, he still hopes Lance is watching. He doesn’t really know why.

They stumble upstairs to their hotel room. Keith is exhausted, and still so happy from the night he had. It was such a beautiful wedding. Such a beautiful night.

Lance is so beautiful.

They flop down onto one bed, not even bothering to change. Lance burrows himself under the covers and laughs drunkenly.

“Holy shit, I’ve never been this sleepy in my life.” He slurs. “I can’t believe it’s over. I’m going to like…” He lifts his hands from underneath the covers to rub his eyes. “I’m going to actually have time to do work at work now.”

Keith glances at the other queen bed in the room. He wonders why they both chose this one. He sighs. That’s an issue for not-drunk Keith to deal with.

“You’ll have so much more free time.” Keith says, laughing as he gets under the covers too. “You’ll be a changed man.”

“Maybe I’ll learn to cook.”

“Hmm. Why would you want to do that?” Keith asks.

Lance shrugs. “No reason.”

They turn so they are facing each other. Keith feels Lance’s breath, hot on his face. He smells vanilla frosting. He’s dying to taste it.

“Your ears are tiny.”

Keith blinks. “Huh?”

“Your ears. They’re like, nickles. Penny-sized.”

“No, Lance. Yours are just enormous.”

Lance gasps. “How could you? You know I’m sensitive about my ears!”

“Well then why comment on mine?”

“I dunno! They’re cute!”

Keith furrows his brow, confused. “Cute?”

“Yeah.” Lance reaches out and brushes his fingers along Keith’s ear, knuckles drifting across the skin behind it. “Like...fun-sized.”

Keith shivers at the touch. He feels a wave of warmth come over him, urgent and pressing. He really would try harder to pretend that it didn’t affect him at all, but he’s too far from sober to care. He lets
his eyes flutter shut and sighs quietly.

Lance hums, low and fond. “Aw, Snickers…” he slurs. “I found one of your spots.”

Keith’s eyes shoot open. “No, you didn’t.”

“Pretty sure I did.” Lance is smirking at him.

“Pretty sure you didn’t.”

Lance shrugs, pulling his hand away. “Whatever you say.” Then he clutches a bundle of covers to his chest and smiles.

“The ceremony was so beautiful.” Keith says quietly. And he has said it a thousand times. Because he wants Lance to know. He wants Lance to see how good he is.

Lance giggles drunkenly. “Thank you. I agree that it was some of my best work.”

“Mmhm.”

“Yep…”

Lance’s eyes are drifting shut, and Keith knows how exhausted he must be. Exhausted and drunk. The past few weeks he’s spent significantly more time awake than asleep, making sure everything was perfect. But Keith isn’t ready to stop talking to him. It may be selfish, but he desperately scrapes for another tropic to continue the conversation.

“Your best work, for now.” He says. “But I honestly think your wedding is going to be your best work.”

Lance cracks an eye open. “My wedding?”

“Yeah. You know. Diamond encrusted wallpaper? Prague? Satin bows on all the chairs?”

Lance closes his eyes again and hums. “Right.” He says. It sounds hesitant.

“What...is it?” Keith asks. “Is something wrong?”

“Nah...it’s nothing.” Lance says sleepily.

Keith brings the covers to his face. “Doesn’t sound like nothing.” He muffles into the covers, words slurred and tired.

“Jus’ me being dumb. Weddings always make me dumb.”

Keith smiles. “Come on. Tell me.”

Lance sighs a little to himself, lazy eyes studying Keith’s face. “It’s just...I mean, all that stuff is great. I love it...the drama n’ the beauty of it. I...I always say that my wedding is going to be this epic thing with all the glam and shit but…” he turns his face into the pillow slightly, looking away. Looking nervous. “I’d like to think...ya know...that the person I marry would be happy with a backyard wedding...a small one...without flower arrangements and ribbons on the chairs and centerpieces ‘cause…” Lance swallows hard and Keith tracks the movement with his eyes. “Because none of that would matter to them...s’long as I was there. I would be enough for them, just like that. Without anything else.” His eyes flutter shut. Keith watches his eyelashes curl against his dark, freckled cheeks. Something inside his chest is aching at those words.
Lance, with his grand ceremonies and romantic gestures and undying desire for love and adventure, has only ever wanted one true thing his entire life. To be enough for someone. For someone to love him, even a fraction as much as he loves them.

And Keith is looking at him now and tears are pricking at the corners of his eyes, because he was always convinced, his entire life, that he could never love anything like Lance does. He could never throw his whole heart into anything like Lance does.

But there is a searing hot sensation in his chest that is expanding, stretching painfully beyond its limit to every single nerve in his body. And he realizes that he’s done it. Without even realizing it, he’s already done it. He’s given his whole heart to someone. Every last bit of it.

“You have always been enough for me.” He whispers brokenly. But Lance doesn’t answer.

He’s fast asleep.

Chapter End Notes

csbuispyhuwfnweiw love you guys. sorry this update took so long lol im a disaster
that awkward thing that happens to friendships when feelings change. Also, it's Lance's turn to suffer

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year! This chapter is half of 18k, sadly. but they can't all be winners ;p also, this update is late. forgive meeeeeeee

I was feelin' the season so there's a lil bit of christmas and New Year's stuff in this chapter.

I'm gonna be real with you guys--usually i get around like 80-95 comments on a chapter but the last one got almost 300? and im like, a little stunned and kinda in shock and whenever i go to respond to them i just see the number i kinda just sit there and stare at it???? like, what???? how???? anyway I'll probably go through and answer as many as possible when I have time! (work has been a bitch lately) just know that I have read all of them, once, twice, three times, and i really just love you guys im. cheiuveov ahhhHHHHHHHH i love you okay im going to stop rambling

message me on tumblr if you want to talk!

Hope you all had wonderful holidays :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Junior year (College)

“Lance, it’s not going to fit.”

Lance snorts loudly. “That’s what she said.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “I’m serious. And it’s like, way too expensive.”

They stand side by side, staring at the tree in front of them. It was Lance’s idea to go out and get a Christmas tree for their tiny college apartment this year, and Keith has been against it since the beginning. It’s just not logical. Their apartment is too small. Where will it go? What will they do with it when it’s dying?

“Snickers, where is your Christmas spirit? Did it die along with the rest of your soul?”

“I can have Christmas spirit and still think logically about things.” Keith says emotionlessly. “Also, I’m fucking freezing .”
The Christmas tree farm is located about an hour outside of town, where the snow is much heavier. Lance is practically swimming in layers of clothing. The only thing visible is the red tip of his nose and a small strip of his eyes. Because Keith is \textit{normal}, he doesn't own four winter coats; and it turns out that maybe Lance was on to something. Because Keith's black hat and gray puffy coat are nothing against the bitter cold air.

"Also how are we going to even get it home? A taxi drove us here, remember? We don't have a car to tie it to."

Lance shrugs. "Tie it to the taxi? I don't know! We'll figure it out. Just help me pick one." He grabs Keith's shoulders, shaking him. "Come on! This is supposed to be \textit{fun}, you wet blanket!"

Keith sighs, a small smile making its way into his face. "Okay. Fine. But this one is too fat."

Lance gasps, turning to the tree and patting it. "He didn't mean it, tree. You are beautiful just the way you are."

"I'm leaving." Keith deadpans.

Lance laughs. "Okay, okay I'm sorry. What about that one?" He points to the a smaller tree next to Keith.

"It's like...missing spots. Look it's all bunchy at the bottom." His nose wrinkles. Lance blinks at him. "Dude. It's a tree."

"You told me to help you decide! I'm just giving my opinion."

Lance chuckles. "Your opinion is \textit{exhausting.}" He drones. "But okay. Let's just keep looking then."

Keith deliberately leads them to the section of the farm with the extremely small trees. Lance rolls his eyes, but doesn't object. The snow on the ground is freshly fallen; still fluffy and light. The air smells like pine and firewood. Keith actually loves places like this. He loves the outdoors. College hasn't really allowed for relaxing time in the fresh air, so going out like this to far away locations is comforting and refreshing.

"What 'bout this one?" Lance asks, pointing to a small, skinny tree.

Keith frowns. "It doesn't...look jolly."

Lance sighs. "\textit{That} one?" He points to another shorter tree.

"Lopsided."

"I'm going to smack you." Lance says, groaning. "Why are you so picky?"

"I'm not picky! I just know what I want."

"Which is what?"

Keith hums, looking around. "It's got to have a certain...look..." His eyes fall on a small, well proportioned tree behind Lance. "Bingo."

Lance raises an eyebrow, turning around and following Keith's line of sight. "\textit{That} one? It's so small!"
“Have you forgotten what our apartment looks like?” Keith asks incredulously. “It’ll look huge once it’s in there.”

Lance studies the tree, considering. “Fine...I mean, it’s a good looking tree.”

Keith grins smugly.

“But you’ve gotta cut it down. Because you chose it.” Lance hands him the saw and Keith sighs.

“Alright, fine.” He bends over and goes to work cutting the small tree down. He used to do this with his parents all the time. It was something his family and Lance’s family typically did together; going out and choosing their trees. Usually, the trees they cut were much larger and usually they actually had cars to take them home. Lance’s older sister was always the picky one, but now that she isn’t here, obviously Keith has to make sure they are getting the best tree.

Lance tends to want the worst looking ones because he “feels bad for them.” It’s just one of those “Lance things” that Keith admires, but doesn’t quite understand.

They drag their tree through the snow to the small cabin, where they pay for it. The cabin also sells hot chocolate and kettle corn, so naturally Lance had to get the largest sizes of both.

They call their cab and wait in the cabin, thawing from the cold and sharing a giant bag of kettle corn. It’s still hot and it’s sweet and salty and Keith is very satisfied with how the day ended up going. The tree looks like it’s small enough to squish into the backseat with them. It smells sweet, like pine and sap. Keith may act like he doesn’t have any Christmas spirit, but Christmas is easily his favorite holiday. And Lance knows it, too. Keith honestly think that Lance’s idea to come out here was more for him than just for Lance.

They pile into the backseat of the cab and the cab driver looks immensely unhappy about it. But Keith doesn’t really care. He’s far too content to care. Lance talks the poor drivers ear off about how his family used to decorate the tree in their living room while singing Christmas carols and making gingerbread cookies. The driver looks like he couldn’t care less, but Keith likes hearing about it, despite having to hear it every year. He knows how excited Lance is to go home for Christmas break in a couple of weeks. So he lets him blabber about it as much as possible.

When they get to their apartment, Keith gives a very generous tip to the driver, for having to deal with Lance’s chattering and also for the mess of pine needles they left in the backseat. Lance bursts through the door excitedly, trailing tree bark and tufts of green needles all down the hallway of their small, dingy apartment building. He throws off his multiple coats and his hat, leaving them in a pile on the floor. Keith walks in behind him, picking up his things and folding them neatly. Lance will probably panic while looking for them later, so he can at least make it a little easier for him.

“I think it can go right here.” Lance says, holding the tree upright in the corner of the small, cramped living room. “What do you think?”

Keith shrugs. “That looks okay.”

“Cool. Now, here’s something we didn’t think about.” Lance slightly lets go. The tree starts to fall. He catches it quickly. “How is it going to stand?”

Keith snorts. “Shit. We don’t have one of those...standy things.”

“Oh no!” Lance squeaks, already panicking. That didn’t take long. “What are we going to do? We’re too poor for one!”
“We could use...something else? Something heavy?”

Lance sighs sadly, collapsing against the tree. “We’re idiots. We’re broke idiots.”

“Just…” Keith sighs. Lance pouts even further, cheeks squished against the side of the tree. “Wait. I might be able to think of something. Start taking the twine off of it.”

Lance nods, eyes still clouded with disappointment as he unties the twine holding the tree together.

Keith looks around their apartment. They really dont have much of anything at all. He starts to lose hope before he finds a huge bag of blue, decorative rocks under his bed. What the...how has he never seen these before? “Uh...Lance?”

“Yeah?” Lance calls from the living room.

“Wanna tell me why there’s a three gallon bag of fish tank rocks under my bed?”

There is a long silence. Then Lance says, hesitantly, “I may or may not have...started a project...recently...to make our apartment look like a beach resort.”

“What?”

“You know! Like, getting home from classes and walking into a room that looks like a hotel room in Cancun. We’d be all ‘damn, classes were killer! Time to take a break in this extremely beach-like, relaxing, luxury resort experience.”

“So...you bought blue rocks?”

“It’s a work in progress, Snickers! I don’t appreciate your judgmental tone.”

Keith chuckles, shaking his head. “Well, we’re going to use them to hold up the tree.” He hoists the bag over his shoulder and carries it to the kitchen.”It’s kind of perfect, actually.”

“What? How?” Lance asks, starting to sound impatient as the tree weighs down on him.

Keith fills a salad bowl with the heavy rocks and walks over to Lance. He helps Lance lift the tree and they, quite ungracefully, stab it into the full bowl. They take a few steps back, slowly. The tree stays upright.

“Snickers!” Lance exclaims. “You genius!”

Keith laughs. “I can’t believe that worked.”

“Now we can decorate it! Oh this is going to be so fun!”

They both stare at each other for a moment. Keith blinks slowly, watching the realization dawn on Lance’s face.

“W—we…” Lance blinks, face falling. “We don’t….we dont have--”

“Decorations.” Keith finishes for him, sounding exasperated.

“We are Christmas failures.” Lance mumbles sadly, hanging his head.

Keith sighs. “Yeah...looks like we are.”
Lance claps suddenly, eyes snapping back up brightly to look at Keith. “Wait! Wait, we can fix this!”

Keith raises an eyebrow. “We can?”

“Yes! We can make decorations!”

Keith glances around their empty apartment. “With...what?”

“Cookies! Gingerbread cookies!” Lance jumps excitedly. “I have all the ingredients! We can make gingerbread cookies, and then stab little holes in their heads and use paperclips to hang them up!”

Keith stifles a laugh. “Stab their heads?”

“You know what I mean.” Lance says flatly. “Come on!”

Keith hums. “I mean, I guess it’s better than a naked tree.”

Lance sighs, patting the tree just like he did at the farm. “You look beautiful either way, tree. Don’t worry.”

Keith scoffs, walking into the kitchen and getting out the ingredients.

xxx

They pop the trays into the oven, trying to ignore the absolute disaster zone that used to be their kitchen. They are both covered from head to toe in flour. Lance has a smear of cinnamon on his cheek and Keith has nutmeg in his hair. They sigh collectively, leaning back against the counter and staring at the oven.

“We did good.” Lance says, nodding solemnly. “There should be enough in there to cover the tree.”

“I think we may have some red icing too.” Keith says emotionlessly.

“You mean, from your birthday?” Lance grimaces. “Three months ago?”

Keith hesitates. “Uh...maybe.”

“You are a gross, gross boy.”

“Well then we’re going to be hanging colorless, blank cookies on our tree. Happy now?” Keith snaps, crossing his arms over his chest.

Lance doesn’t look like he heard him, because he’s leaning in a bit closer to the oven and pursing his lips. Suddenly, his mouth falls open. “Oh my-- Keith. Did we....?”

Keith observes the dimly lit oven window. “What?”

“Did we forget to grease the cookie sheet?”

They both blink wordlessly at each other.

“We used non-stick parchment paper though?” Keith says, unsure. They both eye the sealed box of
parchment paper, completely untouched.

“We forgot...the parchment paper.” Lance says, a little robotically. “We forgot…”

They turn their attention back to the oven. Lance deflates against the counter. “Fuck.”

“Christmas failures.” Keith repeats, a little teasingly. “Shall we get it printed on a t-shirt?”

Lance scowls at him, throwing a wet towel at his face. “Can we just clean, please?”

Keith laughs out loud and doesn’t miss the reluctant smile breaking across Lance’s face too. They wipe down the kitchen and pretend everything is fine while three dozen cookies cement themselves to the cheap, tin cookie sheets in the oven.

xxx

Present Day

Keith knocks on the vaguely familiar, dark wooden door. He wrings his hands nervously, feeling incredibly stupid for showing up here after a whole month. After he promised himself he would stop. The door swings open and Keith is hit with the smell of expensive cologne. Vanilla. Cinnamon. He stares at Kevin’s smiling face.

“Hey.” Kevin says, cheerful as ever. “Long time no see.” He steps aside and Keith saunters in, guilt already weighing down in his gut. “Want a drink?”

“We’re in love.” Keith huffs, taking off his jacket. “Whiskey would be great.” He hates whiskey. But he doesn’t deserve nice things right now. He’s making a huge mistake.

He hears Kevin pouring the glass and turns around, a little reluctantly, to study Kevin’s...backside. Kevin is less slim than Lance, but just as tall. Keith loves Lance’s thin wrists. Bony elbows. The wiry muscles in his thighs from playing soccer in high school and the small, toned definition in his thin shoulders. Pronounced shoulder blades. God, he loves everything about them. Kevin is much more filled out. His skin is the same smooth brown but it covers a more muscled body. It’s not as graceful looking. It’s not as breathtaking. It’s missing the freckles, and the small scars, and the light peach fuzz that Keith associates with the body he has come to love.

Love.

Right. That’s why he’s here. That’s why he booked it out of his apartment, the second he heard the front door open.

He’s in love.

With Lance.

Kevin hands him the glass and he practically downs it, feeling the familiar panic rising like the bile in his stomach, threatening to have him doubled over at any moment. It’s the same panic that found him a week ago, cramped into a hotel bed with Lance and listening to his own heartbeat, wild and terrified in his ears.

And Keith has been making a mess of everything because of it. He tactfully avoided Lance for the entire day after the wedding. Lance was so busy catching up with work for other events that he barely realized it, but Keith was desperate not to cross paths with him all day. He was terrified of what would’ve come out of his mouth if their eyes locked, even just for a second. With the realization so fresh in his mind, like an open wound, it felt sensitive and almost painful to have Lance too close to him. His skin had tingled when Lance brushed past him. His heart had thudded at the sound of his voice.

Keith got home early from work today but panicked when he heard Lance coming in. Kevin house, unfortunately, was the first place he could think of to escape to. And he knows that he can’t avoid Lance forever, but right now there are more important feelings to focus on; the sickly sweet smell of Kevin’s cologne, the softness of his skin, the weight of his hands on Keith hips as he pulls him a little closer. Keith’s throat still burns from the whiskey but he lets himself feel it for a moment, kind of like a punishment.

“I’ve missed you.” Kevin mutters. He doesn’t mean it, of course. He’s really just saying, “i’ve missed sex” or “I’ve missed this”, but Keith doesn’t care. Because he doesn’t really miss Kevin either. He does miss the sex. He misses feeling like what he wants is in reach. He misses getting what he wants, even if it’s only for a moment and even if it’s not what he wants at all.

He lets his eyes fall shut and the smell of Kevin’s cologne, or lotion, or lip balm, or whatever the fuck it is, swirls around his head in dizzying circles and he doesn’t even try to do the right thing. He feels Kevin’s hands sliding up his back and imagines they are Lance’s hands. He feels lips on his neck, covered with a sheen of lip balm, and pretends they are Lance’s lips. He feels the firm, solid line of Kevin’s body pressed against his and pictures lean muscle, thin thighs, broad shoulders and dark freckles, pressed into him like thorns, reminding him of what he wants so desperately and giving him a fleeting taste of what he can’t have.

Kevin leads Keith to the couch where they fall together, limbs tangled. Keith runs his fingers along Kevin’s jaw and it is smooth to the touch. The curve of his jawline is just as subtle as Lance’s. Keith’s head spins. Kevin palms him through his jeans and Keith realizes how hard he is, without even having done anything at all yet. It makes him feel pathetic. It makes him feel eager. Hungry. He moans loudly, surprising himself. Kevin even pauses for a half second, probably perplexed beyond all reason, but then continues.

Things escalate as they always do. Keith’s fantasies start to become more and more graphic as Kevin gets him closer, and closer, and closer. He imagines Lance’s mouth on him. On his chest. On his stomach. On his dick. He imagines the weight of Lance in his lap. Lance’s fingers in his hair, tugging harshly. Lance’s voice, whispering encouraging things into his ear. He feels himself shaking and he’s stunned at how quickly he is riling himself up. He can feel himself getting so close and it has not taken long, at all. He’d be surprised if Kevin ever actually wanted to see him again, because before he can even try to control himself, he’s coming. It’s all encompassing and leaves him shuddering. Gasping. He bunches up Kevin’s shirt in his hands and feels the ghost of Lance’s lips pressed warmly against his temple.

Kevin doesn’t really have much to say to him after the fact. Keith can tell he wants him out of there as fast as possible. Keith thanks him for the whiskey, a little awkwardly, and shuffles out of the apartment as quickly as he arrived.

He stands in the hallway, a little disgusted with himself. A little shocked. Heart still reeling and head
still pounding. The warm feeling in his bones isn’t comfort. It’s anxiety. He doesn’t feel ready to go home. He doesn’t feel ready to go anywhere, really. He just stands there, outside of Kevins door, with his pants halfway unzipped and his shoes not on all the way and his jacket hanging off of one shoulder and he really feels, truly, like he has hit rock bottom.

He knows that if he tells Lance, Lance will feel horrible. Because Lance cares about him. Because Lance is always the person Keith goes to, with all of his problems, no matter how embarrassing. He knows that if he goes home right now and tells the truth:

“I just had sex with a stranger and cried the whole way home. Today has been the worst…I’m so in love with you it hurts.”

Lance would listen. He would understand. He would do what any best friend would do. He’d hold Keith and tell him to stop crying. He’d give him advice. Make him cookies. Because Lance isn’t a monster. And he may not feel the same way about Keith but would he really ditch Keith if he found out the truth?

A flash of Lance’s face; fond eyes and a kind smile directed towards Olivia, makes Keith’s small glimmer of hope come crumbling down.

Lance is finally happy with someone who treats him right. Keith would just fuck everything up. Lance deserves the calm after the storm, not the storm itself. Lance has always deserved better than the mess Keith would bring him.

And now, Lance is happy.

Keith sniffs a little, begging himself not to cry, and defeatedly makes his way to the stairwell. He’s got to go home sometime. He can’t just stand here forever.

xxx

The door bursts open and Lance looks up from his phone excitedly. He hasn’t really had time to talk to Keith all week, and today is his first day off in a while. Keith has been really busy too, but Lance recognizes the lazy footsteps before he even sees the boy’s face, and scrambles off of the couch to greet him.

Lance doesn’t really know what happened during the wedding. His brain was somewhere else. He was having a momentary lapse in sanity. Of course Keith is attractive. Lance has always thought Keith was attractive. It was just such a romantic night, and he got carried away. His brain tends to do that, anyway. But liking Keith? That would be crazy. Like, insane. Impossible. How did he, for one second, think that was the case? There’s no way.

“Snickers!” Lance exclaims when he sees Keith. “Where’ve you been?”

Keith turns around with a look of panic in his eyes. It takes Lance a moment to figure out why. Keith has obviously just had...a very good time with someone. His hair is messy from what were probably fingers running through it and tugging on it, his clothes are on, but just barely. Sloppily done buttons and a loose hanging jacket. There is a pink flush on his face and his lips look red and bitten. And...

“Woah, man.” Lance says, and he doesn’t know why is voice sounds so choked. “Did you...uh...” He clears his throat. Why is this so hard to say? “Hang out with, uh...Hunk?”
Nice, Lance.

Keith blinks at him. Lance ignores the dark purple of his eyes. He can barely read any emotion on Keith’s face. “Yeah.” Keith says, hesitantly. “Yeah we just...hung out.” His voice is low and scratchy. Lance doesn’t even want to know why.

“Cool cool. Nice.” He says, trying for nonchalance. “Did you have a good time?”

Keith looks like he’s not really in the mood to talk about it, but nods. He tosses his jacket onto the counter and sniffs, walking towards the fridge. “Do we have any food?” He asks, changing the subject.

“We should. I made spaghetti and meatballs yesterday.”

Keith hums. A small smile makes its way onto his face. He leans over and picks up the Tupperware from the fridge. “This container...has Prince Eric on it.” He holds the Tupperware closer to his face. “From the little mermaid.”

Lance chuckles. “They were on sale at the dollar store. Seventy-nine cents for Disney princess tupperware!”

The small smile breaks into a full grin. “Oh my god. I hate them.”

“Me too!” Lance says. Keith puts the container in the microwave and then sits across from Lance, sighing.

“I’ve barely seen you this week.” Lance says, starting conversation. Keith finally lifts his eyes and looks directly at him. And he doesn’t like Keith, but, Jesus, those eyes.

“Yeah...I’m sorry.” Keith mumbles. “Just been really busy.”

“Well today is our first day off together!” Lance says, absentmindedly tracing the outline of Keith’s sharp cheeks with his eyes. He ignores the word that is repeating over and over again in his head; Pretty. Pretty. Pretty.

“How was your week?” Keith asks, standing up to get his food out of the microwave.

Lance sighs. “Well, I didn’t die.”

Keith laughs. “That, is spectacular.” He says. “I don’t think I did either.”

“And you had a successful date.” Lance says, binging up Keith’s sex life yet again, because for some reason he loves suffering. Keith raises an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah, it was fun.” He says, studying Lance. “Things are going really well with him.”

Lance nods. “Sure, sure, I knew they would.” Why is he being so awkward? Is the thought of Keith having sex with someone really messing with his head that much? Keith has sex with people all the time.

Keith sits back down with his food, slowly. Hesitantly. “Are you...alright?”

“Yeah! I’m golden.” Lance says, sounding particularly not golden.

Keith rolls his eyes. “You’re using your ‘panic mode’ voice.”
“My what?” Lance’s voice cracks. Right. “I’m not panicked.”

“Lance, what’s wrong?” Keith asks, sounding tired. “Do you not like Hunk or something?”

Lance blinks at him, feeling like he’s falling for a split second at the question. “What? No!” He finally blurts. “I love Hunk.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

Lance glances at Keith’s tangled sex hair. He’s never really thought about Keith’s hair. It’s been right there, on his head, all of these years. Just...existing. And now Lance has this weird itch under his skin, like...he’s never really touched it. At least, not how it looks like it’s been touched now. Something stirs in his stomach, unfamiliar and unpleasant, because he’s been around this stupid mop of hair for more than fifteen years and he’s practically memorized everything about it and someone who has only seen it for a few months is running their hands through it and tugging at the ends of it and what gives them the right to just—

“Lance?” Keith sounds worried.

“What?” Lance inhales sharply. “I’m sorry, I was zoning out. Were you, uh...saying something? Actually, hold that thought.” Lance leans towards Keith and, without really thinking, reaches out to smooth his hair down. Despite his hair being tangled, it’s surprisingly soft. “You’re kinda a mess...” He laughs nervously, hoping he doesn’t sound like anything is out of the ordinary. He sighs. “Nevermind. It’s not cooperating. Welp, I tried.” He sits back down.

Keith looks at him with confused eyes. Confused, big, violet eyes, and a pink flush in his cheeks.

Stop looking at his eyes.

“I was...asking if you were okay?” Keith says hesitantly.

Lance tilts his head to the side, gaining his bearings. Jeez, could he seriously still be suffering from wedding side effects? “I am! Sorry. I swear I worked my ass of this week. I’ve been zoning out a lot. I probably just need to sleep.”

Keith nods, pursing his lips skeptically. Then he shrugs. “Yeah, I feel that.”

“Do you have any other plans today?” Lance asks.

“No, thank god.

Lance’s phone lights up. He looks down and sees a text from Olivia, asking if he’s free.

“Who’s that?” Keith asks.

“It’s Olivia.” Lance says. And he feels something tugging in his chest because he’s making this conversation awkward. He knows he is. And Keith is his best friend and nothing has ever been awkward between them. But he doesn’t know why, he just can’t stop himself from thinking about--

“You gonna go see her?” Keith asks.

Lance glances again at his messed up hair then back down to his face. For some reason, he wants to say no. But maybe a night out with Olivia will get all this crazy shit out of his head, once and for all. “Yeah, probably in a bit.”

Keith’s face falls slightly and Lance has the absurd urge to take back what he said.
“Gotcha.” Keith says, a little hesitantly. “Well...have fun.” He gets up and sends Lance a small, kind smile. One that doesn’t look like it fits on Keith’s face quite right. “Maybe I’ll see you tonight?”

“Yeah, yeah. For sure.” Lance says, feeling an inexplicable warmth in his cheeks. Keith nods slowly and then pads into his room, closing the door behind him.

It was all just...so fucking awkward.

Lance shakes his head, hiding his idiotic, blushing face in his hands.

What the fuck is going on?

xxx

**Junior Year (College)**

Whenever the Kogane and the McClain family get together, it’s like trying to light a wet blanket on fire. It’s not that Keith’s parents are drab, or boring, it’s just that Lance’s parents are very...not boring. Their families have been close for years, so they have, overtime, learned how to come together quite nicely. But it took many, many grossly large misunderstandings, culture clashes, and even fights sometimes, to get both families to understand and accept their differences.

There are no clashes tonight, though, because The McCains and the Koganes have made the executive decision to get together for New Years Eve this year. Something about both boys being home at the same time and celebrating as “one big happy family”. But Keith doesn’t mind at all, because they are all cramped into Lance’s tiny, old living room that smells like dry flowers and firewood, and The air is filled with Spanglish and Lance’s laughter and Keith has been sipping on champagne for the past hour. Things are warm. Things are good.

After the nightmare that was sophomore year of college, Keith really never thought he and Lance could ever reach a solid point in their friendship again. But he was wrong, because these days he feels like they only got closer after that whole mess. And it’s night like these, when he is surrounded by Lance’s family as well as his own, that he really appreciates that.

Shiro is chattering away with Keith’s dad about some girl he met who apparently has silver hair. Keith think’s that’s super weird, but Shiro has always had a thing for unique traits. Usually Lance is around to make fun of him for it, but Lance is too busy bugging the absolute shit out of his older sister Elena, who ends up taking off his party hat and then crushing it against his forehead. Lance yelps in pain and pouts, walking over to Keith. He throws a loose arm over Keith’s shoulders.

“Well, Snickers, in one minute and thirty seven seconds it’ll be a new year.” He says wistfully. “It’ll be the hour of new beginnings. A new door opening. An opportunity, if you will.”

Keith snorts. “It’ll literally be exactly the same.” He says, grinning because he’s a little bit tipsy.

Lance laughs. “It’s a big deal, man! It’s when Harry and Sally fell in love!”

“What?”
“The movie?” Lance asks, incredulously. “When Harry Met Sally? It’s a classic romance!”

Keith giggles, looking around before turning back to Lance. “Well, there’s nobody to pull your ‘classic romance’ moves on here.”

“You may be right. But come the new year, I will be romancing everyone. It’s my resolution.”

“Oh yeah?”

“And mark my words, I will be kissing someone next year. And I will be very in love with them.”

Keith smirks. “Consider your words marked.”

The countdown starts. Lance jumps and holds onto Keith a little tighter out of excitement. Keith’s heart thumps happily in his chest. The countdown is always his favorite part, as cliche as that is.

Both families are shouting as the number gets smaller.

“5...4...3...2...1--!”

The living room explodes with the happy shouts and screams and-- jeez, where did Lance’s family find party horns? Lance’s father tears open a bag of confetti and it gets everywhere. “Happy New Year!” Everyone shouts, over and over again. Keith feels giddy and can’t stop laughing. His ears are ringing at the volume and Lance tackles him into a hug, nearly causing him to fall over.

When they separate, Lance looks at him and wiggles his eyebrows suggestively.

“What?” Keith shouts over the noise. “You’re not getting a kiss from me!”

Lance laughs loudly and then shrugs, leaning forward and planting a wet, sloppy kiss onto Keith’s cheek. Keith groans and rolls his eyes.

“Happy New Year, Snickers!”

Keith has never been more eager to put a year behind him. “You too, Lance.” He says, and his face hurts from smiling.

xxx

Present Day

Keith is losing it.

Lance knows. He has to. There’s no other explanation for the trainwreck of a conversation that just occurred. Lance knows. He knows that Keith is fake-dating Hunk. He knows that Keith is madly in love with him. Oh my god, he knows. Maybe Hunk told him. Maybe Keith said something in his sleep. Keith’s face burns as he slams his room door behind him, leaving Lance alone in the kitchen.

That was the most awkward conversation he’s ever had, in his entire life, with Lance. And there is only one reason Keith can think of, really. One thing that could completely destroy their relationship as they know it. It’s Keith’s stupid, stupid feelings and this incredibly irresponsible secret that he
thought, for some reason, he’d be clever enough to hide.

Lance might even know about Kevin. God. Does Lance know about Kevin? Lance knows about Kevin. Lance knows. Their friendship will never be the same again because Lance knows everything--

A soft knock on his door abruptly cuts off his thoughts. “Snickers? Can we talk?”

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

“Uh…I’m changing.” Keith says weakly.

“Please,” Lance whines, dragging the word out. “Let me in.”

Keith sighs shakily. This is it. This is the end. He’s managed to fuck up Lance’s life; his happiness with Olivia, his one and only solid friendship; all because Keith can’t control his fucking feelings for the first time since he was born.

He opens the door.

Lance is marching into his room with a look of determination on his face. Keith decides, in a moment of panic, that he needs to be the one to talk first. “Lance, look, I don’t want this to ruin--”

“What’s your problem, man?” Lance asks, sounding a little exasperated. Keith, mentally, takes two steps backwards. Does Lance…not know?

“What’s your problem?” He counters, with an equal amount of accusation.

“That was awkward, right? That conversation we just had?”

Keith swallows. “I mean, a bit.”

“So what’s up? Since when could we not talk about what was bothering us?”

They both blink at each other. Keith feels his heart falling to his feet. He can’t talk about this. Especially not when Lance is looking as adorable as is he now, with his annoyingly tight long sleeved blue shirt and fluffy gray sweatpants. Keith has to fight not to trail his eyes all over Lance’s stupid, dumb, horribly attractive lean torso.

“I don’t know…” Keith starts, scrambling for something to say “I guess I just sometimes...feel weird talking about Hunk with you.” Okay, that makes sense, right? He can roll with that. “Because you know him, and stuff.”

Lance shakes his head furiously. “That’s not it.” He says. Panic rises in Keith’s stomach.

“There’s not it.” He replies.

“No, no. I think it’s…” Lance swallows for a moment, studying Keith’s face. “I mean, it might be because we’re like…”

Keith raises an eyebrow at him, trying not to jump to conclusions.

“Like, we’ve never both dated someone at the same time. Ya know?”

Keith lets out a small breath. “What do you mean?”
“Like, I’m dating someone, and you’re dating someone. And like, usually one of us is single but now we both have someone.”

Keith feels a small stab in his chest. “So?”

“So we like...don’t see each other as much?” Lance says. And then a small blush blooms across his cheeks. “Like, I don’t know. I miss you.”

Keith swallows, trying to ignore the sound of his rapidly melting heart. “We live together.” He says, a little shortly, because it’s either that or tackling Lance onto his bed and kissing the life out of him.

Lance frowns. “Well, yeah, but like.” His brow furrows. “You don’t...miss me?”

Keith is really having trouble deciding what to do. How to react. Because he absolutely misses Lance, specifically due to the fact that he has purposely been trying to avoid him. But there is a reason for that. And he has to remind himself of that, over and over again, or else he will lose all control.

“Well...yeah. Of course I do.” He says, but tries to keep his tone a little cold. “But we were bound to meet people at some point. We can’t just like…” He hates everything about what he’s saying. He hates the frown, deepening on Lance’s face. He wants to kiss it away. “We can’t just never find people we like because we’ll miss each other too much.”

It sounds icy. A little heartless. Keith is almost engulfed with self loathing as he watches Lance’s face crumble a little more. But he doesn’t have a choice. He can’t tell Lance the truth.

“I don’t think that caring about our friendship says anything about my relationship with Olivia.” Lance says defensively.

“I didn’t say that.”

“You basically did.”

“No, I didn’t. I’m just saying it’s...about sacrifice.” The word burns on his tongue. He begs himself to leave it. To stop talking. He barely even knows what he’s saying anymore.

“Sacrifice?” Lance scowls. “Like sacrificing our friendship?”

Keith is suddenly struck with the urge to cry, and jeez, he really needs to get out of here. If Lance keep looking at him like that he might die. He might grab Lance by the collar and sob “I love you” repeatedly into his chest, over and over again. He’ll get snot all over his shirt. His feelings are doing too many things and he can’t even identify one of them, so he does what he always does, and shuts himself down. He clears his throat. “Can we talk about this later?” He says hurriedly, trying not to get choked up. “I’m like... really tired right now.”

“What?”

“I just want to sleep.”

Lance blinks at him, looking absolutely horrified, before shaking his head and groaning in frustration. “There it is. I actually expected this, for the record. Why don’t you sleep for the rest of the day? Avoid even more conversations.” He bites, eyes seething. “Must be tired from all that fucking. Don’t let me get in the way of your good time.”

Keith can’t even begin to process what that means before Lance is storming out of his room and
slamming the door behind him.

_Don’t let me get in the way of your good time._

Keith stares at the closed door, completely dumbfounded. He feels like an asshole. He is an asshole. He didn’t even handle that situation with one tiny ounce of grace, and he knows it. Fighting with Lance has got to be one of the top three worst things to ever happen to him. Every time it happens, it get more painful. It doesn’t help that now, he’s head over heels in love and the regular amount of pain feels like it’s been tripled.

But there’s something that he can’t seem to ignore. It makes an absurd part him feel fluttery. Hopeful. Stupid.

_Must be tired from all that fucking._

Lance doesn’t feel the same way. There’s no way. And that is decided. But the way he left the room... What he said when he snapped...The angry crease between his brows...

Keith actually, disgustingly, finds himself smiling a little. Because Hunk...was right.

Lance is not okay with them being together.

And Keith, admittedly, loves that.

___

Lance is fuming, and the worst part is that he is fuming for an entirely different reason than what he should _really_ be fuming about. Because, he knows Keith well enough to understand that when Keith is an asshole like that, it means that he cares. So he doesn’t really think much of it. Keith has definitely pulled this kind of shit on him before; the whole, “maybe we should just be cold towards each other instead of having an emotional conversation” stunt. Lance is used to it. It’s just how Keith operates. He knows that in six hours he will stumble into Keith’s room and Keith will apologize profusely and they’ll end up talking about something stupid like Yeti sightings or the new ice cream flavor at Baskin Robbins.

But the problem is, that’s not what he’s mad about. Keith’s asshole-y ways are actually the least of his problems right now. Because for some reason, he can’t stop thinking about the fact that Hunk actually _touched_ Keith. He touched him all over. He ran hands through Keith’s hair and and probably saw his tattoo and most likely dragged his fingers across Keith’s—

_It doesn’t matter. Why are you freaking out so much?_

Lance has never been a possessive person. He doesn’t know why he’s suddenly feeling so possessive of his best friend; but there is an irritated buzzing, _burning_ right beneath the surface of his skin, and it builds and builds the harder he thinks about it. A persistent thought keeps nagging him, relentlessly, even when he thinks he is starting to move on. The thought that he has known Keith for almost _twenty years_ —he knows Keith like the back of his hand, practically better than he knows himself. But now there is a side of Keith that Hunk has seen, and it’s a side that Lance knows nothing about. And that just makes him incredibly frustrated. It makes him...almost... _jealous_ , that somebody who barely knows Keith at all, knows something about him that Lance doesn’t. That Lance _never_ will.
So, yes. Lance is fuming. He *pissed*.

And he really wishes it was because Keith’s an asshole. But clearly, it’s not.

xxx

“He told you he *missed* you and you said it didn’t *matter*?” Shiro asks, eyes wide. “Are you *crazy*? How long have you known Lance?”

Keith sighs. He doesn’t know why he comes to Shiro for help. Shiro is usually right about everything. It’s kind of a drag. “I *know*, I know. It was a bad move. I was in a bind, okay?”

Allura snorts from somewhere in the kitchen. “No you weren’t!”

Shiro nods, agreeing. “You could’ve just told him how you felt. Bind over.”

“That would’ve been literally the worst possible solution.” Keith says, frustrated.

“Worse than this one?” Shiro asks. “Because it doesn’t look like you guys are the best of friends right now.”

“It was just an argument.” Keith mumbles.

“Yes. For now, it is. But whatever this *thing* is, that you feel towards Lance…it’s going to fester. And probably come out very, very ugly.”

“It’ll never come out.” Keith retorts.

“You’re going to keep driving a wedge between you and Lance if you don’t get your act together.” Allura says flatly, walking into the living room with a glass of water. “Feelings only make things messy if you don’t deal with them properly.”

Keith groans. “Look, as much as I enjoy getting love advice from the happily married couple, you guys are missing a huge factor. Lance has a *girlfriend*.” Keith sighs. “Who makes him so *happy*? Do you know how long he has waited for that? Do you know how many people left him out in the cold, flat on his ass? This is a big deal for him. His... *romance* is rekindled. And all that bullshit.” Keith blushes. “And I’m apparently dating Hunk so...roadblocks.”

Shiro and Allura share a look that Keith probably isn’t mature enough to decipher.

“Olivia is really sweet.” Allura says, nodding. “And Lance *is* quite happy with her.”

Shrio studies Keith for a moment, like he’s trying to decide whether or not to say something. Then he says, “You make him happier.”

Allura nods sagely. Keith rolls his eyes.

“Not true. I’m not soft like that. I don’t...have the eyelashes. He’s got a type and I’m just...it doesn’t line up. Whatever.”

“Why do you even come here if you’re not going to listen to anything we say?” Shiro asks, exasperated.
Keith stands up, picking up his jacket. “Had to get out of the apartment.” He mutters. “But now I think I just need to go back and apologize.”

“Yeah.” Allura and Shiro say in unison, agreeing. Keith rolls his eyes.

“See ya.”

“Good luck, Romeo!” Allura calls behind him. Keith shakes his head, sighing. As he ducks into his car, he pulls out his phone.

*Group Text: The Game Plan (Hunk, Pidge, Keith)*

Keith

_Btw Hunk, if lance asks, we slept together and it was glorious_

Keith sighs and tosses his phone onto the passenger seat. He uses that group chat with Pidge and Hunk way too much. It’s mostly just him ranting about how cute Lance is and Pidge sending back very exasperated gifs of cats rolling their eyes, but they also use it to keep their stores aligned and avoid messy misunderstandings.

Keith’s phone vibrates.

Pidge

_Ayyyyyy congrats man_

Hunk

_Oh, sweet. Im sure lance loved that_

Keith chuckles.
Keith

I think he was a little weirded out

Pidge

“Weirded out” is keith’s denial version of “jealous”

Hunk

Shhh pidge, dont tell him that. He’s gotta figure it out on his own, remember?

Keith

I hate you both

Hunk

Then why’d you sleep with me?

Pidge

Aaahahahahha XD

Keith

Goodbye
“Is this really necessary?” Keith asks unenthusiastically. They are both seated on the ratty sofa in their apartment with printer paper and sharpies littered all over the coffee table in front of them. Lance slaps his arm.

“Yes. Don’t you want to have an amazing New Year?”

“Well yeah but why do we have to, like, write our resolutions? Can’t we just say them?”

“We said them last year, and did any of them happen?”

Keith pauses, thinking. “...no?”

“Exactly. See? I’m your friend, Snickers. I’m looking out for you. I want you to succeed.”

“Yeah but why all the different colors?” He says, eyeing the sharpies.

Lance shrugs. “If I’m going to be an event planner someday I have to get used to color coding and organizing shit. Why not start now?”

Keith sighs. “Fine. That’s fair.” He reaches forward and grabs the black marker, writing “New Year’s Resolutions” at the top of his page and underlining it. Lance groans.

“Of course you go for the blandest approach possible.”

“What? You told me to write them and I’m writing them!”

Lance chuckles. “Fine.” He grabs the purple and starts writing on his paper. “Well, my first one is to go to the gym more.”

Keith snorts.

“What?” Lance asks defensively. “You don’t think I can do it?”

“You haven’t been to the gym in two years.”

“Which is why I wanna go more!”

Keith sighs. “Fine...I guess I’ll write that one too.”

“But you go all the time.”

Keith shrugs. “So it’ll be easy.”

“Are you kidding me? That’s like when people give up vegetables for Lent.”

Keith laughs. “People do that? That’s actually kinda funny.”

Lance rolls his eyes. “Why did I think I could do this with you? I usually do it with my sister, and
she’s a lot more enthusiastic about it.”

“I’ll write, ‘get better at writing new year's resolutions’, if you want me to.”

Lance giggles. “Shut the fuck up.”

Keith ends up putting some music on and they both lean back into the couch, balancing their papers on hardcover books as they messily scrawl their resolutions for the new year. Keith really can’t think of anything too profound. He’s not very into this mushy, “follow your dreams” bullshit but he knows Lance is so it feels good to support him. Lance always sits down with his older sister and writes these. They make the lists look nice and then hang them up in their rooms. It’s a tradition that Lance has been doing with her ever since they were both tiny, tiny children. Elena had to leave town early on January first so they couldn’t do it this year, and Keith knows how important it is to Lance so he may or may not have, offhandedly, suggested that it could be fun. He was in way over his head though. He is very out of his element right now.

“How many do you have?” Lance asks from behind his paper.

“Uh...three?”

“You have no goals or aspirations, do you, Snickers?”

“No really.”

“No hopes, passions, interests?”

Keith purses his lips. “Hmmm...no.”

Lance sighs, leaning forward and snatching Keith’s list from his hands. “Let me see.” He scans over the three items, eyebrow gradually raising. “Study more? Seriously?”

Keith puts his face in his hands. “I can’t think of anything.”

Lance laughs. “Wash the dishes more often?”

“I hate you.”

“This is the greatest list I’ve ever seen.”

“I hate you.”

“Like, this is a holiday all by itself.”

Keith leaps forward, tackling Lance and gripping uselessly for his paper. “I’m not done with it yet!”

Lance is cackling. “I’m hanging it up! It goes in my room!”

“No!” Keith shouts, but Lance is already pushing him off and bounding down the hallways, continuing to laugh evilly.

They trip over each other, laughing and shouting, before tumbling into Lance’s room. Keith makes a grab for the paper but misses. He tries again. Misses again. Before he can try a third time, Lance is somehow finds a thumbtack, conveniently, on his desk, and stabs the sad piece of paper against the wall.

They both freeze after the deed is done, just staring at Keith’s sad, smudged, messy list. It doesn’t
even fill up a quarter of the sheet. Lance is laughing hysterically again before he can catch his breath, doubling over and slapping his hands over his stomach. “Oh my god, Elena is going to piss herself when she sees this.”

Keith sighs, giving up. He flops down onto Lance’s bed. “Well, I’m glad it brings you so much joy.” He says sarcastically.

“It does!”

Why don’t you hang up your list too, then?”

Lance is still giggling uncontrollably as he walks back into the living room, grabbing his list, and walking back into his bedroom. He’s still giggling as he pins his list up next to Keith’s; all bright purples and blues and yellows. The whole paper is full. There is even a little doodle of a champagne flute next to the title.

They sit side by side on the bed, studying the lists in front of them. Next to Lance’s, Keith’s looks even more understated. Even more bland.

But strangely, the display shows their personalities with outstanding accuracy.

“It’s like looking in a mirror.” Lance says.

“Yeah, that’s super weird.” Keith agrees, nodding.

Lance bumps his shoulder with his own. “So, how fun was that?”

Keith sends him a death glare. “Never make me do that again.”

Lance bursts out laughing, for the millionth time that night, and falls backwards onto his bed. “This year is going to be amazing.”

Keith actually feels himself smiling, which is absurd, because he really doesn’t think that’s going to be the case. But for some reason, the way Lance says it has him changing his mind. “Yeah...hopefully.” He says, falling onto the bed too.

xxx

Present Day

Keith is sitting on the futon with his knees pulled up to his chest, staring at the wall, when Lance walks back into the apartment.

Seeing Olivia had actually helped a bit more than he thought it would. They are finally at a point in their relationship where Lance feels like it’s safe to start being more physically intimate. And maybe Lance wanted to have a good time like Keith did. Whatever. Olivia is his girlfriend and he deserves to do those things with her. He’s moved slow enough for her to think he was a relatively normal guy. It’s okay if he shows her a little bit of his overly romantic side. Just a little.

Keith looks up tiredly as Lance walks over to the futon. He looks exhausted, but Lance can’t help
the tug in his chest at the soft, apologetic expression on his face. It’s like clockwork, every time. Keith always apologizes. Always.

Lance sits down next to him, crossing his arms over his chest and sighing. They sit in silence for a minute, just staring forward. Letting things settle. Thinking about what to say.

Lance asks, “String cheese or granola?”

Keith sighs. “Both options are the same.”

Lance turns to him, bewildered. “How do you do that?”

“Option one was for me to apologize first. Option two was for me to apologize first. I get it, I gotta apologize first.”

“No but seriously, how did you know that?”

Keith pouts a little, looking at Lance with stormy purple eyes. “I’m sorry, Lance.” He says gently. “I do miss you. And I don’t think we should...sacrifice anything. You’re right.” Keith sound a little uncomfortable, which is expected, because he doesn’t really enjoy talking about emotional things.

Lance takes a deep breath. “I know you’re really into Hunk.” He says, and it hurts a little as it comes out. He hates that it hurts. “And I’m...really happy for you. I’m sorry I freaked out.” He didn’t mean for it to sound so hesitant. But his weird, possessive ass shouldn’t hinder the first relationship Keith has had in a long time.

Keith nods slowly. “Same for you. With Olivia. I don’t want to ruin that for you by being…” Keith has a pained expression on his face for a moment and Lance wants to shake him. By being what? “I just don’t want to get in the way of it. Like, she treats you really well.”

Lance thinks about sitting next to Olivia and watching 500 Days of Summer, desperately pretending he doesn’t want to cry.

She treats him well. She does.

“You gotta tell me how you know, Snickers.” Lance says, choosing to change the subject. To lighten the mood. They’ve said their apologies. “How do you know what to choose? When I give you such random words?”

Keith looks away. “Isn’t it better left a mystery?” He asks, with a small smile on his face.

“No! Since when do I like mysteries?” Lance complains, leaning over and poking Keith’s cheek. It feels warm. Lance notices he’s blushing. It looks cute on him.

Lance. Stop.

“It’s really not that profound.” Keith deadpans.

“Then why can’t you tell me?”

Keith bites his lip, looking at Lance and trying to control his grin. “I don’t want to.”

“Why?” Lance shuffles in closer, twisting a finger into Keith’s ribs. Keith wiggles away, slapping Lance’s arm.

“Stop that.” He says, chuckling.
Lance briefly wonders if this is considered flirting. He then proceeds to briefly wonder why the *fuck* he briefly wondered that in the first place.

“Tell me or I’ll throw away all the Cinnamon Toast Crunch in this house.”

“We’re all out anyway.”

“Come on, Snickers. This secret is the *only* thing keeping us apart. Our friendship would be so much stronger without the *lies*.”

Keith’s face falls for a second. A split second, but Lance notices. Then he is grinning again, pretty pink lips and straight teeth and flushed cheeks.

“Let it go, man.”

“Why can’t you just give me a *clue*?” Lance replies, feeling the need to look away for a moment.

Keith studies him, looking torn. “Well, if I tell you...you’ll stop doing it.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “You...like when I do it?”

Keith blinks, expression unchanging. “…Yeah. I do.”

Lance feels a blush burning up his neck and takes a breath, scooting away from Keith a little. He recognizes the fluttering in his chest and it *terrifies* him. Because this isn’t a wedding anymore. There’s no reason why he should be feeling this way. There’s no reason why Keith’s eyes should look like *that* in the shitty lighting of their living room. There’s no reason why the spicy smell of Keith’s barely-used cologne should be filling him with heat like this. He *can’t* like Keith. He can’t. It’s a recipe for disaster. He’ll *lose* him. He’ll…

“Okay fine, I’ll tell you.” Keith says, voice low. His eyes gaze steadily into Lance’s unmoving. Lance blinks dumbly at him. Wait what?

“Really?” Lance breathes.

“Yeah.”

Lance cocks his head to the side. “Okay? So what is it?”

Keith swallows. “When you ask me what you want...you already *know* what you want.” He says, and it sounds like a confession.

“W-what? What do you mean?” Lance asks, feeling a little exposed.

Keith takes a deep breath through his nose. “When you say the options, there’s always one you genuinely want more. I can...hear it. Like, in the way you say it.”

Lance just sits there, staring at him. “What?”

“You’ve already *decided* when you ask me for my help. You just don’t trust yourself. But you almost *always* have chosen it already, probably without knowing.”

“What about over text? You can’t hear me then.” Lance snaps, a little defensive.

Keith smirks a little. “Well, usually I just guess.” He says, chuckling lowly. “Sometimes there is one obvious option though. Like, one of them will be ‘honey nut cheerios’ and I know you love those so.
I don’t know.” Keith shrugs. “It’s like you subconsciously name the best option your favorite breakfast cereal.”

Lance deflates, all the tension falling from his shoulders as he slumps onto the side of the couch. He is facing Keith now; both of their cheeks pressed into the back of the couch. He is so close. Lance can feel his breathing. Smell his shampoo. Lance looks up at his hair for a moment. It’s not tangled anymore. He itches to tangle it up again.

*You don’t like him. You don’t like him.*

“Well?” Lance breathes, absolutely floored. “You just...know me? That well?” His heart hiccups a little in his chest. Because of course Keith knows him that well. They’ve known each other their whole lives. But it’s more than that. Keith knows him because he takes the time to listen ...He’s listened to Lance, all these years, despite Lance always accusing him of never listening at all. He’s always been there, observing, collecting data, listening. Carefully.

Caringly.

Keith averts his eyes slightly and shrugs again. “You know what you want, Lance.” He says softly. “You always do. You just don’t trust your own decisions.”

*You know what you want.*

Lance’s gaze flicks down, for a split second, and studies the simple bow of Keith’s lips.

*I want to kiss you.*

It hits him like a slap in the face. It actually stings a little. He looks back up at Keith’s eyes, praying Keith didn’t notice. How horrible would that be? How embarrassing would that be, if Keith knew that for a split second, Lance actually thought about kissing him?

He swallows hard. Keith is right. Lance *knows* what he wants.

And he sure as fuck doesn’t trust himself *now*.

Chapter End Notes

—

same, lance.

Also, kevin is still alive? yeah, i was surprised too lol
Coconut Macaroons

Chapter Summary

this is most likely the calm before the storm, my friends

Chapter Notes

It....is 3AM and I don't even know what I'm still doing writing this haha i need to sleeeeeeeep

//weed warning

the next chapter will probably pick up right where this one left off--I really wanted to continue but. guys. your girl needs some shut eye haha but i really wanted to update today so this is what I've got for you!

i have nothing else to say right now. just that i love you all so dearly. and every message gives me life

bchsidhoicnwebdcivgohiwpjqddklvgwfhdijcs you rock okay enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Senior Year (College)

“How do you think it went?” Keith asks, watching Lance tear open a packet of Splenda and pour it into his coffee. “Do you think you did well?”

Keith decided to meet Lance in the campus coffee shop after he got a very distressed phone call from him about the job interview he had today. Lance has already started applying to post-grad jobs, which makes Keith a lot more nervous than he wants to let on. But he decides to not think about it too hard right now and instead focus on Lance’s worried face.

Lance raises an eyebrow at him, unconvinced. “Hello? I have crippling anxiety, remember? I did horrible. He probably called his wife afterwards and laughed at what a mess I was.” Lance tosses the empty Splenda packet to the side and stirs his coffee worriedly. “They probably had a “I hate Lance” party.

Keith sighs. “They don’t care nearly enough about you to do that.” He says apathetically. When he realizes that he’s not doing a very good job at comforting him, he backtracks and tries again. “Usually your anxiety just makes you think you did badly. But you always do well.”

Lance slumps dramatically in his seat. “Lies.” He mumbles. “I was such a wreck. The questions weren’t even hard! I was just so nervous.”
Keith shrugs. “Well, it was only one interview. Now you know for the next one.”

“I hate you and your stupid, rational mind.” Lance groans, putting his face in his hands. “I have too many feeling for this.”

Keith swallows. Being Lance’s best friend, it seems obvious that Keith would know how to comfort him by now. But even after all they’ve been through, he’s still trying to figure it out. It’s not in his nature to be so sympathetic, but he knows that’s what Lance needs. So he’s going to try.

“Hey, it’ll be alright.” He says gently. “If they don’t want you, someone else will. You really only need one ‘yes’.”

Lance sighs. “You say ‘one yes’ like it’s easy.” He says sadly. “I’ve already had four interviews. And nothing.”

“Well, I haven’t had any. So, you’re already ahead of a lot of people.” Keith tries encouragingly.

“Yeah, but you’re….” He glances up at Keith. “You’re you. You’re good at all this business bullshit. I’m not mature enough for this. I feel like I talk too loud. Laugh too much. It’s like I’m scaring the interviewer away.”

“You kidding me?” Keith counters. “I barely have a memorable personality. They’ll forget about me the second I leave the room.”

Lance studies him for a moment. Then his face, slowly, tentatively, cracks into a small smile. He hums. “Look at us. A boy who feels too much and a boy who doesn’t feel enough.” He leans back in his chair and sips on his coffee. “Who’s gonna want to hire us?”

Keith actually chuckles. “We could always come up with a plan B. Like...prostitution or something.”

Lance spits out his coffee all over the table, eyes blowing wide. “Snickers!” He exclaims, dissolving into giggles.

Keith laughs too. “What? They make a lot of money! I think we’re good looking enough, with some work. Then we could buy a penthouse and tell everyone we’re investment bankers.”

“This sounds like an idea I would come up with. What’s gotten into you?”

Keith shrugs. “I guess it was only a matter of time before we started turning into each other.”

Lance hums. “The transformation has begun.” He says, too seriously.

“Had to happen sometime.”

“Oh no, am I going to lose my dashing good looks? My tan skin? My long legs?”

“I take offense to that.”

“I don’t think I could handle having your hair.” Lance says, frowning at the thick black hair on Keith’s head.

“Does this mean I’ll actually get a tan when I go to the beach now?” Keith asks hopefully, ignoring Lance’s indirect insults.

“Nah.” Lance says with a grin, and Keith feels proud for finding a way to cheer him up. “I don’t think that’ll ever happen to you, Snickers.”
Present Day

Olivia smells like flowers and lemons and Lance breathes it in eagerly as he presses their lips together. He’s been seeing a lot more of her lately. He likes to tell himself that it’s just a coincidence, but he knows the real reason.

And the real reason? Well...he’s definitely not going to think about it right now.

Olivia is soft and kind and gentle. She’s Lance’s type in every way possible. Her skin is smooth and her hair is wild and curly and she giggles at all of his jokes. She doesn’t have any hard edges. She easy to swallow, and incredibly sweet. Lance likes that about her. He doesn’t have to worry about being caught off guard. He doesn’t have to brace himself whenever she talks.

Their relationship has been so smooth. Free of red flags. And maybe Lance hasn’t been very liberal about pouring his emotions all over her, but it’s for the best. Because look at how happy they are. No conflict, no confrontation. No “too much for me”, no “You’re freaking me out.” Lance may have finally mastered the art of being a normal boyfriend.

So he doesn’t need unnecessary feelings for Keith scrambling something that is actually going right, for once.

He banishes all thought of Keith from his head and presses closer into Olivia, letting his hands roam where they want to because he deserves this. He somehow managed to make this girl stay, and it took a lot of effort on his part. And she likes him, for some reason. So he’s going to take it and run with it. Olivia is like the girl he dreamed about all throughout high school. She is everything he wanted, for so many years. He runs his hands through her long hair and tumbles onto the couch with her, feeling giddy as she runs her hands up his bare stomach, slipping his shirt up.

He swipes his tongue along her bottom lip. She tastes sweet. Agreeable. Not too much of one thing and not too much of the other. She tastes how she sounds. She tastes how she acts. Lance thinks it tastes good. It’s comforting. It’s secure. It feels like protection.

The couch is warm and fluffy and the air in Olivia’s apartment still smells like a campfire. To Lance, it’s a soothing scent. It reminds him of summertime. Olivia, in general, reminds him of summertime.

He feels genuine relief kissing her. Touching her. Especially after the turmoil he’s been going through over the past week. An image of Keith’s lips flashes through his mind and he shivers, almost involuntarily.

Olivia’s hands are sliding up his thighs now and he tells himself not to think about it. Not to think about Keith. For one minute of this godforsaken week, can he just not think about Keith? But his brain is moving faster than he can keep track, thoughts stumbling over themselves, tumbling downhill, like they’ve been wanting to do this for so long. And his head fills with the picture of Keith’s face. Porcelain, cold skin. Sharp edges, pointed corners and calloused hands. Nothing to cushion the blow. Nothing easy to swallow. Piercing eyes and a permanent frown and blunt words that sit like weights in Lance’s chest.
Keith wouldn’t taste agreeable. Keith isn’t summertime. He’s the blizzards in the dead of winter and the strong winds in autumn, shaking all the leaves off the trees and stirring chaos in the air. Keith would taste like fire; burning and engulfing Lance’s lungs. Every time he thinks about him, it’s an all encompassing feeling. It’s terrifying. It’s unsafe.

And then Keith’s small smile, which somehow manages to look so soft, despite everything else.

Lance swallows hard and moves his head down, nuzzling his face in Olivia’s neck. Desperate to drown in her daisy perfume and citrus shampoo. Desperate to get these stupid, stupid thoughts out of his head.

Olivia giggles as he moves to unbutton her jeans.

His hands may be shaking, but it’s not for the right reasons. Because this, right here, with Olivia? This is safe.

So this is where he’ll stay.

xxx

“I brought dessert!” Hunk yells happily, bursting through the front door with a huge bowl in his hands. “Mostly because I slightly overshot my baking goal yesterday night—”

“You quadrupled the recipe.” Pidge deadpans, walking in behind Hunk. “Nearly broke your oven!”

“I just wanted to make sure I had enough! You know what my family is like when they come to visit.” Hunk counters.

Keith is sitting on the futon reading, and looks up when Hunk enters the living room. He smiles. “What are you doing here? Hey, Pidge.”

Pidge smiles and waves, looking much less dead than she did last time they spoke. Looks like finals are over for the semester. “Hiya, Keith. How goes the fight for true love?”

“Fuck off.”

Hunk sighs as he slams the bowl onto the rickety coffee table. He plants himself on the futon next to Keith and shrugs. “We figured you’d be home.” He says casually. Then he eyes the bowl. “And I really needed to get rid of these.”

“I didn’t realize we were at that stage in our friendship.” Keith teases.

“What stage?”

“Coming to my apartment unannounced? That’s like, afterschool sitcom level friendship.”

Hunk laughs. “Well, we did sleep together.”

Pidge snorts loudly from somewhere in the kitchen. Keith grins.

“Right, right, How could I forget? It was glorious.”
“You realize I’m going to hold that over your head for decades and decades to come, right?” Hunk jokes, leaning forwards and cracking open the lid of the giant bowl. He peers inside. “Like someday when you and Lance are married and all of this is over, I’m gonna be like, ‘hey Keith, remember when we had that one, glorious night together?’”

Keith shoots him an unamused look. “We’re not getting married.”

“Okay, man. You’re totally right.” Hunk says, severely unconvinced.

Keith clears his throat, pointing his chin at the bowl. “What are they?”

Hunk’s face lights up. “Coconut macaroons! Baked with rum to feed the raging alcoholic within us all.” He grins crookedly. “Try one?”

“Hell yeah.” Keith says, grabbing one from the bowl. He bites into it and it crumbles deliciously into his mouth. It’s salty, and sweet, and earthy. His eyes fall shut.

“Holy fuck, Hunk.”

“Good?”

“Amazing.”

Pidge walks back into the room and sits on the shaggy carpet. “I had twelve before we came here. And honestly? I feel like I’m going to die but...pass me another one, Hunk.”

Hunk laughs. “Death by food is the only way to go.”

Pidge hums, stuffing a macaroon into her mouth. “Death by your food is the only way to go.” She corrects. Then she looks around. “Where’s the bride-to-be?”

Keith rolls his eyes. “You mean Lance?”

“Yes I mean Lance.” Pidge snaps back with equal amounts of unamusement. “Aren’t you guys joined at the hip or something?” She smiles teasingly, but it looks kind. Understanding. Pidge may be a little rough around the edges but the more Keith gets to know her, the dorkier she seems. This girl wouldn’t actually hurt a fly.

“No, we are not, thank you very much.” Keith replies. “He’s at Olivia’s….doing god knows what.” Keith sighs sadly, grabbing another cookie. “I’m going to gain fifty pounds today.”

“It’s cool. Eat your sorrows.” Pidge muffles around her fourteenth cookie. The front door opens.

Keith watches Pidge’s expression as her face lights up. “Lance!”

Lance saunters into the room confidently, grinning at Hunk and Pidge. “Aw, you guys are here? I didn’t know I was missing a party.” His gaze falls on Keith. He salutes adorably with two fingers. “Snickers,” He says, as a form of greeting. “What are you guys up to?” He tosses his coat and wallet to the side. It’s a nasty habit that always leaves Keith cleaning up after him. Then he plops down onto the floor in front of the futon, stretching out his legs. “We gossiping?”

Keith can smell perfume on Lance’s clothes from where he is sitting. It makes him feel uneasy. Jealousy settles in the pit of his gut; ugly and painful.

“I made you guys some cookies.” Hunk says, pushing the bowl towards Lance. “Coconut macaroons.”
Lance’s face explodes into a surprised grin. “Oh my god! Hunk! Yes!” He opens the container and grabs four, stuffing one in his mouth. “Ermmagfffd” He muffle, mouth full. Hunk laughs.

“Glad you like them, Lance.”

Keith feels guilt weighing down on his chest. Lance and Hunk have such an amazing friendship and this...charade that Keith is pulling could potentially get in the way of that. In fact, it already has. Keith can see how Lance is slightly tensed up--just barely, but still evident, as he tries to make himself comfortable on the carpet. He sees the cloudiness in Lance’s eyes, creating a cautious expression that no grin could make look convincing. He knows that these aren’t things other people notice about Lance like he does. He’s had a lot of practice when it comes to reading Lance’s emotions and knowing when he’s lying.

Now he’s talking to Hunk about some TV show that they were obsessed with when they first started getting to know each other. Lance is laughing animatedly and shouting and Hunk is ranting about the new season that apparently came out this week and the guilt just eats away at Keith, more and more and more. Lance doesn’t deserve to be messed with like this. Keith shouldn’t go on lying to him, but he doesn’t know what else to do. He feels like he’s scrambling, like he’s running out of options. Shiro, as usual, is right. His feelings are festering. And it’s getting incredibly, incredibly ugly.

Hunk wraps an arm around his shoulder, leaning into him. Lance glances between the two of them and then looks away quickly. “So, uh, Hunk. What’s the occasion?” He says, gesturing to the cookies.

“Family is in town.” Hunk says casually, leaning back against the futon. “This is their favorite thing that I make, for some reason.”

“Because they’re incredible.” Keith mumbles. Lance sends him a smile, clearly agreeing.

“Anyway, I had a lot of leftovers so I thought you guys might like them. You can give some to Shiro and Allura too, if you want!”

“If I don’t eat them all first.” Pidge chimes in. Lance laughs.

“Well, eat all you want because Shiro and Allura just left town this morning.” He smirks, wiggling his eyebrows. “Late honeymoon.”

“Oh right, I completely forgot.” Keith says. Then, he explains, “Shiro and Allura needed to recover, money wise, from their wedding before they could afford a honeymoon. But I guess they scraped together enough.” He turns to Lance. “Where did they say they were going?”

“I think New York City? Allura has always wanted to go there.”

“Wow, I wanna go somewhere.” Pidge says distantly, from the floor. “Can we go somewhere?”

Hunk sighs. “I wish. I have the restaurant.”

“You can’t close it for one weekend?”

Hunk hums. “I mean...I guess it’s my restaurant.”

Silence fills the air as they all let that sink in.

“I mean...we’re technically adults.” Lance says slowly. “We can go on a weekend trip.”
Keith sits up slightly. “I haven’t used any of my vacation days this year.” He says.

“I’m sure Allura would let me off the hook for a couple of days.” Lance adds.

“And I’m on break!” Pidge finishes, excitedly.

Lance grins, sitting up straighter. “But where would we go?”

Pidge frowns at Hunk, shoving his shoulder. “You know where we’d go, Hunk. Come on. Stop hiding it! I’m surprised you haven’t taken Keith yet! You guys have been dating for almost two months!”

Keith glances at Lance, who is already looking at him with intense, blue eyes. He takes a breath and looks back at Hunk. “What’s she talking about? A boyfriend privilege I’m not aware of?”

“It’s...nothing. Just a family thing.” Hunk says shyly.

Lance, seeming to snap out of whatever the fuck kind of trance he was in before, joins the conversation. “Dude, Hunk, what are you hiding from us? Do you have a place in mind?” He asks eagerly, crawling up to the futon and placing his chin on the edge of it. “Dirty little secret?”

Hunk rolls his eyes and then wrings his hands a little nervously. “Fine. My family has...a cabin. On Lake Michigan. Like...right on the lake--”

“What?” Lance nearly jumps out of his skin. “Dude! Oh my god, we have to go! On the lake? I’ll quit my job right now!”

“That does sound pretty awesome.” Keith agrees with less emotion than Lance, as usual. But he finds himself grinning at Lance’s stupidly adorable reaction. “We could bring booze and bathing suits and just chill out for a few days.” It takes Keith a moment to realize that Hunk’s arm is still around him. He leans into Hunk a little, feeling like it grounds him a bit. It seems to stop his “getting lost in the fucking ocean of Lance’s eyes” spiral that he feels himself stumbling into.

Pidge nods aggressively, as if to say ‘I told you so.’ “Hunk doesn’t like telling his friends about it because last time he had a gathering there, his friends trashed the place.”

Hunk sighs sadly. “I woke up in someone else’s vomit!”

Lance’s nose wrinkles. Keith wants to pepper it in kisses. “That’s disgusting, man. I won’t barf on you, I promise.” He turns to Keith. “Snickers, on the other hand…”

“Hey. I’m a tame drinker.” Keith says defensively, leaning away from Hunk and towards Lance, purely on instinct. “I’ve never barfed on you.”

“No, but you have barfed next to me. And around my general vicinity.”

“On New Year’s Eve last year you barfed in my shoe!”

Lance brings a hand to his mouth, stifling a loud laugh. “Oh my god, I thought you forgot about that.”

“How could I forget? You ruined my boots forever!”

“You needed new boots anyway.”

“No I didn’t.”
“You had those black ones for years! The only reason they could fit you was because your heel came out of a hole in the back.”

“Now you’re just being inconsiderate.”

“I did you a favor, dude! Those boots needed to go, and even my drunk ass knew it.”

Keith doesn’t realize how hard he’s grinning until his face starts hurting. “Fuck you, man.” He says, shaking his head and probably blushing. “You’re the worst.”

Remembering Hunk and Pidge are in the room, Lance sniffs a little awkwardly and crosses his arms over his chest. “Anyway, Hunk. It’s a deal. We’re trashing your cabin. Just give us a day and time.”

Hunks sighs tiredly. “Fine, I’ll ask my parents. They should be in town for a few more hours so, If I leave now I’ll catch them.” He stands up and holds a hand out for Keith to take. Keith stares at it for a moment, then looks up and sees Hunk’s knowing gaze. He takes it.

Hunk tugs him forward and holds his face, planting a kiss right on his lips. Just like that. Keith is a little caught off guard but tries not to show it. This is supposed to be normal for them, after all.

Hunk smiles at him like he’s trying not to laugh. “See you, Keith. Text me, okay?”

Keith smiles, fighting the urge to roll his eyes. He doesn’t know how many relationships Hunk has been in, but he seems to have all this gushy shit down to a science. He briefly remembers Hunk mentioning Shay, and wonders if he’s ever acted like this around her. Hunk never said if they had a thing or not, but he did say they “were a good team.” Maybe that’s where Hunk learned how to be in a relationship so well.

Keith sure as shit doesn’t know what he’s doing. Hunk is saving his ass out here.

“Can I bring Olivia?” Lance asks, and Keith is snapped out of his reverie by the harsh sound of his stomach plummeting to his feet.

What? Olivia? That’s not fair! How is that fair?


Pidge gets up off the floor. “Of course I am…” she says, eyeing the bowl of cookies.

She doesn’t leave the apartment before taking ten more.

xxx

**Senior Year (College)**

Keith is startled awake by a loud banging on his bedroom door. “Snickers! Keith! Open up! Wake up!”

Automatically assuming the worst, Keith scrambles out of bed and falls onto the door handle, prying it open. Lance is standing on the other side, grinning at him.
“What? What is it?” Keith asks frantically. “Are you okay?”

Lance throws his arms out dramatically. “I got the job!”

Keith blinks at him. Wait, “What?”

“The hotel job! For after graduation! The dude just called and said he liked my passion!” Lance jumps up and down excitedly. “I got the job!”

Keith stares at him, not able to decide how he feels. But the happy, hopeful expression on Lance’s face is telling him that this is something good, so he grins back. “See? I told you, you always do better than you thi-- oof!” Lance stumbles forward and pulls Keith into a rather aggressive hug.

“I’m so relieved!” He breathes messily into Keith’s hair. “I thought I embarrassed myself! But he liked my passion!”

Keith laughs. “I told you.”

Lance lets go of him, sauntering into his room and flopping down on his bed, sighing happily. Keith sits on the edge of it, suddenly feeling uncomfortable. “So...where is the job?” He asks.

Lance, noticing Keith hasn’t laid down next to him, sits up cautiously. “It’s...in Providence. Rhode Island.” He says. “But, it’s at like, a super luxurious hotel. The pay is great for a post-grad job.” He looks at Keith hesitantly. “It’s like, a really good first step.”

Keith clears his throat slightly. “Oh. That’s awesome.” He says, trying for happy but sounding sad. Lance sighs, scooting in closer to him.

“Hey. Snickers. It'll be okay, alright?”

Keith wraps his arms around himself, moving away slightly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m happy for you.”

“I know you are.” Lance says, smiling sadly. “But you’re forgetting that you’re a horrible liar.”

Keith sighs, turning away from Lance and standing up, desperate to find something to distract him.

Lance is going to move away. It’s not like Keith thought they would live together forever. Lance has got to go live his life at some point. He knew that the end of college was approaching, so why does he feel so caught off guard? Why does he feel like he wasn’t prepared for this? He leans over and picks up some stray clothes on the floor, tossing them in his laundry basket. He feels a hand on his shoulder, gripping firmly and turning him around.

“Talk to me, Keith.” Lance says.

“I’m just cleaning up a little.” Keith says flatly.

“You know we’ll visit each other all the time, right?”

Keith sighs, looking down at the crumpled shirt in his hands. “I don’t even know where I’ll end up yet.” He says. Then, without being able to stop himself, the lie slips out. “I’ve applied to a few jobs in that area too. Providence, I mean. Just haven’t heard from them yet, so I’m trying not to get too excited.” He doesn’t know why he says it. Because he hasn’t applied, anywhere. And he wasn’t even planning on applying anywhere near that area at all but…

Lance raises an eyebrow. “Oh, really?” He asks in a hopeful voice. “I had no idea you were
applying to jobs!”

“Yeah I...started a month ago. I just don’t talk about it too much.”

“Well that’s a super awesome coincidence!” Lance says, stepping in closer and studying Keith’s face, as if he’s trying to figure out why Keith doesn’t seem ecstatic about it. “I would love to end up in the same place!”

Keith feels irrationally angry at Lance now, and he can’t pinpoint why. He can’t help but feel like Lance is acting way too chill about all of this. About moving away and never seeing Keith again. Doesn’t Lance realize how long they’ve been living together? How much time they’ve spent together? How is he acting like none of this matters to him? Would he really be totally fine moving on and leaving Keith in the dust?

Keith knows he’s scowling now because Lance’s excited smile is slowly melting into a concerned frown. “What is it?” Lance asks.

“It’s just that I haven’t gotten any of those jobs yet.”

“So?”

“So what if I don’t?”

Lance shrugs. “There are other jobs, Keith. Don’t discourage yourself.”

“I’m not discouraged.” Keith mumbles.

“Well then I don’t know what’s wrong?”

Keith sighs. Saying *I don’t want to be far away from you* sounds stupid. And clingy. And weak. Especially since Lance doesn’t seem to care at all. “I’m just stressed. You know, it’s the end of the year. Gotta keep...applying to places.”

Lance sighs sympathetically. “Yeah, I know. It’s stressful.” His phone rings and he looks down at it. “Oh, shit! I’ve got an exam. Keep me posted about those Providence jobs, okay?”

Keith swallows. “Yeah.”

“Cool! See ya, Snickers!”

Keith watches him leave and lets out a collected breath. There is an uneasiness in his stomach that he can’t stand. He flops down on his bed and opens his laptop, defeatedly typing in “HR jobs in Providence, RI”.

xxx

“I don’t understand. You don’t want to apply to jobs anywhere else?” Keith’s academic advisor has, quite literally, never had a conversation with him throughout his entire four years at Garrison University. And now, Keith has completely invaded her office, insisting that he won’t leave until he gets a job in Rhode Island. He knows that his actions are...desperate. But he also knows that being on his own after graduation just doesn’t seem natural to him. Lance would be fine. He’d move on and make hundreds of friends and Keith would just be someone he used to hang out with a lot. But
Keith can’t stomach the thought.

“It doesn’t even have to be in my field.” Keith says. “It can be like, a receptionist. A waiter. Bartender.”

“Really shooting for the stars, aren’t you?” His advisor deadpans.

“I just want to be in that area. I can look for a new job once I get there.”

“Got a girlfriend moving there or something?”

Keith swallows. “No.”

She sighs. “Right.” She says sarcastically, clearly not believing him. “Haven’t heard that one before.”

“Just please help?”

“You wanna go into HR, is that right?”

“Yes. But, again. It can be anything. Any office job. I don’t really care.”

She looks at him critically. “It doesn’t matter at all?”

Keith shakes his head because, Lance or no Lance, he really doesn’t care what he ends up doing with his life. He’s never been someone who does care. He’s never had those dreams, or aspirations, or passions. He finds passion elsewhere. At least, that’s what he tells himself.

She hums. “Alright...well, you’re in luck. Looks like there are quite a few openings for HR in Providence.”

Keith perks up. “Really?”

“Yes. Almost all entry level, so you won’t be doing much of anything.”

“Don’t care.”

She sighs. “If you apply this week then you’ll probably still be considered. It looks like these were posted recently.” She prints the documents on the loud, ancient office printer in the corner of the room and then snatches them, handing them to Keith. “But apply this week, alright?” She says. “Otherwise you’ll miss your shot.”

Keith nods, smiling and grabbing the papers. “Yes! Thank you so much.” He scans the papers with the job descriptions. They all seem doable. They all seem like something he could actually have a chance at getting.

“Have fun with her, alright?” His advisor says. Keith looks up questioningly.

“With who?”

“Your girlfriend. The one in Providence. She’s lucky she’s got someone as dedicated as you.”

Keith frowns. “I told you I don’t—”

“Yeah yeah, I’ve heard it all.” She waves a dismissive hand at him. “Nice try though.” She gives him a knowing smile and Keith actually finds himself blushing a little. “Have a nice rest of your day,
Keith just nods slowly, opting to back out of the room before the conversation gets even more awkward.

xxx

Present Day

“Snickers?” Lance calls from the living room. “Do you have my swimsuit?” He has completely torn apart his closet and his swim trunks are nowhere to be found. “The blue one?”

“No.” Keith says, unenthused. His voice is muffled by the wall between them. “Why would I have your swimsuit?”

“Because I can’t find it anywhere!” Lance exclaims, tossing a couple tshirts into his backpack. “Can I come look?”

“Be my guest.”

Lance walks into Keith’s room and sees Keith laying facedown on his bed.

“Dude.”

“What?” Keith muffles.

“We gotta pack!”

Keith groans. “I packed already. Let me nap.”

“You’re done packing?”

“It’s three days, Lance. Don’t make the same mistake you made last time we went on a road trip.”

“I needed all of that stuff.” Lance argues.

“Your suitcases took up more space in the car than we did!”

Lance sighs, watching Keith sit up. Keith’s hair sticks up on one side and Lance clenches a fist, trying to keep himself from reaching out and running his fingers through it. He doesn’t know how he’s going to survive being trapped in a cabin with Hunk and Keith all over each other like they were earlier today. It makes his stomach churn uncomfortably. That’s so... not Keith. He’s so not like that. That’s why Lance can’t stand being around them when they’re together. Well...part of the reason, anyway.

And he’ll have Olivia there, so whatever.

“Wanna help me pack?” He finds himself saying. “You’re better at it than me.”

Keith raises an eyebrow at him. “You hate when I pack for you.”
“Well, yes, but…” I want to be around you literally all the time and I don’t know why. “Maybe I could use the help this time. You know, narrowing down the options.”

Keith smiles at him and Lance feels heat rushing to his face. “Uh. Okay.” Keith says, pushing himself off the bed and walking past Lance, in the direction of his room. Lance bites down a grin and takes a deep breath, before following him.

When they get into Lance’s room, Keith stares down into Lance’s backpack. “You don’t need a razor.” Keith says, pulling it out of the bag and tossing it to the side. “Or shaving cream.”

“What if I spontaneously sprout uncontrollable amounts of hair all over my body while we’re there?” Lance exclaims, suddenly remembering why he hates when Keith helps him pack. “I’ll be swallowed up by it and you’ll never see my face again!”

“You haven’t grown facial hair in 23 years.” Keith says flatly. “I doubt it’ll be a problem.”

“I have!” Lance defends. “Some!”

“You don’t need a razor.” Keith repeats flatly, but he sends Lance a smirk. “Also, you don’t need this tie.”

“Snickers, no. You can’t take out the tie.” Lance grumbles angrily. “You know I need the tie.”

“No, you don’t.”

“I do! That’s my customary ‘just in case’ tie! I take it everywhere!” Seven years ago, Lance went on a trip with his family and there was a last minute dinner party with almost every relative Lance has ever known. Unfortunately, all he had packed was a pair of ripped jeans and a few hoodies. He was traumatized by his severe state of underdressed-ness and now is convinced he needs to bring a tie and button down on every trip he goes on for fear of being caught off guard.

Keith sighs, staring down at the tie. “Oh my god. Fine.”

“Yes! Thank you!”

“But only because I know you’d be a nervous wreck if you didn’t.”

“True.”

Keith groans, reaching into the bag. “You’re bringing a purse?”

“What if I need to carry around a wallet but my hands get tired?”

“You have never, in your entire life, carried a purse.”

“I could start in the next three days! You don’t know!”

“No purse, Lance.”

“Fine. But I’m going to hate you for the rest of my days.”

“I can live with that.” Keith says emotionlessly.

“I hate you, starting now.”

Keith shrugs, and then smirks again. It’s a smirk that comes naturally to him. It’s a smirk Lance has
seen a million times.

It’s a really hot smirk.

God, Lance is going to die this weekend. This newfound attraction to Keith could not have come at a worse time.

Keith zips up Lance’s bag. “Can I go nap now?” He asks.

“Fine.” Lance drawls, frowning at him. “Leave me all alone with nothing to do until we leave.”

“Hunk’s coming to get us in two hours.” Keith says, laughing. “That’s hardly any time at all.”

“Fineeee.” Lance whines. “Go sleep.” Can I come with you?

Quit it, Lance.

“See you in two hours.”

“’Night, Snickers.”

xxx

Hunk packs up his car and picks them up with remarkable punctuality, which was bad news for Lance because he apparently forgot about five thousand last minute things that he absolutely needed to pack. Which Keith knows is bullshit, because usually that’s just code for “I have to re-pack all the stuff that Keith took out of my bag.” And that’s just not fair, because Keith worked very hard to narrow down all of Lance’s shit.

They pile into the surprisingly spacious Jeep and Lance stretches his legs out in the backseat, throwing them over Keith’s lap.


Pidge shoots him a death glare from the front seat. “Watch yourself, Kogane.”

Keith sighs, placing his hands on Lance’s legs. “But now I’m stuck back here with Lance’s gross feet in my face.” He mumbles, smirking at Lance.

Lance, surprisingly, blushes at that. It’s strange because Keith always teases him, and that’s never happened before. “You know quite well that I take very good care of my feet, Snickers!” Lance argues, lifting a leg and pressing the sole of his shoe to Keith’s cheek. “See? It doesn’t even smell!”

“You’re gross.” Keith says through a chuckle, pushing Lance’s foot off his face. “Get that thing away from me.”

Lance laughs. “Trust me, your feet are worse.”

“Mine are probably worse than both of yours.” Pidge says, like it’s a fact. “College has not been kind to them.”
“Ew, Pidge.” Hunk says, clearly not amused. “Hey Lance, Olivia is going to meet us there, right?”

Lance nods. “She actually flew down yesterday to visit family so she’s already in the area.” He’s smiling excitedly and Keith feels it stabbing in his chest. “She’s pumped to see you guys again!”

“Cool, we’re excited to hang out too.” Hunk says kindly. Keith looks out the window, trying to avoid the urge to slide his hands up Lance’s legs and feel every inch of him. Of course they have an eleven hour drive ahead of them and Lance is in a touchy-feely mood. Keith didn’t need his sanity anyway.

“Oh man, I’m so excited to relax.” Lance says, leaning back and putting his hands behind his head. “Work was brutal this week, especially with Allura gone.”

Pidge nods, agreeing. “I just need some sleep.” She says. “I literally did not sleep for the entire last week.”

“Well lucky for all of you, I bought some pretty relaxing things for us to do.” Hunk says, wiggling his eyebrows into the rearview mirror. Lance tilts his head to the side, questioningly.

“What?”

“Just some...you know. Recreational stuff.”

Lance sits up. “Weed?” He asks.

Keith grins. “Oh, sweet. I’ve never gotten high before. Maybe it’s time.”

Lance laughs. “You’re going to be such a mess when you’re high.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I just know these things.”

“You ever smoke before?” Pidge asks Lance, turning around in her seat.

“Yeah, once upon a time.” Lance answers casually. “I try not to do it anymore, though.”

“I feel that. I don’t really like it much either.

Keith is still grinning, and he reaches forward and tugs a lock of Hunk’s hair. “Looks like it’s just me and you.” He says, making it sound fond.

Hunk chuckles lowly. “We’ll have fun, won’t we?”

“Ew! You guys are disgusting.” Pidge scowls. “We don’t need to know about that.” But she is grinning like a maniac when she turns away from them.

Lance looks at Keith with a small, barely-there frown gracing his features.

He looks away.

“I brought vodka too, though.” Hunk says. “If you don’t want to smoke, Lance.”

“Uh…” Lance looks hesitant. “I don’t think Olivia drinks. So, I probably won’t either.”

Keith snorts. “Because you told her you don’t drink.”
“Quiet, Snickers.”

“And who knows what else my parents have stored there?” Hunk says. “I think they might even have absinthe.”

Keith laughs. “I think that’s too much for me.”

“Doesn’t that stuff make you hallucinate?” Pidge asks, genuinely curious.

“Yeah.” Lance says, picking at his nails. “Made me see dogs pissing everywhere when I drank it.” Everyone looks at him and he glances upwards at them innocently. “What?”

“Lance has a wild past.” Keith deadpans.

Lance grins at him.

“I want to hear about it!” Pidge whines.

Lance scoffs. “Long story.”

“We have eleven hours.” Hunk says.

Lance nudges Keith with his foot. “Snickers here will get angry if I talk about it.” He teases.

Keith rolls his eyes, looking back out the window. If he lets his gaze linger on Lance’s devastatingly beautiful face for another minute he’ll probably die. “I don’t mind.” He says.

“Oh, cool! Well, it all started when I almost failed out of my Intro to Lodging class and--”

Lance continues on and on. Keith feels himself tensing when he brings up Dylan, but Lance subtly nudges him with his knee, as if to say, “I’m sorry”, or “hey, it’s okay.”

Eventually, Keith falls asleep. Lance can literally talk forever, and it’s nothing he hasn’t heard before. He feels himself drifting off and lets himself imagine what it would be like to fall asleep, warm and tangled in Lance’s stupid arms.

x

The rest of the car ride goes by in long naps, stupid road games, and tons of crazy college stories from Lance and Pidge. Hunk tells a couple stories about culinary school as well, and when he brings up Shay, Keith can tell that he’s trying not to gush about her. Lance freaks out; “Oh my god! You know Shay? She’s the best! Best cakes in town! Woah, small world.” To which Hunk just replied, “Yeah, she’s pretty cool.”

Keith sighs. They are going to need to fake a break up soon, because this is getting out of hand. Hunk truly loves Shay. And Lance is never going to feel the same way about Keith. So it’s really just happening for no reason at this point. He makes a mental note to talk to Hunk later.

Maybe...after this trip.

Lance falls asleep sometime around hour seven. Keith doesn’t even bother trying not to stare. Lance
is truly something else. Keith can’t believe he’s had his whole life to look at him, but didn’t. Lance looks so soft when he’s sleeping; like all of his features are muted. It’s pretty. It makes Keith blush. He sighs, looking back out the window. When did he turn into a fucking disney princess? He reeks of Cinderella.

“You’ve got it so bad.” Pidge whispers, shaking her head.

Keith scoffs.

“You really do.” Hunk agrees. “And so does he,”

Keith clears his throat. “No, he doesn’t.” Then he frowns. “And Olivia is coming, so that’s the proof.”

“Uh, Olivia is coming because I’m going to be all over you the whole time.” Hunk says proudly. “You do realize that’s why he invited her, right?”

Keith doesn’t answer.

“That silence is the sound of denial.” Pidge says sagely.

“You guys are insane.” Keith grumbles, letting his head fall against the window. “I’m going to sleep now.”

Pidge shrugs. “Suit yourself.” She says casually, turning around and starting a new conversation with Hunk. Keith watches his breath fog up on the window and tries not to get too carried away.

It’s going to be a long, long weekend.

xxx

Olivia arrives before them and waits outside the front door. Lance feels relief filling his chest at the sight of her, and he’s not really sure why. He tumbles out of the car, legs sore from sitting so long, and envelops her in a hug.

“Hey!” She says excitedly into his shoulder. “You finally made it!”

Lance pulls away from her. “How long have you been waiting here?” He asks.

“Only like, fifteen minutes.” She shrugs. She’s wearing an orange sundress and a blue necklace. It doesn’t look like it should work, but it does. She’s so beautiful. Lance feels guilty. He feels like he’s lying to her. He can’t pinpoint what he’s lying about. But he can pinpoint the familiar, uneasy sensation of feeling like he’s not good enough.

“Hi Keith!” Olivia says, pushing past Lance and waving to Keith, who is climbing out of the car. Keith smiles at her.

“Hey Olivia, good to see you again.”

“Alright guys!” Hunk says loudly, clapping his hands and he gets out of the car with his bag. “Let me give you the grand tour. And don’t touch anything.” He warns, before opening the olive green, worn-looking front door.
Lance laces Olivia’s fingers with his as they venture into the house.

This house is beautiful. Keith parents were self proclaimed interior designers, re-doing their house once every two years, so Keith has seen it all. But this? This cabin is beautiful in a way that no other house can be. It somehow manages to feel grande, and new, and luxurious, while simultaneously feeling homey, and humble, and welcoming. It smells like pine and honey. The furniture is all maroons and dark greens. The fireplace is dusted in black like it’s well used. The kitchen is all dark mahogany and worn redwood.

But the best part is the backyard.

Because it’s the lake.

Well, not like, the lake. But a very small part of the lake. More like a very large pond. A very, very large pond.

They walk out onto the small deck, which leads to an even smaller shore, lined with canoes and paddles. There are fishing lines, and surfboards, and any other kind of aquatic sport equipment you can imagine.

“Dude!” Lance shrieks excitedly from somewhere behind them. “What do your parents do?”

Hunk shrugs. “Something about investing? I dunno.”

Keith feels Hunk wrap and arm around his waist and he chuckles.

“Are we going to go canoeing like couples do?” Keith asks sarcastically.

Hunk grins. “Oh, totally. And then we’ll stay out on the water for two hours and Lance will be wondering what they hell we’re up to.”

Keith shakes his head, smiling. “You’re a bad person.”

“Or I’m just sick of watching you guys tiptoe around each other?” Hunk suggests through a grin, letting go and shrugging dramatically at Keith before walking away. He waves for everyone to follow him. “Come on guys! We got here just in time to make lunch!”

Keith chances a glance behind him and sees Lance, looking right back at him. He turns back around quickly and smiles to himself.

He doesn’t know why Lance was looking, but he blushes either way, because he’s a dumbass.

Lunch passes in a flurry of loud laughter and amazing food. They see the rest of the house, and the afternoon seeps into the evening. Turkey paninis for lunch become steak for dinner. Diet coke turns
into wine, which turns into vodka. The lake glows outside in the moonlight. Everytime Keith looks outside he is surprised by the view. Everytime he looks at Lance, even moreso.

Lance has refrained from drinking and smoking, probably because of Olivia. Keith finds himself missing the small, cute drunk flush that usually fills Lance’s cheeks when he’s had a couple drinks. He doesn’t miss how Lance was in college, but he misses tipsy Lance. Lance from Shiro’s wedding. Lance with large, dark eyes and a small sheen of sweat on his face.

There’s something so sexy about it. It makes Keith want to slam him against the wall. Pant into his mouth, hot and needy.

He sighs, tearing his eyes away when he sees Olivia looking at him strangely.

“Hey Hunk, wanna smoke?” Keith asks, desperate to get out.

Hunk nods. “Yep! Meet you outside.” He opens his bag and takes out a ziploc. Then he waves Keith outside, saying bye to everyone in the room.

They walk into the brisk, lake air and sit on the edge of the small deck. Hunk lights the joint and brings it to his lips, breathing it in. Keith wraps his arms around himself.

“Had to get out?” Hunk asks, passing the joint to Keith.

Keith brings it to his lips and takes a chance, inhaling. He immediately feels the urge to cough, but holds it in. It fills his body with warmth. In a second, his head feels slightly fuzzier. He blows it out and watches it float into a cloud above his head.

“Yeah.” He says roughly. He coughs once. “Started thinking about slamming Lance against walls so, it was time to go.”

Hunk laughs, a little humorlessly. “Damn, man.” He takes the joint from Keith and takes another hit. “That something that happens often?”

Keith sighs. “I think about it a lot.” He says, a little shyly. “Like...a lot.” He holds out a hand. “I need another hit.” Hunk hands him the joint.

“Sorry you’re going through this.” Hunk says, a little surprisingly. “I can’t even imagine how tough it is.”

Keith swallows. “I didn’t even think I was... capable.” He says, smoke clouding his brain.

“Capable of what?”

“Of like... feeling this much.” Keith brings the joint back up to his lips. “Physically. My body has never done it before.”

Hunk laughs. “Well, there’s first time for everything.” He says softly.

“It’s seriously fucked up, man.” Keith says, a little dazed. The weed is slowly hitting him. “Like, he’s there my whole life and then one day I’m just like...fucking some dude who looks like him and my life is falling apart at the seams.”

“Wait, fucking who?” Hunk snatches the joint from his fingertips before he can take another hit. “Someone who looks like him?”

Keith groans. “Long story.” His face falls into his hands. The air around him feels warm and
buzzing. His muscles feel heavy and loose. “Fuckin’ Kevin. Doesn’t wan’ me aroun’ anymore because I didn’ last long enough. Y’know. During sex.”

Hunk giggles, probably because he’s high. “Seriously?”

“Yeah…”

Keith hears Hunk’s scooting closer to him but refuses to look up. A friendly hand falls onto his shoulder. Hunk’s voice sounds calm and soothing.

“Keith, look, no matter how Lance feels…things will be alright.” He says. Keith doesn’t move. “I mean, you’re a good lookin’ guy. Nice too. And funny.” At this, Keith peers at him through a gap in his fingers.

“M’not funny.” He mumbles.

“You are though! In your own kind of way. Seriously dude, if I was even remotely attracted to guys, you’d be like, third on my list.”

Keith snorts, letting his hands fall into his lap. “Third?”

“Well yeah.” Hunk nods, like it’s obvious. “Sam Claflin? Johnny Depp?”

Keith laughs, probably for a bit longer than considered normal, but shit, he’s pretty high. “Wow, I’m up there on the list, huh?”

“Oh yeah. For sure, man. So even if the love of your life never loves you back, you can always have the comfort of knowing that you’re third on my ‘if i ever go gay’ list.”

Keith doesn’t know if it’s the weed, or just Hunk’s blatant kindness during a tough time, but feels the urge to give Hunk a hug. So he does. He can hear his own giggling, a little hysterical sounding, in his own ears. He doesn’t let go for a while.

“Thanks for being my fake boyfriend.” He slurs into Hunk’s shoulder.

Hunk laughs. “Lance was right; you’re hilarious when you’re high.”

xxx

**Senior Year (College)**

Lance has been staring at an empty suitcase for what feels like weeks. He can’t help it. He gets attached to things way too easily. The thought of packing up this apartment, one that has been a home to him for the past three years as he stumbled through college, is making him insanely emotional. He can already feel the nostalgia eating away at him and he hasn’t even left yet.

But the fact of the matter is that graduation is only in two days. And he has a job a few states away. And real life is going to start now. There is nothing he can do to stop it.

Anxiety gnaws away at his insides. The voice in the back of his head is louder than ever. Because
somehow, even though he has a post-grad plan and he graduated senior year with straight A’s, he’s still finding things to spend all of his free time painfully worrying about.

You don’t deserve this job. You only got it because you were the last option. They were desperate. They didn’t want to hire you but they had no choice. Which means they’ll treat you like shit. You’re not made for the real world. You don’t have the stuff. Who has the stuff? Everyone but you. What are you thinking? You can’t do it. You can’t do it. You can’t--

And worst of all, he’s leaving Keith.

At first, it didn’t seem like something that would change their relationship too much. But Lance has slowly come to realize how much he’s taken Keith for granted. Keith has always been around, and now what? He’s going to ask Keith to follow him? To drop everything and apply to jobs in Rhode Island? Because Lance is suddenly realizing he’s not man enough to take on the world alone?

Without his best friend?

Lance sighs and sits on his bed, next to the empty suitcase. Time is passing too quickly now. He still needs to pick up his cap and gown. He still needs to find a way to move all of this furniture out of his room. One way or another, these forty eight hours will pass by. One way or another, he won’t be ready for them. Just like he’s not ready for anything else.

Holy shit, he’s going to miss Keith.

He feels so stupid for thinking about it so much. Because friends separate all the time. Lance’s mom is still super close with her college friends, even though they only hang out once a year. They talk all the time.

He’ll talk to Keith all the time. Right?

Wrong. Keith is a horrible texter.

The front door opens and Lance pulls his knees to his chest, feeling his heart clench as he hears the telltale sound of Keith’s keys on the counter.

He can’t let Keith know how broken up he is about this. How embarrassing would that be?

Keith peeks his head into Lance’s open door. “Hey.” He says. “Just got some giant Ziploc bags if you need ‘em for packing.”

Lance nods. “Thanks.”

Keith nods back, a little awkwardly, and then walks away. Lance sighs, cursing himself for getting up and following him into the kitchen.

Keith is filling a cardboard box with mugs and plates from the cupboard when Lance catches up with him.

“What’re you doing?” Lance asks, sounding panicked.

“Uh.” Keith turns around and raises an eyebrow at him. “We have to be out of here in two days, remember? I’m packing.”

Lance can feel himself frowning. “Yeah...I’m packing too.”

Keith nods. “Yeah. I know.” He turns back to the box and starts stacking bowls on top of the plates.
Lance just stares at him.

“So...can you believe it?” He finds himself asking.

“Believe what?”

“You know. College is over. It’s...crazy.”

Keith hums, nodding. Lance sighs. Keith has never been very good at these conversations. So he decides to take control.

“I’m going to text you every day.” Lance says. “And you better text me back. Every time. Okay?”

Keith sighs, pausing what he’s doing. He places a bowl back on the counter, shoulders slumping. He doesn’t turn around to look at Lance. He just huffs. “Lance. I don’t want to do this right now.”

“Too bad. We have to.” Lance says, feeling his lower lip quiver. So much for looking tough. “This is kind of a big deal, Snickers.”

“Can we just do this later?” Keith mumbles, stacking plates again.

“No.”

“Sucks.”

“Keith, please talk to me.”

“Let me pack.”

Lance grabs Keith’s wrist. “Keith.”

Keith scowls at him, looking increasingly frustrated. “Talking about it isn’t going to change anything, Lance. It doesn’t work that way. If we wanna keep in touch, we will, okay?”

Lance sighs, dropping Keith’s wrist. “I’m just...going to miss you.” He says.

Keith just looks at him with intense eyes, and then looks away. “You’re going to meet so many people there. You’ll be busy.”


“What?” Keith snaps. “Don’t you see how much packing we have left to do?”

Lance scowls at him. “I am going to live in an apartment, Keith. By myself. And I’m going to go to work every day by myself. And I’m going to eat all of my meals by myself. And chances are everyone is going to hate me no matter where I go, and I didn’t even deserve this job and my family won’t be around and you won’t be around and if i get a pet it’ll probably die so I just need to know-.” Lance’s voice cracks and he tries to cover it with an angry expression, “--I need to know that when I fucking text you, you’ll text me back.”

Keith looks at him with glassy eyes, face falling slightly. “Lance…”

“I don’t need the anxiety pep talk right now.” Lance argues. “Just tell me. Yes or no. Will you text me back or not?”
Keith nods slowly. “Of course I will.” He says quietly, voice barely above a whisper. “You know I will.”

Lance lets go of him. “See? Was that so hard? Jesus, Keith. Trying to get emotions out of you is exhausting.” He sighs, already walking back in the direction of his room.

“Wait.” Keith says begrudgingly. Loud enough to make Lance pause.

Lance turns around and sees Keith, standing awkwardly with a plate in his hand. Holding it like a shield against his chest.

“I’m going to miss you too.” Keith says, eyes cast downwards. “A lot.”

The words hang in the air for a minute. It takes Lance a long time to absorb them. He just looks at Keith’s hunched figure, trying to make sense of it all.

Then Lance smiles sadly. Somehow, despite his better judgement, the admission made things feel even worse. “I know you will.” He says softly. Teasingly. “Just wanted to hear you say it.”


Present Day

Despite wanting to get completely fucked up in a cabin on the lake, none of them actually drink that much. Keith and Hunk drink the most, but even then it’s only a couple of shots. It’s almost like everyone is too buzzed on the excitement of being there to care about anything else. They are sitting on the plush, deep red couches and telling loud stories and laughing until they can’t breathe anymore. Keith sits tucked closely into Hunk’s side, occasionally whispering to him and bumping their noses together. Lance makes it a point to look away. To pull Olivia closer to him. To whisper in her ear and lean in more than he needs to.

This is what people who are dating do, after all.

Keith is clearly high, which makes Lance simultaneously laugh and feel hot all over. He knows that when he got high in college, it always made him really horny. And just imagining a really horny Keith makes him…

He runs a hand through Olivia’s hair.

They play a drinking game; a lame version of ‘would you rather’ that got Pidge admitting she’d rather give birth to a cactus than sleep on one for the rest of her life. The questions were all pretty similar to that. Keith giggles wildly the whole time. Lance can see his wide, blown-out pupils and pink, pretty lips. High looks good on Keith.

Everything, Lance is finding out, looks good on Keith. And Keith has no idea.

At some point in the night, Keith brings up Lance’s horrible packing habits and Lance takes out his “just-in-case” tie, slipping it over his head. Keith had told him to “prove that he packed it”, but Lance realizes a little too late that Keith just wanted to tease him for putting it on. It hangs loosely around
his neck, right on top of his light blue t-shirt, and makes everyone laugh. Lance decides he doesn’t mind. He keeps it on for the rest of the night.

The air is warm and Pidge and Hunk share stories about their families. Pidge talks about her crazy roommate at school. Olivia shares a story about her favorite professor. Lance talks about his first job interview for a post-grad hotel position; something he was freaking out about at the time, that actually ended up being okay.

Keith chimes in and talks about his nightmare of a first job, too. Lance finds himself laughing along with Keith’s baked ass, as they reminisce over the craziness that was their last few weeks of college.

Lance’s heart feels full. He was anxious about coming on this trip. He was nervous about missing work. Leaving home. Being stuck with Keith. But he’s so glad he came. Because having a good time with friends like this is something that Lance spent so much of his life wanting. Going crazy in college was supposed to give him this feeling, and it never did. It always felt empty. Hollow. Fake.

But now, looking around at Hunk’s smiling face, Pidge’s amused smirk, and hearing Keith’s loud laugh filling the room, Lance finally thinks like he’s grasped the feeling he’s been searching for, for years. He finally doesn’t feel lonely anymore.

And Keith may be trailing his fingers along Hunk’s chest, but Lance has got a pretty girl curled into him, snuggled into his neck. And that’s what high-school Lance would have wanted for 23 year old Lance. This is probably how things are supposed to be.

Keith’s gaze meets his from across the room and Lance’s heart hiccups in his chest at the sight of his goofy, dazed grin.

Maybe this is how things are supposed to be.

But...maybe not.

xxx

Pidge and Olivia go upstairs a bit earlier than the rest of them. Olivia was falling asleep on the couch at around 1:30AM, and Pidge was out cold by midnight. Hunk says that it’s the first time she’s probably slept in two weeks.

Lance, Hunk, and Keith ended up eating mac and cheese in the kitchen and talking for another hour, but then Hunk called it quits. Which meant that Keith was calling it quits too. Lance had watched them walk up the stairs together, hand in hand, and felt a surge of protectiveness, of jealousy, come over him. It took him twenty minutes of exfoliating in the bathroom to calm himself down. He ended up crawling into bed next to Olivia and crashing the moment his head his the pillow.

He doesn’t even let himself think about what Keith and Hunk are doing. He doesn’t let himself get upset about it.

He is finally in a deep sleep, body curled comfortably around Olivia, when he feels someone shaking him awake.

“Lance...Hey…”
He stirs, groaning slightly. His eyes crack open and he sees Keith staring down at him, with mussed up hair and large, dark, wide awake eyes. He sits up slightly.

“Snickers?”

“Wanna come canoeing with me?” Keith whispers. He sounds nervous. He bites his lip. Lance glances down at the movement and then back up at Keith’s eyes.

“It’s three AM.” He says. Keith just blinks at him.

“Yeah.” Keith whispers back.

Lance nods slowly. “...Kay.” He finds himself saying. “Just let me find my shoes.”

He climbs out of bed, careful not to wake Olivia. Then he spots his shoes in the corner of the room, slipping them on and tiptoeing out into the hallway with Keith following close behind.

Keith is in a black, long sleeved shirt that looks way too big on him. His dark gray sweatpants hang low and loose on his hips. Lance guesses that they are hand-me-downs from Shiro.

The sleeves are so long they cover Keith’s hands.

Lance’s stomach flutters mercilessly as he rubs his eyes, trying to look away.

Keith puts a finger to his lips when they get to the sliding door, warning Lance to be quiet. They open it slowly, trying not to make a sound, and step outside.

The breeze shakes the trees and the air smells like the end of summer. It’s one of those rare nights where all the stars are visible in the sky, splattered like white paint over the dark blues and blacks beneath them. Lance and Keith walk in silence. They untie the canoe in silence. They paddle out into the middle of the large pond, in complete silence. Keith sits in the front, Lance sits in the back.

Nothing but the sound of moving water and insects surrounds them. Keith finally breaks the silence by taking a deep breath, like he’s relieved. Relaxed. Probably still a little high from earlier. Lance watches as his shoulders slouch and his chest deflates, with the weight of the sigh. His head rolls forward for a moment, like he’s stretching out the back of his neck, and then he lifts his gaze forward, eyes focused on the water.

Lance turns towards the water as well.

They just sit there.

Time stands still.

The canoe rocks back and forth calmly on the water.

Lance eventually turns his gaze to Keith; bored with how the stars look reflected in the water and fascinated by how they look reflected in Keith’s eyes.

Keith looks stunning in moonlight. Midnight dark eyes, black hair, pale skin. It’s like he’s made for it.

And then Keith is looking at him, too.

“What is it?” Keith asks quietly. Like it’s a secret. Like he already knows.

Lance swallows hard, not able to come up with an excuse for staring and honestly, not feeling like it.
He just shrugs and looks away, feeling defeated.

Suddenly, the canoe is moving. Creaking slightly. And then Keith is next to him. Right next to him; pressed all up along his side, his smell invading all of Lance’s senses. His head falls onto Lance’s shoulder, heavy and lazy. Almost on instinct, Lance brings an arm up to wrap around Keith’s shoulders.

“I think this is the part where we have a deep conversation about something.” Lance says, voice warm. He turns his face slightly and nudes the top of Keith’s head with his nose. “Got anything profound to say?”


Lance barks a laugh, grip tightening around Keith’s shoulders. “Well yeah but I already knew that.” He says. His heart beats erratically and he hopes to god that Keith can’t feel it. “So what gives, Snickers?” He asks, trying to keep his voice level.

“Whaddya mean?”

“Why the canoe? And the spontaneous cuddling? Not that I’m complaining, you know I love cuddling.” Lance says. He really does try hard to make it sound casual. “You’ve got a perfectly good cuddler inside, you know.”

Keith shrugs. “He’s asleep.” A moment of silence. Then, “You could’ve stayed in with Olivia...Didn’t have to come out here with me.”

And Lance doesn’t have anything witty to say, because Keith is right. Lance has fully, 100%, ditched his girlfriend in a bed to come outside and look at the stars with someone he sees every single day of his life, without fail. By all laws of relationships, it makes absolutely no sense.

“Yeah…” he finds himself saying. “Good point.”

The silence stretches out between them. Lance doesn’t let go. He feels like he’s suffocating with the proximity, but the feeling he gets when Keith is far away is even worse. His heart is thudding, heavy and fast all at the same time. He can feel Keith breathing. He can feel the rise and fall of his shoulders and the warm breath near his neck. Keith smells like spicy cologne and weed and dry leaves. He smells like home, too. Everything about him reminds Lance of home; who he is, who he was, where he grew up. His memories and his family and his childhood. Keith was always there, somewhere. Present for every important event of Lance’s life. And now he’s here. He’s just….

Here.

With Lance. Again.

Lance thinks about Olivia, laying alone in bed after he fell asleep next to her. He should’ve stayed. He feels guilty, and idiotic, and most of all, scared. Because despite all of those negative emotions, he really, really doesn’t want to go back. And he doesn’t even understand why, because Olivia is nothing short of perfect. They’ve never even fought. Compared to his relationship with Keith, it seems more than perfect. It seems exquisite. Keith has thrown things at him, and shoved him, and yelled until he lost his voice. Olivia has been nothing but kind.

Lance sighs.

The realization creeps up on him almost too slowly, but it’s there.
Of course there are no red flags. Of course everything is going perfectly. He hasn’t been himself since the moment he laid eyes on Olivia. He’s been a muted version of himself. Who likes different things. Who is willing to compromise on movies and who doesn’t have an opinion about whether or not the characters fall in love at the end. A version of himself that doesn’t spit snarky comebacks at people; who doesn’t ever get drunk or make dirty, sloppy mistakes with strangers, who is always sure of himself and knows what’s going on. A version of him without the anxiety, without the months he spent high and drunk in college, without his love for face masks or green eggs and ham. Has he even sung along to one song on the radio when she was in the passenger seat?

“I don’t think you’ve ever been this quiet in your life.” Keith mumbles sleepily. His voice rumbles into Lance’s neck, low and so familiar, and Lance shivers.

He looks down at Keith. “Not much to say tonight.” He croaks.

The fluttery, content feeling he gets around Olivia; that’s got to be love, right? Because love is supposed to be happy. It’s supposed to make you feel safe. At least that’s what Lance always thought. At least that’s what he thought with Erica, and Nyma, and Dylan, and every other person before. He was in love with them. That was love.

Not this .

Because love…isn’t supposed to hurt this much. It’s supposed to make sense. That’s why there are romantic comedies, and disney princess movies, and they all have happy endings. Because love is happy. It’s not messy like this. It’s not painful like this.

But Lance can’t stop thinking about it. All of it. There’s only been one person, in his entire life, throughout all of the shit, who he was always, truly himself around. The one person who made him breakfast after he drank all night. Who has been there for the worst of his anxiety attacks. Who was there , every night, when Lance ate too many pastries, or binge watched Sex in the City, or couldn’t stop crying after a Romantic Comedy that wasn’t even that sad. Who saw him for exactly what he was, for so long, and never, ever left.

Keith lifts his head and Lance’s shoulder misses the contact immediately. It’s like he’s craving for it. Keith looks at him with a small smile and glinting eyes. “Ready to go back inside?”

I’m in love with him.

Lance blinks. “Huh?”

“Wanna go back inside? It’s like, 4AM.”

I’m so in love with him.

“Oh…sure.”

Oh my god, I love him.

Keith turns around and grabs the paddle. Lance studies his back, feeling like he’s plummeting into a deep, dark hole with nothing to grab onto. Nothing to save him. He just keeps falling, and falling, and falling.

“Ready?” Keith asks, glancing behind him.

No. “Yeah.” Lance says weakly.
Keith turns briefly and grins at him, just as dazzling as the stars. “Alright, let’s go.”

Chapter End Notes

goodnight friendos zzz
Blueberry Pie

Chapter Summary

Keith takes a deep breath. “You know...that super corny quote? About like, loving something and setting it free? Or letting it go or whatever?”

Hunk snorts. “You can’t be serious. Come on, man--”

“Well this is me letting it go.” Keith hoists the bag over his shoulder. “Before it lets go of me first.”

Chapter Notes

JIFVBSJONKLAS:HFGBDONLFJIDHIUBUWJFLN i need a shot of vodka and some fried chicken. this chapter murdered my soul just take it please just take IT

keith splits because he gets scared. lance only figures out enough of the truth to be super pissed about it

also can we please just all agree that keith doesnt have location services turned on, on his phone? I think thats a safe assumption

love you all <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2 Years Ago


Keith sighs. “It’s not that bad.” He says. “Stop being so dramatic.”

Lance and Keith have somehow managed to end up in the same city after graduation, which is awesome , because Lance was honestly terrified of the idea of not having Keith around. Of growing apart from him. And Keith is so easy to live with, plus he can help with rent, so it was really just a massive, beautiful coincidence that they are here together.

But apartment hunting has been...difficult. It’s not Lance’s fault. It’s just that all of the apartments he picks are grossly over budget and all of the houses Keith picks are just grossly gross.

“The walls and the carpet are beige. Beige, Snickers. It’s like we’re living in a haystack.”

“We can hang up stuff.” Keith retorts, crossing his arms. “It has two rooms and a kitchen and a bathroom. And it’s under budget.”
“Uh yeah because it’s decomposing.” Lance snaps back.

The poor realtor, who really didn’t know what he was signing up for when he agreed to show Lance and Keith apartments, interjects weakly. “The appliances are new.” He tries.

“New appliances, my ass.” Lance mumbles. “There are cockroaches in the fridge.”

“Those can be cleaned out.” Keith says dryly, voice getting more irritated.

“This is a home to you?”

“We have no money!” Keith says, temper finally starting to rise. “This is all we can do!”

Lance studies his face and then sighs, reaching forward to tug on a lock of Keith’s hair. His telltale “you’re freaking out again” signal. Keith’s face softens slightly.

“I’m sorry, I know you’re right.” Lance says softly. He looks around again. There are multiple beer stains on the carpet. The white, ceramic tile in the kitchen is so cracked that parts of it move when you walk on it. There are water marks littered across the ceiling. The fridge is covered in a mysterious, gray sticky substance. The window has no glass in it, and instead is just covered by a giant piece of cardboard.

“It’s close to the subway station. And the bus station. Which is great because we aren’t going to have cars for at least a year.” Keith says, sensing Lance’s horrified response. His voice is calm, like he’s already trying to comfort him. “We can deep clean the whole place once it’s ours.”

Lance’s gaze moves from a particularly concerning dead bug in the corner of the room to Keith’s consoling face. “...is this... really going to be where we live?”

Keith’s face falls slightly, sympathetically, and he gives Lance a short nod.

“I-If I may,” The realtor cuts in. “Sir, once you and your husband rent the place, the landlord will probably be able to spray for roaches and such.”

Keith sighs, rolling his eyes. “We’re not marri-”

“We’ll take it.” Lance says, feeling himself smile. He knows that if he doesn’t stop Keith, he’ll probably get into a full blown argument with the poor man. “We can move in anytime within the next two weeks.”

The realtor nods. “Wonderful! Follow me for the leasing paperwork.” He says, gesturing for them to leave through the front door.

Lance takes a deep breath, taking one last look around the place. His concern must show on his face, because then Keith is squeezing his shoulder. Lance looks down at him, and Keith is grinning-- one of those huge, broad grins that he almost never sees on Keith’s face.

“It’s going to be great, Lance.” He says, like he’s holding back a laugh.

Lance frowns at him. “Better be, because working the street corner is still an option.”

“Oh, fuck off.” Keith replies, finally letting himself laugh.

xxx
Keith skips the kitchen and goes straight out to the lake when he wakes up the next morning. It’s still more dawn than it is sunrise. He’s not in the mood to talk to people. ‘People’ being Lance. After the stunt he pulled last night; waking Lance up at three AM and going on a romantic fucking boat ride with him—he can’t seem to shake the feeling that he upset the waters a little bit. He messed with the delicate, yet tense balance of things. The air feels different today and he doesn’t even know why. Whatever had come over him had been purely selfish. Obviously, Lance has Olivia, and he’s happy, and all of that nonsense. But looking at Lance, underneath the fucking starlight on a fucking canoe in the middle of the night, he found himself remembering what Shiro had said the last time they talked about this.

“You make him happier.”

Lance was looking at him in a way Keith has never seen him look before. It sends chills up his spine when he thinks about it.

“You make him happier.”

Maybe I do.

Keith starts pushing a canoe off the shore and into the water, mind racing. He can’t let himself think that, can he? He can’t let himself fall into that pit. False hope is currently the enemy. He has to watch his own back. And yet...

“Keith. Hi.”

Keith hear a voice from behind him that doesn’t sound too familiar. He turns around, curious, and sees Olivia standing nervously in front of him, tugging at the bottom of her pajama shirt. “Going for a ride?” She asks.

“Uh.” Keith falters a little. Has he ever actually spoken to this girl? “Yeah. I know it’s early, but…” He shrugs. “I just...feel like it.”

She nods, taking a few steps towards him. “Yeah, I’m a morning person too.” She says, laughing a little awkwardly. “Mind if I tag along?”

Keith blinks at her, caught off guard by her offer. It shouldn’t confuse him as much as it does. There is a knot of bitterness in his stomach that actually hurts when he looks at her. He pauses, hands on the edge of the canoe. He doesn’t really want to hang out with her. But he knows that Lance would be happy if he saw them talking.”Oh. Uh. Sure.” He moves to the front of the canoe and climbs in, glancing to the back of it and then at Olivia, as an invitation.

She smiles shyly. “Thanks.” She says. “It’s a really nice day.”

“Yeah.” Keith agrees.

They drift along the water and Keith tries to busy himself with the view. With steering and paddling.
He tries to get lost in the feel of the water swishing around him. He hears Olivia sigh, long and tired, from behind him. Suddenly, he feels as nervous as she sounds.

“I know you don’t want me to be here.” She says, a little sadly.

Keith pauses, paddle still in the air. He holds it for a moment, before letting it splash back into the water. “What makes you think that?” He tries, feeling guilt start to loosen the bitter knot in his gut.

She sighs again, but doesn’t answer. In fact, the next few minutes go by in a bit of an agonizing silence. She continues to not reply. Keith doesn’t speak either, because there’s nothing to say. The breeze shakes his bangs out of his face. Birds are chirping in the distance, as dawn turns to a full-blown sunrise.

Finally, Olivia says, “You like him, don’t you?”

The question feels like a stab in his chest. His shoulders sag, defeated. His paddle splashes back into the water. He doesn’t realize that his heart is jackhammering in his chest until the splashing noise fades and the air is quiet. He hears it, pounding in his ears.

Slowly, hesitantly, he turns around to face her. Her pretty features are screwed into a concerned frown. Not angry, just sympathetic.

You like him, don’t you?

“No.” Keith says, voice level. Her expression remains unchanged. Then, almost without thinking, he says, “I love him.”

Olivia nods slowly, a small hum escaping her lips. She turns away and squints into the sunrise. The wind blows her wild, curly hair around her cheeks. “You love him.”


“And Hunk?” She asks.

Keith sighs. “It’s a...slightly exaggerated...relationship.” He admits. Not really sure why. Not really knowing why he’s saying any of this at all, especially to a virtual stranger. It hurts to say it. It also feels uncomfortable. Like he never realized his lies could be detected by other people, and now he’s scrambling. Caught in the act.

Olivia nods again, wrapping her arms around herself. She tucks her cold hands underneath her armpits. “Yeah.” She says, gently.

Keith finally looks at her fully, lifting his gaze. “How did you know?” He asks, curiosity eating away at him.

Olivia visibly swallows. “Well, you were staring. A lot. All night.” She says. “You have a very unnerving stare, by the way.”

Keith feels the corner of his lip twitch upwards. “I’ve been told.” He says. “That’s it? My staring?”

Olivia shrugs. “I don’t know, really. Just, the way you look at him. And talk to him. The fact that we’ve never actually spoken to each other.”

Keith hums, not knowing what to say.
The silence stretches between them. Keith returns his gaze to the shore. He wonders if everyone is awake now, eating breakfast without them.

“Are you going to...do anything about it?” She asks, sounding careful.

Keith doesn’t look at her. “No.” He rubs his eyes, suddenly feeling the weight of his lack of sleep. “It’d be idiotic.”

Out of all things Olivia could have said to that, what she actually says is the last possible thing he was expecting. “How so?” She asks.

Keith frowns at her. “What do you mean?”

“Why would it be idiotic?”

Keith continues looking at her, confused expression unchanging. “Why do you want to know?” He asks, accusingly. Her frown deepens slightly, like she wasn’t expecting his tone. He sighs. “You don’t have anything to worry about.”

Her brow furrows. “That’s not why I asked.” She says.

Keith scoffs, shaking his head and studying the paddle in his hand.

“Keith.” Olivia says, as if to say look at me.

Keith looks up.

“I was awake, last night. When you came in to get Lance.” She admits.

“So what?”

“He just...went. With you.”

Keith stares. “Okay. So? He always does that.”

“Exactly.” She breathes. Then she shrugs. “And he always will.”

“You’re being dramatic.” Keith says, a little apathetically. “He’s dating you, not me. That’s enough evidence.”

Olivia, surprisingly, smiles at him. It looks a little sad, but it’s still a very pretty smile. “Keith, I met Lance in a diner. I was excited, because I’d never like, randomly asked someone out before. He was super cute and super charming and it was just really fun.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Keith interjects, feeling the scowl on his face. “I don’t want to know.”

“My point is, it was fun. But it’s been a couple months now, and I...” She leans back and shrugs.

“You what? You don’t like him?” He snaps, feeling protective.

“I do. Of course I do.” She says. “But, I don’t know anything about him. I just found out about his sexuality last night. When he was talking about college, and that Dylan guy. And there’s probably much more to that story that I don’t know, either. I feel like that’s something I should’ve known a while ago. Right?”
Keith blinks at her.

“Anyway, it doesn’t matter. I still really like him, either way. But, when I asked him out I didn’t think that, like, he had a…” She scans Keith up and down, looking a little distraught. “A you.”

“What does that even mean.” Keith asks emotionlessly, wanting this conversation to be over. The discomfort of being “figured out” is causing his chest to feel like it’s caving in on itself. He starts paddling towards the direction of shore.

“He has you, Keith. How the hell am I supposed to compete?”

“That’s a stupid thing to say.”

“Oh, please. I’m a girl he hit it off with in a diner. I gave him my number on a crumpled napkin. You are his whole life.”

“Well, he doesn’t agree. So.” Keith says. “Thanks for the vote of confidence but, it doesn’t change anything.”

She sighs defeatly. “Don’t be difficult.”

Keith flat out scowls at her. “Are you asking me to make a move on your boyfriend?” He asks, frustrated. The last thing he needs is one more complicated factor in all of this shit. “Do you not realize how weird this is? How disrespectful it is, to Lance?”

Olivia looks at him for a moment, trying to figure out what to say. “I’m not...asking you to make a move on Lance.” She says slowly. “I guess I’m asking...why you haven’t yet.”

Keith blinks down at the water, a little shaken by the question. “Well, for starters, he’s dating you.”

“Only for two months.” Olivia adds. “Not much compared to fifteen years.”

Keith frowns at her. “It’s really none of your business.”

She shrugs. “I know. I’m just curious.”

Keith sighs. Dammit, she’s being completely honest. It’s really hard to be mean to this girl. He looks back up at her and tries to weigh his options. Tries to consider telling the truth, for once in his life. But Olivia has honest eyes. A kind smile. And for all the shit that Keith has been putting Lance through, he feels like he at least owes her an explanation. Even if it is a shitty one.

“He doesn’t feel the same way.” Keith finds himself saying, before he can think about it properly. “I somehow got Hunk to be my fake boyfriend, which I lied about, because I wanted Lance to feel the same way. I told Lance I was going on a date with a dude from a biker gang, but it was really some sharply dressed, buff version of Lance that made me feel like I was...I don’t know. So I lied about that, too. And then I told him to go on that first date with you, even when…” Keith glances up at her and then back down at his lap. “Well, I lied about that too. So I’ve just been stacking on all of the lies. Lies on top of lies. And I don’t lie.” Keith swallows. “And I did that all because I thought that there was a chance. But he doesn’t feel the same way, even after everything.” He shrugs, sniffing.

“So that’s it?” Olivia asks.

Keith chuckles a little bitterly. “I somehow managed to be horrible friend to him while simultaneously being in love with him.” He says quietly. “So isn’t that proof enough?”
“Proof of what?”

“That someday, I’ll love him so much that I’ll lose him.” At this moment, Keith kind of wishes he had a cigarette. He’s never smoked in his life, but it seems like the perfect moment to start. Saying that sentence out loud felt like an actual slap in the face. “I’ve already started driving a wedge between us, ya know? It’s only a matter of time at this point. We’re not even together and I’m already ruining our relationship.”

Olivia hums. “So let me get this straight. You haven’t made a move because you love him too much?”

Keith shrugs. “He deserves better. Lance has had a...spotty past, with relationships. He deserves someone who will make sure he doesn’t get hurt.” Then he turns his body towards her, fully, and gives her an earnest look. “Don’t leave him.” He says quietly. “Not because of me.”

Olivia frowns at him, looking caught off guard. “I think I should be telling you that.” She says.

“What do you mean?”

She levels him with worried eyes. “You keep pushing him away? Soon you’re going to be the one leaving him. Feelings be damned.”

Keith swallows, trying to drown out her words with naive denial. But the panic that floods his chest is enough to tell him that she’s right. Keith is losing Lance. It’s the same scared feeling that plagued him years ago, in college, when Lance didn’t come home for months.

He’s losing him. And this time, it’s completely his fault.

xxx

Lance, Hunk, and Pidge join them in the kitchen about an hour later for breakfast. Keith is anxious to see Lance again. He knows that hanging out in the middle of the night is something they always do, but it felt different last night. He wonders if Lance felt it too. It’s probably insane, but he still wonders. Because a small part of him still has not stopped daydreaming about it.

When Lance comes downstairs, all ruffled hair and sleepy eyes, Keith feels like the oxygen has been sucked out of the room. It’s not fair, how pretty he is. He pecks Olivia on the cheek and Keith feels guilt and a little something else, gnawing away at his insides. Then Lance is sliding up next to him and throwing an arm over his shoulder.

“Mornin, Snickers.” He says casually, through a yawn. “What’s for breakfast?”

Keith crumbles inwardly. Of course Lance is super casual about everything. Of course the heavy flurry of emotions, hanging over their heads at three AM last night, is untraceable in Lance’s morning demeanor.

Keith feels like a fucking idiot.

Of course their strangely romantic night together had absolutely no effect on Lance whatsoever.

He needs to grow the fuck up. What was he thinking?
“Scrambled eggs?” Keith asks Hunk.

“Oh, yeah!” Lance says excitedly, dropping his arm from Keith’s shoulders. Keith wants to pull him close again. “Except, like, with green peppers! And ham!”

Keith shakes his head. ‘Green eggs and ham’ never fails.

Hunk laughs, raising an eyebrow. “Uh, sure? I’ll see if I have the ingredients.” He says, starting to search through his fridge.

Lance turns to Keith. Keith catches a whiff of his cupcake body wash. Did Lance seriously bring his own body wash to this place? Jesus.

“Heck frowns. So did you, you asshole. You were with me, remember? “You know I’m a morning person.” He says instead.

Lance hums. “More like a masochist.”

Keith rolls his eyes, heart thrumming painfully as Lance’s sweet smell curls around him.

He can’t help but notice the ugly feeling of resentment, spreading from his gut and into every single one of his veins. It feels like it’s taking over him, like a virus. Everything that he loves about Lance makes it hurt to be around him. Keith doesn't know how much more he can take. If he can’t even stand to be around Lance anymore, how the hell is their friendship going to survive?

He remembers what Shiro and Allura said, about his feelings festering. Getting uglier. And uglier. And Keith sees it now, plain as day. He feels himself getting further and further away from Lance, purely because of his own feelings. His own feelings that will never be returned.

Maybe instead of the painful process of drifting apart over time, Keith can just rip it off like a band aid.

A newfound anger bubbles within him that has him pushing himself away from the counter and walking towards the stairs. “Bathroom.” He mumbles, feeling Lance’s eyes on him.

He never knew that love could manifest itself in such drastically different ways. But the frustration, and the anger, and bitterness just keep boiling and boiling and they are close to the surface now. Anger at himself for being so desperate. For dating a fake boyfriend and for chasing down Kevin at clubs. Anger at Lance for not seeing him—not opening his fucking eyes and looking at what he’s doing to his best friend’s heart. For not loving him back even though there’s so many reasons why he shouldn’t. Anger at Olivia for being a smart ass. For dangling something in front of his face and making him feel like an idiot anyway.

This festering has somehow managed to taint his feelings about everyone he knows. And he never realized how brutally pissed off he was until this very moment. He never realized how hopeless the situation actually is. You can’t just make someone be in love with you. And that’s all Keith has been trying to do. What a waste of time. He’s overwhelmed. He’s exhausted. Hurt, and exhausted.

Before he realizes it, Keith is stuffing all of his shirts back into his suitcase.

He needs to get out of here.
He paces the room a couple of times, trying to gather his bearings, but then he is packing again.

He can’t be around Lance right now.

Strangely enough, Olivia telling him to get his shit together is actually having the opposite effect on him. Because _fuck_ Olivia. Fuck everything. He has officially made a mess of everything in his head, and he needs to leave.

He can probably take an Uber to the airport. He can probably buy a ticket at the counter, He’s got some money on his card.

He hears somebody coming up the stairs and recognizes Hunk’s footsteps. “Woah, buddy. What’s going on in here?” Hunk says, padding into the room and eyeing Keith’s bag. “Are you... packing?”

“Got called into work.” Keith lies, folding his pants.

“Work?”

“Yeah. Some sort of mix up with vacation days.” He pushes past Hunk and walks into the bathroom, grabbing his toothbrush. He tosses it into his bag.

“You’re working today?”

“Yep. They got me a flight and everything.” Another lie. Wow, he’s really just a stand up guy today.

“What.”

“It’s a Saturday.”

Keith pauses, fingers curling into the fabric of his duffel bag. _Fuck_.

“Where are you actually going?” Hunk tries again, crossing his arms over his chest.

Keith sighs. “Look, I just think it’ll be better if I go home early. It’s not a big deal, okay? Don’t make it a big deal.”

“We just got here.”

“And it was a really fun night!” Keith amends. “But I’m...in really deep, man. And I need to leave.”

Hunk frowns in confusion. “You talkin’ about Lance? You guys seemed chill this morning. I don’t get it.”

“We’re fine.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

Keith zips up his bag. “I don’t really know, okay?” He says evenly. “There are a lot of...conflicting things happening.”

“You are literally running away from your problems.” Hunk deadpans, eyeing the bag again. “Literally.”

Keith takes a deep breath. “You know...that super corny quote? About like, loving something and
setting it free? Or letting it go or whatever?"

Hunk snorts. “You can’t be serious. Come on, man—”

“Well this is me letting it go.” Keith hoists the bag over his shoulder. “Before it lets go of me first.”

“Don’t you think you’re overreacting?” Hunk asks carefully. “Maybe just a little bit?”

Keith shrugs. “Does it matter?”

“Um. Yes?”

Keith swallows. “It’s a losing battle, Hunk.” He says in a quiet voice. “If I stick around, I’ll lose him. If I leave, I’ll lose him.”

“Sounds a little dramatic.” Hunk mumbles.

“Maybe to you.” Keith starts walking out of the room. “This is just how I do things. Lance knows it, too.”

“What, by avoiding them? You think fifteen years of friendship will suddenly not matter if you just avoid him?”

Keith doesn’t answer.

“It’s cowardly. It’s impulsive.” Hunk adds, sounding a little irritated. Keith keeps walking. “Hey! What the hell? You really think Lance is going to be cool with this? What do you expect me to tell people?”

Keith refuses to look back at him. “I don’t know. We got into a fight. We broke up. I left crying.”

“That doesn’t seem fair.” Keith can hear the scowl in Hunk’s voice.

“Then, I got sick.”

The side-door is in view now and Keith’s got Uber open on his phone and his heart kind of feels like it’s breaking but he also feels relief at the thought of being separated from everyone. Unable to mess anything up.

“Keith!” Hunk calls again. “Are you freaking kidding me?”

But Keith pushes past the door and doesn’t stop walking.

xxx

2 Years Ago

“What do you think?” Lance asks, sticking his tongue out and closing one eye. He tilts his head to the side, staring at the painting on the wall. “Yes? No? Maybe?” He looks over at Keith, who is staring blankly at it. “Does it make your heart want to sing? Does it make your fingertips tingle with
Keith levels him with a very unamused stare. “It’s a mug filled with coffee.” He says.

“So, you love it! I knew you would.” Lance says, grinning. “It’s homey, isn’t it? I feel like it’s homey.”

They’ve been living in their apartment for three months and Lance can’t say it’s horrible. They deep cleaned the place and bought some mediocre furniture and it all, very slowly, started becoming less horrible. Lance even bought a Glade wall plug-in to get rid of the smell of whoever died in here before they moved in. Everything’s coming together, really.

But the one thing Lance can’t get over is the fucking blankness of everything. No colors. No decorations. It’s madness. It must be what the inside of Keith’s head looks like.

In order to solve their problem, Lance went on a slightly concerning shopping bender and spent an asinine amount of money on cheesy prints and paintings that say things like “don't talk to me until I’ve had my coffee” and “Home is where the food is”. Keith, of course, almost vomited upon seeing them. But Lance doesn’t care, because it’s his apartment too. So he has some say in the matter, okay?

“How much did you pay for this?” Keith asks, like he’s afraid to hear the answer.

“If it’s my paycheck, it doesn’t concern you.” Lance says, still grinning. “Oh! I also bought some colorful rugs!”

“Rugs?” Keith wrinkles in nose. “It’s a carpeted apartment, Lance. The whole floor is a rug.”

“Uh, no. Snickers.” Lance digs through some of the Bed Bath & Beyond bags littered in the corner of the room until he finds the rug he’s looking for. “Our floor is hotbed for disease. It’s probably got bodily fluids from various different people so deeply ingrained in the fibers that we are inhaling toxic waste right now. We’ll most likely die at thirty.”

“And a rug will help us how?”

Lance spreads out the dark red, shaggy rug and place it on the floor in front of him. “Ta-da! We’ll die in style, now!”

Keith looks at the rug. Then back up at Lance. “It’s red.” He says.

“Yeah!” Lance nods. “Good job, Keith!”

Keith frowns. “You hate red.” He says.

“Yeah. But you love red! And you hate rugs, and I love rugs! Compromise, Snickers. It’s a compromise.”

Keith hard, emotionless expression fades slowly. A pleased, happy smile spreads across his face. “That’s oddly sweet of you.”

“I try, I try.” Lance says, shrugging. He turns towards the bathroom. “How do you feel about a Finding Nemo shower curtain?” He asks, trying to sound like he hasn’t already bought one.

“I hate it.” Keith says.

“Oh, that’s going to be a problem.”
“You bought a Finding Nemo shower curtain? Are you serious?”

“It was on sale!” Lance defends. “And it’s so cute!”

“What the hell am I going to do with you?”

“It was a good investment.” Lance says. “And I’m going to put it up right now!”

“No you’re not.” Keith says, disbelieving. But Lance is already snatching up a target bag and sprinting into the bathroom.

“Lance! Wait! Come on!” Lance hears Keith calling from behind him. And to his surprise, it’s followed by Keith’s laughter. “You’re not putting it up!”

“I am! We need a new curtain, Snickers! And it’s okay if this one gets wet! Nemo loves the water.”

Keith emerges into the bathroom, chuckling. “You somehow just managed to make it weirder than it already was.”

“Can you please try being supportive of my artistic decisions?” Lance jokes, standing on the ledge of the tub and snapping a few hooks onto the shower bar. “I’m thinking about the greater good of this establishment,”

“Oh my god. Dory is on there, too?” Keith asks incredulously, looking down at the picture on the package. “Ellen Degeneres is going to watch me shower?”

Lance giggles. “Kinky.”

“How old are you?”

“Twelve, I think.”

Keith sighs, shaking his head and climbing onto the toilet. He stands up at roughly the same height as Lance. “Okay. Fine. Let me help, at least. You look like you’re about to fall over.”

Lance gasps, looking down at him. “Oh my god! Really? Thanks, man!” He says excitedly. He tosses Keith a couple of hooks. “What a caring and artistically passionate roommate I have.”

“I need you to know I’m still 100% against this idea.” Keith deadpans. “In its entirety.”

Lance hums. “And yet you’re up here, anyway.” He says, sending Keith a smile and a wink. “Looks like I can be pretty damn convincing.”

xxx

Present Day

“Keith is leaving.”

Lance’s gaze shoots up from his scrambled eggs and falls onto a very angry looking Hunk, walking
downstairs.

“What?” Olivia asks, from the seat beside Lance. “Leaving where? To get breakfast?”

“No. Like, he’s leaving. Apparently he just called an Uber. He’s waiting in the driveway.”

Lance is out of his chair in a heartbeat, standing up on alert. “What?”

“I couldn’t talk him out of it, but you should go try.” Hunk urges, and there is something very pleading in his eyes. There is something that he’s not saying.

“What did you do to him?” Lance snaps, seeing Hunk’s flat expression and suddenly feeling way too protective. “Did you say something?”

Hunk holds his hands up in surrender. “It was just a little argument!”

“What did you do?” Lance repeats angrily, this time grabbing his shoes and shoving them on. “The fuck, man?”

“I didn’t think he’d leave.” Hunk responds earnestly. “It was just a stupid fight!”

Lance swears under his breath and bursts out the front door. His heart pounds as he books it out into the driveway. What the fuck? Keith is leaving? Without telling anyone? If Hunk hurt him, Lance is going to throw a fucking fit.

When he gets to the top of the driveway, he sees Keith. A very pitiful Keith, with sagging shoulders and his face turned towards the floor. A packed suitcase sits at his feet. Lance’s legs are shaking from sprinting so fast. He takes an uneven breath, feeling bombarded with too many emotions at once. “Hey! Snickers!” He shouts, sounding much angrier than he intended to. Keith’s gaze snaps up and locks with his. Lance scoffs, jogging up to get closer to him. Keith just watches him as he approaches, not saying a word. Just staring.

Lance is panting when he’s finally in front of Keith. “Where are you going?” He asks between breaths. “What gives? What did he do to you? Are you okay?”

Keith blinks at him with those wide, violet eyes.

“I, uh…” Keith speaks, voice cracking a little. “No, Hunk didn’t do anything...I’m not feeling too hot. Think I need to see a doctor or something.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “What? You felt fine and hour ago. Look, if he said something—” He starts.

“’It’s not Hunk.” Keith says again. Lance still doesn’t believe him. “I just don’t feel good. And I don’t want to ruin the weekend so...you should go back inside.”

Lance scowls, taking a step in closer to Keith. “Come on, Keith. You think I’m an idiot?” He asks, lowering his voice. “I know what you’re doing. It’s what you always do. Your special brand of ‘dealing with your problems.’” Lance says accusingly. “What could you possibly be trying to avoid right now?”

A million emotions flash across Keith’s gorgeous eyes. Lance can barely even catch one of them. Keith’s whole face looks like it’s an inch from crumbling to pieces. His eyebrows twitch like he’s trying to hold his blank expression. His jaw clenches and unclenches. “I’m sorry. I just really need to go home and rest.”
“Why?”

Keith shrugs. “I told you, I’m not feeling well.” He says, voice trembling.

“Hey…” Lance says softly, stepping in closer. “Keith, please tell me—”

Keith puts hand on his chest, stopping him. He frowns, shaking his head and looking away slightly. “I really want you to have fun this weekend.” Keith says. “Just stay, okay?”

“I’m not letting you leave without knowing why.” Lance says, a little too urgently. “What was the fight about? What happened?” He feels like he’s scrambling a little. “Why can’t you tell me what’s wrong? You tell me everything.”

Suddenly, Keith’s eyes turn glassy. It happens in a split second. Faster than Lance has ever seen it happen before. “That’s not true.” Keith says.

“What? Of course it is.” Lance replies, frowning. “There isn’t one thing about you that I don’t know. Hello? That’s how it’s always been. You can talk to me.”

Keith just blinks at the ground. To Lance’s horror, a small tear streaks down his face.

Lance stares, completely dumbfounded. He’s only seen Keith cry two other times in his life. Both times happened in sophomore year and both times were under much, much different circumstances. “Keith, you’re freaking me out. Seriously, what’s going on?”

The sound of a car engine rumbles in the distance, getting closer. Keith looks up at the road, and wipes a tear from underneath his eye. He sniffs a little, holding his shirt sleeve to his nose. Then he looks back at Lance, with bloodshot eyes and a pink nose. He still looks breathtaking, all things considering. His ink-black hair whips around his pale face as the breeze gets stronger. Lance’s heart feels like it’s folding in on itself, painfully and unnaturally. He doesn’t think he’s ever loved anyone more in his life.

“I followed you to Providence.” Keith says with a shaky voice.

The Uber pulls into the driveway.

“What?” Lance asks, barely processing what he just heard.

“I followed you to fucking Providence, Lance.” Keith says again, reaching down and extending the handlebar of his suitcase. “I applied to sixty jobs there. And nowhere else. I talked to my fucking academic advisor about it. And I followed you there. It wasn’t a coincidence. It was my choice.”

Lance’s heart climbs into his throat, suffocating him. “I’m—”

“So that’s one thing.” Keith says, and his voice sounds bitter all of a sudden. Empty. “That’s one thing you don’t know about me.” And just like that, he climbs into the car and slams the door. He looks up at Lance through the window with a pained expression on his face, and then looks away.

The engine roars. The car lurches in reverse. It backs out of the driveway. Lance watches as it speeds down the road, getting smaller and smaller and disappearing around the corner.

Lance stands in silence; stunned at how quickly the entire morning unraveled. His hands are trembling. His heartbeat is reeling. All of his nerve endings feel like they could be on fire. He doesn’t know what’s going on. He doesn’t know how to process what is happening.
“It wasn’t a coincidence. It was my choice.”

His chest aches in a brand new way.

xxx

Olivia’s voice rings in Keith’s ears as he watches the road zip by through the window.

“You keep pushing him away? Soon you’re going to be the one leaving him.”

He clenches his fists tightly in his lap. It was a good prediction. A solid one. Reasonable, and true, and logical.

Doesn’t make it any less shitty.

xxx

2 Years Ago

Keith gets home from work early and pours himself a cup of tea. His new job is a lot busier than he thought it was going to be, but he doesn’t hate it. He feels like he’s got what it takes to handle it, and seeing as he wasn’t even expecting to get a job in his field, he’s pretty thrilled. The pay isn’t half bad, either.

He usually wakes up earlier than Lance and gets back a little earlier, so when he hears shuffling coming from near Lance’s room, he pauses. He looks around the kitchen, but can’t seem to find Lance’s keys anywhere.

The shuffling continues, fast and frantic. Then a loud bang. Keith nearly jumps out of his skin. “Lance?” He calls, trying not to let his panic show.


Keith walks towards the direction of his voice and sees Lance crowded up against the entrance to the bathroom, back against the door. He looks like an absolute mess. There are giant combat boots on his feet, covered in mud; probably the one’s Keith borrowed from Shiro a few months ago. Lance is still in his pajamas. His worn out, light blue pants that he always wears are slightly torn right next to his hip. His oversized shirt is falling off one of his shoulders and his hair is a disheveled mess. There are dark bags sunken underneath his eyes and he is looking at Keith with what appears to be a manic look in his eyes. A substance that bears an uncanny resemblance to peanut butter is smeared all over Lance’s face, as well as his shirt. He is clutching a large salad bowl close to his chest. “Don’t go in there!” He shouts, clutching the bowl closer. “Don’t ever use the bathroom again!”
Keith raises an eyebrow. “What are you--? Have you been here all day?”

“I couldn’t take a shower this morning so I called in sick! I can’t go to work without brushing my teeth!” Lance exclaims, sounding a little insane.

“What is going on?” Keith asks, stepping forward and placing his hand on the door handle. Lance lets out an unholy shriek and tackles him to the floor. “Jesus fuck, Lance! What the hell?” Keith struggles to get up but Lance climbs over him, holding him down. He grabs Keith by the chin and glares at him. Keith can smell the peanut butter now. Then in a low, quiet voice, Lance goes, “Listen to me. It can hear us.”

“ What can hear us?” Keith growls, frustratedly.

“The fucking spider, Snickers. It can hear us.”

Keith groans. Lance makes a noise of protest when Keith finally pushes him off. “A spider? Are you serious, Lance?”

“It’s not just a spider! It’s a fucking mutant!” Lance’s voice cracks. “It’s an alien! It’s going to crawl into my ear, and lay eggs in my brain! I’ll be eaten alive from the inside out, slowly and painfully over a period of decades! It has a plan.”

Keith blinks at him. “It’s a fucking spider, Lance.”

“A huge spider! It’s as big as your face! And it’s all hairy!”

Keith sighs, long and slow. “Okay. Alright. Well, we can’t just never go in our bathroom again.”

“We’re making money now! We can have a new one made.”

“We’re not building a new bathroom because of a spider,” Keith says sternly. The he pushes past Lance and walks towards the bathroom. “Let’s just see what we’re dealing with here.”

“Don’t you dare open the door!” Lance shrieks. “Keith! Keith, no!”

Keith rolls his eyes and cracks the door open and glances around the small room. There is peanut butter smeared all over the floor. “What’s up with the peanut butter?” He asks.

“WikiHow said that peanut butter can trap spiders if they try to crawl over it!” Lance screams. “And it hasn’t tried to crawl over it!”

Keith blinks down at it, very confused. Then he looks back up. It doesn’t take him very long to spot the thing, and when he does, he physically recoils, gasping. “Shit.” He whispers.

This spider is enormous. It is currently stationed in the upper right-hand corner of the shower, virtually unreachable unless Keith stands on something. Not to mention, this thing looks closer in size to a chipmunk than it does to any kind of bug. Keith immediately shuts the door. “Fucking shit.”

“Right? How did it get in here?” Lance screams, voice shrill. “Did it walk through the fucking front door?” He huddles himself behind Keith, using him as a human shield.

“We’ve gotta get it out somehow. Without squashing it.” Keith sighs, rubbing his hands down his face.

“I am not going anywhere near that thing!” Lance retorts.
“We gotta try, Lance.”

“Let’s call Shiro.”

“No, we’re adults. We gotta do this ourselves.”

“Fuck you.” Lance spits, clearly very stressed.

Keith sighs defeatedly, reaching down and grabbing the salad bowl from Lance’s hands. “Okay...we can swat it down with a broom. And then when it falls, we trap it under this thing.”

Lance blinks owlishly at him. “Are you insane?”

“You got a better idea?” Keith snaps back.

Lance groans frustratedly. “Fine, and then what?”

Keith looks around at their surroundings. “We’ll just...slip a cutting board or something underneath it. Carry it outside and let it go.”

Lance still looks like he’s on the verge of a panic attack, but he nods slowly. “...Okay.”

“Okay? You good?”

Lance swallows. “Yeah...I’m good.”

“Okay,” Keith says gently. “Now let’s do this.”

x

After what is the most stressful twenty-two minutes of Keith’s life, they have the spider trapped underneath the bowl. The cutting board has been successfully inserted where it needs to be. Lance and Keith collapse against the nearest wall, sliding down until they are both on the floor.

“Fuck me.” Keith says, exasperated. “I feel like I just aged twenty years.”

“We still have to get rid of it.” Lance responds quietly.

They both stare at the bowl, unmoving.

“I think I can hear it.” Lance whispers.

“I think you need to get out of this apartment before you lose your mind.”

Keith hears a thud as Lance’s head falls back against the wall. “What a day.” He says.

Then Keith is chuckling, a little hysterically, before he can stop himself. “I can’t believe you skipped work.” Lance hums in annoyance and swats at his shoulder.

A comfortable silence falls over them, calm and settling. For a moment, Keith actually thinks Lance might have fallen asleep. But then he takes a deep breath, and turns slightly to face Keith. “I don’t know how the fuck we both ended up in Providence...” He says, laughing. “But holy shit, I’m glad you’re here.”
Keith laughs a little nervously, trying to forget that he knows full well how he ended up here. “I’m glad to be here. Otherwise, you would’ve died.”

“That is a fact.”

They both laugh quietly as the exhaustion takes hold. The bowl remains on the floor, unmoving. After a while, Lance sighs, pointing his chin in it’s direction. “Shall we?”

Keith groans, rubbing his eyes. “Yeah.” He says. “Guess so.”

xxx

Present Day

It only takes Lance seven minutes to realize that he needs to follow Keith.

He charges into the house and completely bypasses the kitchen. He ignores Hunk, asking what happened. He ignores Pidge, who just woke up and grunts groggily at him. He dashes up the stairs, heart about to explode, and bursts into his room. He doesn’t even bother to fold his clothes. He doesn’t dry his toothbrush. He starts stuffing miscellaneous objects into his suitcase that don’t even belong there, because his brain is scrambled and his head is pounding and everything around him just brings him back to Keith’s stupidly sad face. His stupid pink nose, rubbed raw. His red rimmed eyes. Fuck, Lance still doesn’t know what happened. He still doesn’t know what’s wrong. But he is not letting it go. He is not letting Keith go.

Keith may not feel the same way; may never feel the same way. But it doesn’t matter. It is what it is, and Lance refuses to lose him. He loses every single person he ever starts to care about, but this time it’s the most important person. And he isn’t going to let Keith slip through his fingers like everybody else managed to.

“I take it he’s gone?”

Lance jumps like he’s been shocked and whirls around, seeing Olivia leaning against the doorframe. Guilt knots itself up, tight and unforgiving in Lance’s stomach and he nods. “He fucking left.” Lance says, shrugging and trying to play it off. “Said he...doesn’t feel well.”

Olivia wrinkles her nose, looking confused. “That seems very unlike him.”

Lance scoffs. “On the contrary. Keith is a master at becoming an emotionally unavailable prick whenever it’s convenient for him.” He says, voice cold. “He’s pulled stunts like this before. Just not...to this degree.”

“Do you think he’s going home?” Olivia asks.

Lance swallows. “Not likely. Too much of a chance that he’ll run into someone he knows there.” Lance looks down at his messy pile of clothes. “He’s the most impulsive person I know. Probably got a flight to India or something. Won’t be...” Lance sighs shakily. “Probably won’t be back home for a while. But I... god. He’s such a gigantic pain in my ass.” Lance finds himself saying angrily. “Why does he do this? Sometimes I honestly think he’s still ten years old.”
Silence falls over the room, for a moment. The words hang in the air a little uncomfortably. Then Olivia clears his throat. “And you are...going home too?” She asks, eyeing Lances bag.

Lance looks up and meets her gaze, suddenly faltering. “I...don’t know.” He says, taking a few clear steps backwards and realizing that he is about to leave his girlfriend in a different state with two people she barely knows. “It doesn’t make sense for me to. I mean, I’m not going to cut my vacation short because he’s being a mopey asshole somewhere. I couldn't care less.”

Oh man, he could care less. He could care a lot less. He cares so much that he feels physically nauseous. And it’s probably all over his face, now. It’s probably so obvious.

Olivia sighs, twirling a long piece of hair around her finger and picking at the ends of it. “Yeah, it make sense for you to stay.” She says. “But...it’s understandable if you want to check on him. Being in love with someone makes you have this like, inherent need to make sure they’re okay.”

Lance hums, picturing Keith’s glassy eyes. “Yeah, you’re right about that.” He answers back, not really thinking. The words just fall out. Then he pauses, heart stuttering to a complete stop in his chest. He looks up frantically at Olivia, who is smirking at him. “Wait. W-wait, shit--”

“Too late Lance. You already admitted it.”

Lance blanches. “ Shit , Olivia. No , I’m... It’s not--”

“It is.” She says, sighing. “It definitely is.” Her expression softens, just enough for all the wind to be knocked from Lance’s lungs. “And it’s kind of a shame, too. Because are really cute. And I really do like you.” Then she takes a few steps into the room, closer to Lance. “To be honest, I was kind of hoping you’d tell me I was wrong.” She says, a little sadly.

“Oh my god.” Lance muffles into his hands, which are now covering his face. “Oh my god I’m so sorry.” He mumbles brokenly.

He wants to put his head through a wall. How could he be such an idiot ? Just admitting it like that? Without even warning her first? This is not how it was supposed to happen. “I don’t know what the fuck is going on.” He says, a little hoarsely, before he can think to say anything else. He hates how desperate he sounds. “I just...the feeling wasn’t there. It wasn’t. And then it... was .”

She nods, reaching forward and busying herself with his clothes. He waits for her to fight him about it. To start crying. To do anything , really. But her sad expression just kind of sits there, stagnant, on her face. She starts neatly folding one of his worn out, old gym shirts that he sleeps in. “So... now what?” She asks.

Lance snorts bitterly, deflating as he sits on the edge of the bed. “Well...I’m guessing you break up with me.”

Olivia pauses and gives him an unamused look. “You know what I mean.”

“What?”

“What are you going to do about Keith , Lance.”

Lance frowns, completely thrown off guard. “Keith has a boyfriend . What is this, a romantic comedy from the nineties? I’m not going to do anything.”

“Do you know why he left?” She asks.
“No, but I’m pretty sure it has something to do with Hunk.” Lance says lowly, anger stirring dangerously in his chest.

Olivia takes a breath, like she’s preparing herself to give a lecture. “Uh...Actually...Lance--”

Loud footsteps on the stairs interrupt her. They get louder and louder and then suddenly Hunk is in the room, looking around at all the piles of random objects littering the floor. “What is going on? Jesus, not again.” He mumbles. Then he looks up at Lance. “Oh shit. You leaving now, too?”

Lance stands up, feeling even more irritated at the comment. “Yes, I am. It’s not my fault you ran Keith out of the fucking house.” He snaps, scowl deepening on his face.

Hunk blinks at him, like he genuinely doesn’t know what Lance is talking about, which makes Lance even angrier. “What?”

“I wonder why Keith left!” Oh man, Lance is feeling it now. He’s pissed. “Maybe we should ask the last person he talked to.”

“Are you serious, man?” Hunk asks, sounding exasperated.

“What did you do to him?”

“Nothing.”

“You had to have done something! I swear to god if you hurt him--”

“He wanted to leave, okay? It had nothing to do with me. Did he tell you it was me?” Hunk asks, sounding very confused.

“He said it wasn’t, but he always lies when he’s pissed.” Lance says lowly, crossing his arms. “I don’t believe him.”

Hunk sighs. “Look, I think you just need to talk to him, alright? Not me.”

“Or you could just admit you fucked up.” Lance spits.

“I didn’t.”

“You hurt him and he booked it. Just fucking tell the truth!”

“I didn’t hurt him.”

“You did!”

“I didn’t! I would never hurt Keith!” Hunk shouts, finally starting to pick up on the mood of the argument.

“Hunk,” Olivia says calmly, trying to settle him down. “Maybe you should tell--”

“He left crying!” Lance interrupts, jealousy and protectiveness stirring together in a very unpleasant way, somewhere deep in his gut. “Because of you!”

“It wasn’t me.”

“Yes it was!”
“Oh my god, Lance. We aren’t even dating!” Hunk yells, waving his hands wildly around his head. “Okay? We are not together! So it couldn’t have been me!”

“Ah- hah!” Lance shouts, pointing accusingly. “So you broke up with him!”

“No! We were never dating! It was a fluke, alright?”

Silence.

Complete silence.

The tension in the room sits like bricks on Lance’s shoulders. The air stops moving. One second becomes two. Two becomes three.

And then a high pitched ringing, filling Lance’s ears. Static, white noise. He blinks, lowering his hand. He blinks again. Hunk’s chest rises and falls, reeling from the shouting. Lance’s arms fall to his sides, floppy and useless.

“What?” He squeaks.

Hunk visibly swallows. “We...lied.” He says. “It was just...for fun.”

“Oh boy.” Olivia says under her breath, but Lance ignores her.

“You what?” He manages to choke out again, voice small.

“Don’t make me say it again, man.” Hunk says sadly, expression falling slightly. “I know you heard me.”

Lance stares blankly over his shoulder, trying to process what the fuck he just heard. He doesn’t look away from a small hole in the wall behind Hunk, where a thumbtack used to be. “You were faking it?” He asks, a little blankly.

“...yeah.”

“Does Keith know that?” Lance asks angrily. “Because he really likes you--”

“Keith knew.” Hunk says, swallowing again and nodding. “He was...in on it.”

“In on it?” Lance scoffs, turning around frantically and running a hand through his hair. “In on it?”

“Look, Lance--”

“It’s been two months.”

“I know that.”

“Why would you lie to me? Do you know what you put me through?” He didn’t mean to say the last part. Shit, he didn’t mean to admit that. But he can’t seem to find any semblance of self control and his mouth is processing his feelings much, much faster than the rational parts of his brain.

Hunk is looking at the floor now, scratching the back of his neck nervously. “Look, you just...you have to hear the whole story--”

“Fuck you, man.” Lance says, shaking his head furiously. And he can hear how much he’s overreacting. He can hear how crazy he sounds. But he doesn’t want to hear a fucking explanation.
He doesn’t want to know why his best friend for fifteen fucking years would lie about liking someone. About dating someone. Did he really think Lance was that stupid? Did he really think it would just be something fun to do, to prank him because he’s so fucking gullible? What was he going to do when Lance found out? Just laugh? Just say, “Hah! Gotcha! It was a joke the whole time! See Hunk? Told you he’d fall for it.”

Why would Keith do something like this? And why was Hunk a part of it?

Lance pushes past both of them and storms out of the room, feeling like everything around him is spectacularly crumbling to pieces. This is not how the weekend was supposed to go. He was not supposed to ever fall in love with Keith. None of this was supposed to happen. It’s all his fault, and yet he still feels bad for himself. Tears fill his eyes and he hears Hunk calling after him. He hears Olivia trying to calm him down, telling him to just let Lance go.

Oh god, Olivia. What a mess. What a fucking mess.

What a fucking mess.

Just like that, he doesn’t want to go find Keith anymore. He doesn’t want to go back to that apartment, and just sit there by himself while Keith’s room is busy not being lived in. He doesn’t know where he wants to go, but he knows the fury boiling in his chest and he knows he needs to get away from this. At least until he gets his head on straight. So for now, he just keeps walking until he’s on the shore, breathing in the fresh lake air and trying to calm his angry heartbeat.

x

x

x

xxx

2 Days Later

Keith watches the condensation drip down the side of his glass. It’s been doing that for an hour now. There’s no way the drink is still cold. He sighs. Why the fuck did he order beer? He doesn’t even like beer.

There are fewer things more depressing than sitting at a bar with only three bar stools, in a shitty Motel 7 right next to the highway. It’s even more depressing when you are alone, and may or may not have just decided to let go of someone you love. He is the literal personification of a bad cliche.

At this point, Keith doesn’t even know what he’s upset about. Now that he’s had time to cool down and actually think, he can’t really place a solid reason for why he did what he did. And he’s not sure
if that makes it better or worse. Because on one hand, he is hyper aware of the gaping, Lance-shaped hole in his heart where a significant amount of his happiness used to be. But on the other hand, he is shocked with himself, because he actually just got into an Uber and left almost every single person he cares about in order to sit at a shit-hole motel bar in the middle of bumfuck nowhere Michigan and drink warm, stale beer.

“Blueberry pie?” An unfamiliar voice says from somewhere in front of him. Keith looks up and sees the bartender, or waitress, for that matter, raises a bored eyebrow at him and holding out a plate. She’s short and chubby, probably in her late fifties. Keith furrows his brow.

“Huh?” He glances at the plate and studies the piece of pie sitting on the surface of it. It’s covered in large sugar crystals and glistening with buttery crust. “I didn’t order pie.”

“Nah.” She says, smiling. “But you look like y’need it.”

Keith frowns at it, confused. The waitress sighs. “Look, kid. My mother made it. I brought it today for someone’s birthday and there was a piece left over. You want it or not?”

Keith purses his lips at her, and then sighs. “Yes.” He says begrudgingly. He takes the pie.

“Thanks.”

“What got you all pissy, anyway? You shouldn’t be staying in a dump like this.” She says, picking up his beer glass and wiping down the counter underneath it.

“Nothing.”

She hums. “Ah, I see.” She says sarcastically.

Keith scowls even further. “It’s none of your business.” He says.

She holds her hands up in surrender. “Alright, alright. My bad for wanting to start a conversation.”

“This isn’t an afterschool sitcom. You can’t just get me to talk about my problems like some...sad, lonely guy at a bar.”

She sighs tiredly. “Yeah, yeah. Whatever.”

Keith leans back slightly, picking up his fork and stuffing a bite of pie into his mouth. It’s actually really fucking incredible. Or maybe he’s just starving. Suddenly, he feels guilty for snapping.

“Sorry.” He mumbles, mouth full. “Shitty couple of days.”

“That I can tell.”

Keith sniffs. “Might’ve really fucked things up with someone.”

She grunts, reaching over to wipe down the corner. “Someone who?”

Keith takes another bite. “Someone I love. A lot.”

She hums, dropping the towel and starting to stack a few glasses. “We’ve all been there.”

“No, but like... really screwed it up. Repeatedly. For months.”

“Again.” She says. “We’ve all been there.”

Keith pokes at a blueberry. “Not really sure what to do right now.” He admits, honestly. “I feel like
I’ve already lost him.”

She snorts. “Oh, honey.” She says condescendingly. “Trust me, if it were that easy to lose people, the world would be a much simpler place.”

Keith puts his fork down. “How so?”

“Well, you guys fought, right? Or somethin’ of the sort.” She pauses, wiping her forehead, and then leans forward to support herself on the bar. “He probably shouted stuff, or you shouted stuff. Or you stormed out. Or he stormed out.” She counts the options out on her fingers as she says them.

Keith crosses his arms. “Yeah? So?”

“The world would be so much easier if fighting with someone, or lying to someone, meant that you were done with each other. But it’s never quite like that.”

“And what makes you think that?” Keith snaps, disbelieving.

The bartender laughs. It comes out like a bit of an unattractive snort. “Kid, half the reason people do that is because they give a shit.” She shrugs, wiping her hands on her dishtowel.

“No. But in the terms of ‘sad, lonely men’ in my bar? Always.”

Keith feels his frown softening, despite his better judgement.

“When people start givin’ a shit, everything starts to get messy.” She says pointedly. “And that’s just how it is.”

Keith falters, put off by the rawness of her answer. He looks down at his pie, which is messy; smeared blueberry syrup and crumbled, soggy crust. Messy, but still pretty fucking delicious.

And that’s just how it is.

xxx

Despite how angry Lance is at Keith, the apartment sucks more than it ever has before because Keith’s not in it.

Lance promised himself he wouldn’t come home. He knew that Keith wouldn’t be here. But after the whirlwind that consisted of trying to get Olivia a flight back (so she wouldn’t have to ride eleven hours in a car with a perfect stranger), trying to get out of the cabin and avoiding conversations with Pidge or Hunk on the way out, and finding an Uber who was willing to drive them an unnecessarily long way to the airport, Lance was so exhausted that by the time he and Olivia made it to the airport, the only idea he could stomach was just going home and sleeping in his own bed.

And now it’s been almost four days and he hasn’t heard a word from Keith. He hasn’t spoken to Hunk or Pidge. Of course he hasn’t spoken to Olivia, because he fucked that up colossally. Shiro even called him this morning, asking what Keith was up to, completely oblivious. Lance lied and said Keith was sick in bed. He doesn’t even know why he lied. Four days doesn’t seem like a long
time, but the heaviness in Lance’s chest has made it feel like a fucking eternity.

The apartment is getting messy. It makes Lance realize that Keith is usually the one who cleans. Not that he cares, because he’s so crazy pissed at Keith that it hurts to think about him. It also hurts because he misses him, but he doesn’t want to tell himself that.

He picks up his phone and dials Keith’s number. He doesn’t want to talk to Keith, but he dials it anyway. It’s just what his fingers are used to doing when there is a phone around. It’s muscle memory.

Just like the twelve other times Lance has called, it goes straight to voicemail. Lance actually snarls when he hears Keith stupid, monotone voicemail greeting. “Hey, it’s Keith. Lemme know why you called. Okay... bye.” He curls his hands into fists and waits for the beep.

“Hey, Keith.” He bites into the phone. “What should I choose? Laptop, doorknob, or curry chicken? Oh wait, don’t even bother! Because they’re all the same!” Lance laughs bitterly. “For me to punch you in the fucking face! Asswipe!”

He slams the phone down onto the couch in a spectacle that may be a little too dramatic. Okay, so that wasn’t his finest moment. He’s had better moments in his life, collectively. And maybe he already regrets it.

He dials Keith’s number again. Waits for the beep.

“Look, okay fine, that last one was a little mean. But I’m still pissed at you. And maybe I do want to punch you. But I shouldn’t have told you, I mean that’s not cool. Ya know?” He pauses. “Oh, wanna know what else is not cool? Lying about your boyfriend! And then leaving and not telling me where you are! Fucking shithead!”

Well, second attempt at reconciliation clearly failed.

Lance sighs, stuffing his face into the smelly futon as tears burn in his eyes. God, he feels crazy. It’s only been three days, but he feels crazy. Keith makes him crazy. Why does it have to hurt so much? How do all of these people write songs about being in love, and make it sound so wonderful? So fulfilling? Lance has never felt more empty. Love is a trick. It’s a fucking joke. It’s--

His phone vibrates and he nearly jumps out of his skin.

Snickers Kogane.

His heartbeat quickens. Should he answer? Should he? He’s mad at Keith. Furious. But…

He grabs the phone, hands shaking.

“Hello?” He squeaks.

“Lance.” Keith’s gravelly voice carries over the phone line, low raspy and comforting, like a bowl of hot soup on a cold day. “I’m alive, alright? You can stop with the phone calls.” He sounds hollow. Like a watered down version of himself.

“What phone calls? I haven’t been calling you.” Lance lies frantically. “I’m mad at you.”

“Never would’ve guessed.”

Static noise fills Lance’s ear, indicating Keith’s silence. It remains that way for more than a
comfortable amount of time. The sound alone is enough to have tears welling in his eyes again. He
wants to keep yelling. He wants to ask Keith a million questions. To tear him a new one. To scream
at him for lying and to ask him why all of this is happening .

But all he finds himself asking is, “Where are you?” His voice trembles and he hates himself for it.

He hears Keith sigh, long and sad. Then the line goes dead.

“W-what?” Lance sputters, looking at the “Call Ended” screen in absolute horror. “Are you kidding
me?” He shrieks at no one. “Fucking asshole!”

He wants to chuck his phone across the room but decides against it. He groans frustratedly, grabbing
at his hair.

And then when his anger fades, even just for a moment, he hears Keith’s voice in his head.

“I followed you to Providence.”

Lance looks down at his hands. Almost like the universe is laughing at him, he absurdly feels heat in
his cheeks. He’s fucking blushing . Like despite everything, the idea of Keith doing that for him
makes his heart all bubbly, like a thirteen year old with a fucking crush.

“I followed you to Providence.”

Lance sighs shakily.

Please come back home.

Chapter End Notes

hello, please just pretend to like it even if you didnt lol. spare me, i want to live and have
children of my own someday
Mango Sorbet

Chapter Summary

just really fucking soft

Chapter Notes

sigh.

jeeezus im tired

uhh...i got a ko-fi? It's under klancekorner. currently experiencing some technical
difficulties with it but I thought i'd put it out there anyway <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1 Year Ago

Lance’s phone lays motionless on the worn out coffee table. He knows he shouldn’t be this anxious
but he can’t help it. He just keeps staring at it, unblinking. Waiting for something to happen.

“Want some water or something?” Keith calls from the kitchen.

Lance glares at the phone. “No.”

“Maybe some cereal?”

“No.”

Keith sighs. “Any dinner? At all? Ever?”

“No, Snickers. Can’t you see I’m busy?”

Keith groans, and Lance can hear him rolling his eyes. “She’s not going to call you tonight. It’s after
six.”

“So what?”

“So work hours are over. Nobody gets offered a job after six PM. It just doesn’t happen.”

Lance continues staring, not wanting to give in. Working at the front desk of a hotel has been...exactly what you would expect. The only reason Lance ever stayed in his job was really because he couldn’t think of anything else he wanted to do. But after observing, and maybe accidentally helping with the planning of a few hotel hosted events, he very surprisingly found something he loved even more than hospitality. Event planning.
And the universe is on his side, too. Shiro’s girlfriend, Allura, actually took over her family’s event planning business and Lance applied for her open, entry-level position the second Shiro told him about it. He doesn’t know Allura very well, despite the fact that she and Shiro seem to be getting pretty serious. So, really, he doesn’t know what she’ll think of him in a professional work environment. He probably can't rely on Shiro’s word either because...well, Shiro knew him when he was still basically wetting his pants. So no matter how many times Keith says, “oh my god, Lance. You’ll be fine. There’s no way you won’t get it.” Lance can’t help but feel like he probably won’t get it.

Allura said for him to expect a call, mid-week. It is Wednesday. *Literally* the middle of the week. Lance runs a hand down his face and continues staring at his phone. He sees Keith approaching him out of the corner of his eye. Keith sits down next to him on the futon. Lance immediately smells something fruity.

He turns his head a little aggressively towards Keith and sniffs again. “What is that? What are you eating?”

“Fruit Loops,” Keith says, smirking a little. “Oh, sorry. Did you want some? You said you were busy.”

Lance scowls at him. Then he scowls at the bowl. Then back up at him. “Fuck you.”

Keith laughs loudly and he ignores it, turning back to his phone.

“Lance, *please* relax.” Keith says, still grinning. He leans forward a little to get a better view of Lance’s face. “You’ve been at it for two hours. Don’t you have to pee?”

Lance remains scowling. “She’ll call while I’m in the bathroom. I know she will.”

“No, she won’t.”

“Yes she will, Keith! And we both know it!”

Keith sighs defeatedly, eyes scanning over Lance. Lance glances at him. The expression on his face is sympathetic.

“Okay, alright.” Keith says gently. “If you’re not going to move then...I guess I’ll just wait with you.”

Lance lets out a breath. “*Thank* you. Jeez.”

Keith leans forward so that he is in the same position as Lance; elbows resting on his knees and chin resting in his hand. They sit side by side and study the inactive phone on the table in front of them.

“I really want this job.” Lance says. “So bad.”

“You’ll get it.”

“How do you *know* that?”

“Simple. I know everything.” Keith says dryly.

Lance sighs. “Yeah...you kinda do.”

Keith chuckles, bumping their shoulders together. “Hey, you said it. Not me.”
To their surprise, the phone starts vibrating. Lance jumps, letting out an inhuman noise. “Ah! It’s her! It’s her!”

“Answer!” Keith pushes.

“Should I put it on speaker? Is that something I should do? Oh my god what do I do?” Lance blabbers uselessly.

“I don’t care, Lance! Just answer!”

Lance slams his thumb down into the screen, blinking at it nervously. He shakily raises the phone to his ear.

“Hello?” He chokes, barely getting the word out. Allura’s voice answers, cheerful and a little tinny.

“Lance! How are you? It’s Allura.”

“Hi! I’m great, how are you?” Lance says.

“Good, good.” Allura says. Lance’s heart races nervously. “I’m calling about the entry-level position you applied to. Do you have time to talk?”

“Yes! Yes, of course.” Lance nods, even though she can’t see him. He looks at Keith a little absentmindedly. Keith looks back with questioning eyes.

“I really enjoyed our conversation during your interview. You seem like a very passionate, hard worker. Your lack of event planning experience is concerning but…” She sighs a little tiredly. “I’m willing to take that chance. You seem like you would be an excellent asset to the company.”

Lance holds the phone to his chest for a moment and jumps excitedly, pumping his free hand victoriously in the air and trying to be as silent as possible. Keith stands up abruptly, face exploding into a grin. Lance presses the phone back up to his ear.

“Oh, wow. Thank you so much!”

“I just need you to know that...this job may say ‘entry level’ but you are going to be asked to do things based on much higher, more difficult standards. It is not a job for the faint of heart, you’ll be very busy, very often.”

“That’s wonderful news!” Lance says, riding on his high and not letting her words worry him. “I won’t let you down, I promise.”

He can hear her smile. “I know you won’t. Shiro trusts you, and therefore, so do I.”

Lance sighs with relief, suddenly sending a mental “I LOVE YOU” to Shiro and hoping he somehow receives it. “Thank you, Allura.”

“Okay! Great! Come in on Monday and we can work through all the details.”

“Wonderful!”

“Have a good night, Lance.”

“You too! Bye.” Lance hangs up and chuckles his phone on to the futon, so excited he could burst. He turns to Keith, about to strangle him with a massive, intrusive hug and scream obnoxiously in his ear. But to his surprise, Keith is already heading towards him and has Lance wrapped up in his arms.
before Lance even realizes what is happening.

“Told you you’d get it.” Keith says happily, and Lance feels warmth filling his cheeks as he hugs back. He doesn’t ever really know how to act when Keith shows actual emotions like this.

“Look at that, you do know everything.” He says, chuckling into Keith’s hair. “That’s just not fair. Keith laughs, pulling away from him. He is still grinning broadly—it’s a smile that Lance doesn’t see very often but makes him equally as happy when he does.

“Shall we go celebrate?” Keith asks, already picking up his jacket and putting on his black sneakers. “A drink? Maybe a burger?”

Lance bites his lip, unable to contain his excitement. “Burgers sound fantastic, Snickers.” He says happily, grabbing his coat and following Keith out the door.

xxx

Present Day

“Hey, Snickers. Just wanted to let you know I saw some roadkill on 5th street today and it reminded me of you.” Lance’s voice crackles through the phone. “You know, because you’re like… I don’t know. But take it as an insult. Okay. Screw you. Bye.”

Keith sighs and swipes to delete the message. “Message Deleted.” His phone says in a robotic tone. “New Message: Friday, September 12 at 3:02AM--” Lance’s voice again. “Hey Keith, if you wanted to drop off the face of the earth, at least you could have taken your stupid collection of black t-shirts. I can’t even sell this shit because nobody wears them an unhealthy amount like you do. Next time you wanna be an asshole, try to be a bit more considerate. Okay. Screw you. Bye, again.”

Keith doesn’t even put his phone down before the next message starts playing.

“Hey just wanted to let you know that I threw out all of your fucking Cinnamon Toast Crunch because I don’t need all that shit clogging my new positive, healthy lifestyle. Oh yeah, I’m getting fit now! I’m going to run a fucking marathon, Keith. So fuck you. I’ll be at the gym. Eat a dick.”

And the next message.

“Well I was just watching this show on Netflix where this guy’s best friend lies to him, stabs him in the back, and then disappears for a month and--oh wait! That’s just you, being a dick!”

Keith’s hands shake as the messages get increasingly angrier. He looks down at his phone and realizes there are still seventeen left. Seventeen unheard messages from Lance. And he knows that Lance is being dramatic—it hasn’t even been a month. Just three weeks. Keith knows he has to go back soon. There’s only so many days he can “work from home” and he’s running out of money, even with the low, shitty rate this motel offers. He knows he’s got to go home, but there is still something stopping him. It’s like there is an invisible line separating him from seeing Lance again, and it may have something to do with these crazy, hurtful messages quite literally blowing up his phone every minute. It’s just so incredibly odd, and off putting, because usually when Keith wants...
space, Lance gives it to him willingly. So he is baffled by the constant calls, the psychotic babbling, the crazy, drunk messages. This isn’t Lance. Well, to a degree, it very much is. But Lance has never acted like this with him. Lance has never lost his head, and left Keith hundreds of obnoxious messages, no matter how bad the fight was. Lance only does this when he…

Keith looks down at the seventeen messages. Reluctantly, he scrolls to the bottom and hits the most recent one, skipping the sixteen angry ones before it. He puts it on speakerphone and Lance’s voice fills the room.

“Keith…” Sad and quiet. Even breathing, like he’s about to fall asleep. “Things…suck without you here.” Keith’s heart clenches. Another long pause, and then, “I miss you way too much.” Keith hugs his knees to his chest. “Also… I tried running on a treadmill today and I don’t think that marathon is happening…okay. Um…screw you. Bye.”

Keith feels a smile tugging at his lips and it feels out of place, like he hasn’t done it for a while and the action is rusty. His chest aches in a hollow way, and he wonders why he’s doing this to himself. Judging by the messages he’s been getting, Lance probably somehow found out about one of Keith’s…lies. He doesn’t know which one, but he takes a wild guess and assumes it’s the whole “fake boyfriend” thing. He knows that if he just explains why he lied…it wouldn’t make it better, but at least it would merit some version of mercy from Lance. Right now, who knows what Lance is thinking?

But at the same time, Keith can’t stomach telling the truth. Every time he thinks he’s convinced himself to do it, he gets so nervous that he actually feels bile rising in his throat. And it doesn’t even make any sense, because this is Lance, and Lance has always been the easiest person to talk to about anything. But this is different. This is dangerous, and it feels like chaos in his heart.

He thinks about what the bartender said to him the first week he was here—about things getting messy when people care. He now recognizes this as a mess, caused by caring too much.

But he also recognizes that as long as he loves Lance, that’s how it’s going to be. It’s always going to be a mess, from now until he somehow falls out of love. And judging by the thundering of his heartbeat at just the mere thought of being near Lance again, he doesn’t think “falling out of love” is happening any time soon.

And the mess is worth it. The heartbreak is worth it. Deep down, he knows that he is willing to sacrifice it all, just to have Lance in his life. And it’s that realization that makes him realize how honestly, and truly fucked he is.

He picks up his phone again and flops down back onto his lumpy, dirty mattress. Listening to the remaining voicemails is probably a bad idea but he misses Lance’s voice. He presses the phone into his ear as Lance starts talking again.

“Hey, Snickers. I can’t think of anything mean to say today. It was a rough night and I didn’t really sleep that mu—” An aggravated sigh, when he realizes he was starting to talk about his day. “Anyway, fuck you. Bye.”

The next message.

“Are you seriously not home yet? It’s been almost two weeks. Are you just wearing the same shirt every fucking day? You probably smell gross.” Keith can hear his nose wrinkling. “Anyway, you know the drill. Screw you and you suck. Okay…bye.”

Keith sighs shakily and skips a couple, clicking another random one. He turns over on his side and
curls into a ball, trapping the phone between the pillow and his ear.

“Where did you go?” Lance asks quietly. “Can you at least tell me where you are?”

Very suddenly, disturbingly fast, Keith feels tears filling his eyes. He huffs and blinks them away. God, Lance is right, he does smell pretty bad. Like, very bad. He has been showering but the water here is probably dirtier than his skin is. Lance would be incredibly disappointed in his current state of hygiene.

He sits up a little groggily, staring at the pathetic display of his severely under packed suitcase; flung open with his two shirts and one extra pair of pants decorating the floor. He sighs, running a hand through his matted hair. Maybe he’s not ready to go home, but he can at least try to take the first step. And the first step, as difficult as it is to swallow, involves getting the fuck out of this room.

He stands up, legs wobbly, and waddles over to his suitcase, starting to throw his shirt and pants inside it.

His phone chimes with another voicemail and he is struck with the thought again; the obtrusive and slightly delusional thought that Lance is being far more dramatic than usual. It’s like there is an air of desperation, hanging onto his every word as he leaves Keith these messages. And Keith doesn’t know what it means. He doesn’t know why it makes him feel uneasy and yet comforted, all at the same time. He doesn’t know why it makes him feel hopeful.

Because Lance only acts this crazy when there are...extenuating circumstances.

Being in love, for example, is one of them.

Keith shakes his head, pushing the thought away as quickly as it came.

xxx

If Keith doesn’t call him back soon, Lance is going to fucking lose it.

Some may argue that he has already lost it. He may or may not have spent the last four days curled up on the futon, crying into a gallon of mango sorbet. And he isn’t really even sure what he’s sad about anymore. Is it the fact that Keith lied to him? Is it the fact that Keith isn’t here? Is it the hole in his chest cavity where all things good and happy used to be?

Okay that last one was a bit dramatic, but he’s been in kind of a...dramatic mood. Every time something happens to him, he wants to tell Keith about it. But then he remembers that Keith barely even exists right now, which leads him to remember why, which sends him into a blinding rage and results in a strongly worded voice message that initially had decent intentions but was then clouded by anger and bitterness.

And now he’s out of mango sorbet.

He sighs and debates going to the store. Other than work, he hasn’t really made an effort to leave his apartment. Ultimately, this choice hasn’t been very good for him. He ignores Allura in the office, asking what is wrong. He ignores Shiro’s worried texts, asking what is happening with Keith. Hunk and Pidge? Nothing at all from them. He knows he’ll have to tell them sometime, but he feels skittish whenever he thinks about confessing his feelings to anyone else.
Feeling defeated, he stands up and slips his shoes on. He grabs his coat and wraps it around his shoulders.

For the sake of more mango sorbet, he will weather the outdoors.

Lance finds the mango sorbet and buys two cartons this time, to avoid another trip into the outside world. He truly looks like someone who is getting over a breakup; bloodshot eyes, baggy clothes, bedhead, and two cartons of ice cream. He doesn’t really care, though, Because this kind of does feel like a breakup. Oddly enough, even his disappearing act in their sophomore year of college didn’t feel like a solid ‘end’ as much as this does, and Lance can’t really explain why. Maybe it’s because there are messy feelings involved now. Maybe it’s because now, almost ninety percent of Lances thought revolve around him pressing his lips against Keith’s and tasting him and feeling--

Lance blinks the thought away for the twelfth time today. He gets in line and groans when he realizes how long it is. He’s going to die in this store. This is where he dies.

“Lance?”

Lance spins around, shocked to find Shiro standing behind him in line, holding a loaf of bread and a jar of jam. Shiro smiles, looking a little confused. “Hi. Fancy meeting you here.”

Lance kind of stares for a moment, feeling like he’s been caught red-handed doing something he should feel guilty for. “Uh. Hey.”

Shiro looks around. “Keith not with you?”

“No.”

A slow nod. “Right.” He says. “He stayed home?”

Lance turns back towards the counter. “Yeah. I guess.” He says emotionlessly.

“You guess?”

“Look, Shiro.” Lance glances back at him. “If you want to talk to Keith, then just call him, okay? It’s not like he’s attached to me. We have separate lives.” He snaps.

Shiro frowns slightly, looking unconvinced. “Do we need to talk about something?”

“No.”

“Because you’ve been acting super weird--”

“I’m fine.” Lance cuts him off. “Just buying some ice cream.”

Shiro doesn’t say anything else, and Lance is eternally grateful. When he makes it to the front of the line, he slams the two cartons of ice cream onto the counter. Humming in consideration, he adds a bag of beef jerky from the small shelf above the conveyor belt. When he looks up at the cashier; a small, red-headed girl who can't be more than seventeen years old, he notices that she is staring at him with wide, shocked eyes. Her eyes dart over his shoulder for a moment, and then back at him.
She looks mystified. Lance raises an eyebrow.

“What? You’ve never seen someone in mourning before? Jesus, get a grip. I know I look like shit, you don’t have to look at me like that.”

Her face crumbles in confusion for a moment and she shakes her head. “No, it’s not that, sir! It’s not that, it’s just…” She glances over his shoulder again and leans in, speaking a little quieter. “There is a guy in line who literally looks exactly like you. Do you have a twin?”

“Huh?” Lance turns around, not even trying to be subtle. “Where?”

She shakes her head, embarrassed. “N-evermind. I was probably just imagining it. Eight hours shifts are tough in the evening.” She says, laughing nervously. She scans his jerky, and Lance turns around again, still curious as to who she was talking about. What an odd thing to say to someone, especially in a grocery store. But if he really does have a doppelganger, Lance wants to meet him.

His eyes pass over a very concerned looking Shrio, and then Lance sees him. Or at least, it’s got to be him. Lance blinks owlishly, absolutely shocked.

Standing a few spots back is a man who is wearing an outfit that Lance literally owns- a light blue, button down shirt and a pair of brown slacks. He’s got tan skin, a hairless face, a narrow nose that hooks up at the end, thin, arched eyebrows, and brown, short, choppy hair. Of course he’s much more in shape than Lance- in fact this guy could probably bench him. This guy could probably run a marathon. His muscles are bulging out of his shirt. Lance blinks at him again. He’s like.. Lance McClain 2.0. Is this an alternate dimension? Is he seeing himself, but in the future? Is he--?

“$14.27 is your total, sir.” Says the cashier. Lance whirls around to look at her. “You’re right.” He hisses, probably sounding a little crazy. “He looks just like me!”

She grins and nods, raising her eyebrows. “Right? It’s crazy. You should ask for a picture with him.”

“I should!” Lance says, feeling himself smile for the first time in days. “Thanks.” He grabs his bags and walks towards Shiro. “Hey, Shiro, check it out.”

Shiro purses his lips and turns around, following Lance’s gaze. When his eyes fall on the mystery man, Shiro’s expression melts into one of pure shock. “Woah, shit.” He says, and Lance will never get used to hearing Shiro swear, but he feels pride well up in his chest at Shiro’s expression.

“It’s insane, right?” He hands Shiro his phone. “Can you take a picture of us?”


“Sweet, thanks.” Lance says, satisfied. Taking a deep breath, he walks towards Lance McClain 2.0. When he gets closer, he waves at him. “Hello!” He says. The man looks up from his phone and it almost feels like looking in a mirror.

“Hi?” He replies, confused. Lance is almost vibrating with excitement. He’s never had a doppelganger before! He’s got to tell Keith about this, he’d be so--!

No. Anyway. Whatever.

“Hello, sir. I know this is random, but the lovely cashier up there made the discovery that you and I look very similar.”
The man blinks up at the cashier and then back at Lance, giving him a onceover. “Huh.” He finally says. “Would ya look at that? We kinda do.” A smile blooms across his face and, damn, his teeth are a bit straighter than Lance’s but Lance can still work with this. “That’s really strange. I’ve never met anyone who looks like me before. Where are you from?”

“Technically, Cuba.” Lance says excitedly. “My family is from there.”

The man hums, clearly impressed at the situation. “Same.”

“I’m Lance!” Lance says, extending his hand. The man takes it; it looks small and bony compared to his.

“Kevin.” He says, grinning. “So what gives? You my long lost brother or something?”


“Yeah, just moved here at the beginning of the year.”

“It’s a wonder we never ran into each other before.” Lance says, crossing his arms over his chest. “Well, welcome to Providence!”

Kevin smiles, “Thanks, man.”

Lance sees Shiro walking over and turns around to greet him. Shiro waves. “Hi.” Shiro says, assuming they’ve already started making conversation. “I’m Lance’s friend. Thought I’d come over here and see this resemblance for myself.” He looks between them, impressed. There is another emotion on his face that Lance can’t quite place. “It’s even more ridiculous up close.”

“This is Kevin.” Lance says, helpfully. “Kevin, this is Shiro. He’s going to take a picture of us.”

Kevin laughs. “A picture?”

“Yeah! We gotta document this, man.” So I can show Keith when I’m not mad at him. ”Opportunities like this rarely ever come around.”

Shiro rolls his eyes and snatched Lance’s phone from his hands. “Alright, let’s just get this over with.” He says, but he smiling. He holds up the phone. “I’ll take a couple.”

Lance stands next to Kevin and hears the camera sound go off a couple times. “Got it.” Shiro says. He’s still looking at Kevin with a baffled look on his face, like he can’t quite believe it. And although Lance still feels like an empty shell of who he once was, he’s kinda glad he came here today.

He’s still mad at Keith.

But he pictures the shocked smile that would blossom across Keith’s face if he saw the picture, and it makes his heart flutter like a fucking fool.

xxx

Keith watches trees blur by, outside the window of the bus he’s on. He doesn’t really know where he is going yet, but he’s got an idea. It’s the only place he can think of, really. He's pretty proud of himself for finally getting his ass out of that motel. He was starting to smell like black mold.
There are four unread texts from Shiro on his phone and he knows that Shiro is wondering what the fuck is going on. But Keith doesn’t need to be lectured. He doesn’t need someone to tell him that he’s being a dramatic idiot. He already knows he is.

Even still, he is incredibly guilty for not answering his older brother. Shiro really has been with him through everything, and he doesn’t deserve to be worried sick. So when his phone starts buzzing and he sees Shiro’s name, he decides to just bite the bullet and answer him.

“Hello?” He says, unenthused. Unprepared for the outpouring of stern scolding he’s about to get.

But Shiro, surprisingly, just asks, “Remember when you told me you were sleeping with a guy who looked like Lance?”

Keith snorts a laugh, mildly shocked. “Uh...yeah?”

“Was his name Kevin?”

Keith presses his phone closer to his ear, heart stuttering. “What?” He hisses. “Yes, how did you know that?”

Shiro clears his throat, a little awkwardly. “Yeah, I think I just met him.” He says. “And, uh...so did Lance.”

His forehead thumps against the window defeatedly.

"But he seemed really excited, so I'm guessing he's cool with it? He knows, right?” Shiro continues. "Or is that what you two are fighting abou--?"

Keith immediately hangs up, pulling his hood over his eyes in complete resignation.

It's just amazing how quickly things fall apart.

xxx

1 Year Ago

Keith hasn’t seen Lance for a few days because he’s been busy with his new job. Lance has been so invested in being the best event planner in the world that he has basically fallen off the face of the earth for the past couple of days. So when Keith comes home from work and sees Lance laying on the floor in their living room, he’s a little surprised to see him. Lance is sprawled out on the carpet, covered with glue, fake rose petals, and rhinestones. He’s wearing a giant hoodie and his boxers. There is a heavy, open book laying on top of his face that says “DIY for Dummies” and Titanic is playing on the tv.

Keith blinks at the scene in front of him. “Uh...Lance?”

“Hm.” Lance muffles beneath the book.

“You...okay?”

Lance lets out a heavy, heavy sigh, and sits up. The book falls right into his lap and he hisses in pain. “Fuck!” He curls in on himself and rubs his eyes tiredly, groaning. “What time is it?”
Keith resists the urge to laugh at Lance’s hair, which is sticking straight up in the back. “It’s eight.”

“Eight in the morning?” Lance shouts, frantic.

“No, it’s eight PM. What are you doing?”

Lance slowly rolls onto his back again. “Centerpiece guy quit last minute. Apparently he’s filing for bankruptcy.”

“Centerpiece guy for what?”

“Quinceañera. In a week.” Lance’s voice sounds completely void of emotion. “It was a sketchy decorator but I hired him anyway. Stole the company’s money and then fucked off. I should’ve known better.”

“Oh my god.” Keith says. “Are you going to sue?”

Lance shrugs, looking exhausted. “I can’t think about any of that until I get these stupid centerpieces done.”

“Jesus, how long have you been working on this?”

Lance sighs. “Uh...is today Wednesday?”

“Yeah?”

“Seventy eight hours.”

“Holy shit, Lance. Just hire someone else.”

Lance puts his face in his hands. “I can’t, Allura gave me a budget for this project and I used it all up. I can’t let her know I screwed up this badly.”

Keith sighs sadly, walking over to where Lance is laying and sitting down next to his head. “How were you supposed to know?” He asks.

“I dunno…” Lance mumbles. “But I have a feeling that if it were anyone but me, they wouldn’t have messed it up like this.”

Keith studies Lance’s face; the bags under his eyes look are a deep purple and he’s got creases in his face from falling asleep on the open pages of the book. “Fuck everything, man.”

“You’re going to have to tell her, Lance.” Keith says carefully. “She’s your boss, it’s her company.”

“Yeah…” Lance takes a deep breath and runs a hand down his face. “But I won’t be able to think straight unless I get these stupid centerpieces done.”

Keith glances around at the discarded rose petals. “How many...do you have to make?”

“Seventeen.” Lance says miserably.

“How many have you made?”

“Like...a fourth.”

“A fourth of them?”
“No, like, a fourth...of one.”

Keith blinks at him. “...What?”

“I keep changing my mind! Everything I make looks horrible! But I think I finally have an idea—” Lance scrambles around for a moment and then pulls up a sketchbook. “See? I have a sketch of it.”

The sketch is beautiful. It’s made up of thin, delicate pencil lines and light washes of pinks and reds. Very typical for one of Lance’s sketches. “Looks great.” Keith says dumbly, feeling very out of his element.

Lance huffs. “But I can’t seem to make it.” He says. “And I have to have them ready by tomorrow, so I’m fucked.” He flops back down onto the carpet. “This is the end for me. My career is ruined.”

Keith rolls his eyes. “Come on, we can figure this out. Sit up.”

Lance is silent for a moment. Then he says, “We?”

“Yes, we. I’m going to help you. I have nothing better to do, anyway.” Keith eyes the two large plastic bags in the corner of the room. “It looks like you already have the materials, so let’s just figure out a cutting and gluing system and hack this out. I’ll order some chinese food for dinner.”

Lance sits up slowly. “You do realize this is going to take all night, right?” He says skeptically. “You won’t be able to wake up early and go to the gym and drink green juice like the obnoxious person you are.”

Keith shrugs. “One day won’t kill me. If I can help, I will.” He stands up and walks over to where is cell phone is on the counter. “Orange chicken? Or sesame?” He asks.

“You’re really going to help me?” Lance asks back.

“Of course.” Keith turns around to look at him. “You’d do the same for me.”

Lance nods slowly, looking like he wants to be overly emotional but doesn’t have the energy. “Thanks,” He says, sounding relieved. “And sesame chicken is fine.”

Keith hums. “Knew it.”

x

After about eight hours, they have managed to make fifteen centerpieces. Keith’s are...a little less beautiful than Lance’s. But at this point in the night, or morning, it really doesn’t matter one way or another. Lance finishes the one he is working on and pushes it up against the wall where all the other ones are. They take up more than half of the tiny living room. He falls onto his back and groans. There are plastic rose petals in his hair. Rhinestones stuck to his chin. He looks like he’s seconds away from death.

“I’m doomed. We’re not going to finish. We’re going to die.”

Keith is way too tired to deal with this. “Shut up, we only have two left.”

Lance rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands. “I can’t even see anymore. My vision is all blurry. I
feel like there is chicken lo mein in my bloodstream.”

“Yeah…” Keith agrees. “We did eat way too much chinese food.”

“God…” Lance falls back over again, onto his side this time, and uses his hands as a pillow beneath his cheek. “This job is so hard. I dunno what I was thinking.”

“It was just one mistake.” Keith says, trying to be reasonable. His eyelids are heavy and he leans back on his hands, letting them fall shut.

“A huge one.” Lance mumbles, voice starting to slur. “Big, bad one.”

Keith sighs, finally giving in and laying flat on the floor. He can already feel himself drifting off the minute his head finds the carpet. “You gonna quit?”

“Do you think I should?” Lance asks, sounding sad.

“Fuck no.” Keith replies.

“Hm.” Lance hums. “Well then, I guess I won’t.”

Keith probably drifts off after that, because when his eyes flutter open again, an hour and a half has gone by. He sits up frantically, glancing around at the disaster area in their living room. They only have one more hour to make two more of these things before Lance has to go to work. Keith stands up quickly, wobbling a little, and slapping his cheeks to try and wake himself up. He whirls around and gets ready to shake Lance awake, but then stops himself.

Lance is curled up into a ball and sleeping so soundly that Keith falters. Lance hasn’t slept in days...He’s so stressed about all of this. Keith feels horrible waking him up. He probably has a terribly stressful day ahead of him. And he looks so peaceful, so happy, just being able to sleep.

Keith sighs, sitting back on the floor and gathering materials.

He knows how to make these, now. Might as well just let Lance sleep. He yawns so hard it’s almost painful, and then gets to work.

About forty five minutes later, Lance stirs. He lifts his head, hair going in twenty different directions, and looks at Keith with confused, bleary eyes. “Snickers?” He rumbles, voice rough with sleep. “What are you doin’?”

Keith clears his throat, feeling strange being caught in the act. “Just finishing these up.” He says shyly. “You looked like you needed to sleep.”

Lance sits up further. “What? What time is it? Oh my god , I didn’t realize I fell asleep.”

“You’re okay.” Keith says, a lot gentler than he expected to. “You’ve got about fifteen minutes to get ready for work. I’m almost done here, don’t worry about the centerpieces.”

He can feel Lance looking at him, but refuses to look up and meet his eyes. He feels himself blushing a little stupidly, because he’s not used to this feeling and honestly he doesn’t do things for people very often, so he’s not sure how to deal with this situation.

“When did you wake up?” Lance asks.

“About an hour ago.” Keith puts the finishing touches on the last centerpiece and pushes it to the wall, letting out a tired sigh. “I gotta go get ready for work now, too.” He says uncomfortably, still
feeling Lance looking at him. “Gotta shower, so…” He gets up and Lance stands up with him. Keith finally looks at him and is met with two surprised, blue eyes.

“Keith ...you didn’t have to--”

“I know.” Keith says bluntly, turning away to hide his blushing face and making his way to his room. “But I did, so. Okay. I’m going to shower now- -oof !”

Of course it was bound to happen, Keith was kind of just waiting for it, to be honest. Lance collides into him, hugging him so tightly it feels like he’s being crushed.

“Oh my god , thank you. Thank you so much Snickers--”

“Alright , alright.” Keith squeaks, pushing him off. “It’s too early for that.”

Lance’s smiles doesn’t fade at Keith’s apathetic response. “I’m buying you dinner tonight.”

“Yay for me.” Keith says emotionlessly, walking into his room.

“It’s going to be amazing.” Lance says again, equally cheerful.

“I’m sure it is.” Keith deadpans, and Lance giggles, giving him one last smile before trotting into his room and shutting the door.

Keith sighs and saunters into the bathroom, splashing some water on his face. He makes sure it’s cold, so it can calm down the silly, pink burning in his cheeks.

xxx

Present Day

“Lance.” Shiro says sternly, and Lance attempts to run, rather hurriedly, out of the supermarket. Jeez, he really thought he’d be able to slip out while Shiro was on the phone, but it doesn’t look that way. Shiro gets closer behind him. “Lance, come on, talk to me. I know something happened between you and Keith, and I...think I know what it might be.”

Lance doesn’t turn around. “Nothing happened.” He lies. God, he was just starting to have good day.

“Sure, whatever you say.” Shiro says sarcastically. “Wanna tell me why Keith isn’t in town?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Lance.” Shiro finally catches up to him and grabs his shoulder, whirling him around. “Where is Keith?”

Lance sighs frustratedly. “I don’t know, okay? Can you leave me alone? I have ice cream to eat. A doppelganger picture to send to all of my friends.”

“You don’t know ?” Shiro looks stunned. “What the hell happened between you two?”
“We got into a fight.” Lance says bluntly, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I know you did. That’s it?”

“Yes.”

“And now Keith is somewhere? And you are here?”

“Yes. Jeez, wanna rub more salt in the wound?”

Shiro sighs tiredly. “Just..please. Tell me. He’s my brother, Lance. I’m worried.”

Lance takes a deep breath and runs a hand through his hair. “It’s just…”

Shiro waits expectantly. God, Lance doesn’t want to do this.

“Keith…lied to me. Like, he’s been lying to me for a while. And I feel…” He looks down at his open palms as if he wrote down what he was going to say. Giving up, he looks back up at Shiro.

Shiro’s face softens significantly. “Oh.” He says sadly. “Right...so it is about him.” Lance frowns in confusion--Even Shiro knows about Hunk? Seriously? “I don't mean to get involved but like...if you guys got into a huge fight about Kevin, then why did you just take a picture with him?” Lance pauses, blinking. He doesn’t get a word in before Shiro continues. "Look, I know Keith tends to...internalize. You know he does. I’m sure if he knew sleeping with that Kevin guy would upset you, he wouldn’t have done it. It’s just...you know. I mean, the resemblance is uncanny. You can’t really blame him.”

It takes several moments for the words to actually make it through Lance’s brain. He stands tensely, fists clenched, absolutely dumbfounded. “What the fuck are you talking about?” He asks, voice shaking a little.

Realization registers on Shiro’s face. “Shoot.” Shiro says, lifting a hand to his cheek. “That’s...not what you are talking about, is it? Oh no, there has been...a misunderstanding. Keith...is going to kill me.” He bites his lip and starts walking towards his car, scratching the back of his neck.

“Shiro what the fuck is going on?” Lance calls after him, a little panicked. There’s no way he just heard those words come out of Shiro’s mouth. This must be a joke. This must all be some huge, practical joke that his friends organized with Satan himself, and Lance feels so played, so hurt, by everything around him. Nothing makes any sense. What else has Keith been keeping from him? What else has he lied about? What is happening-- “You owe me an explanation!” Lance shrieks behind him, desperately. “You’re the one who made me talk! Now it’s your turn!” His head is spinning to fast and unforgiving for him to make any sense out of the situation, and he gets one moment of relief when Shiro stops walking, looking resigned, and turns back around. Lance bounds towards him.

“What the hell do you know about Keith that I don’t?” He says, a little defensively. “What did he tell you?”

Shiro lets out a long, exasperated sigh. “It’s really nothing.” He says, sounding guilty. “It’s just...a few months ago, Keith came to me wanting some...advice. About...” Shiro blinks a couple times at him, looking unsure. “Well, about you, really.”

Lance furrows his brow. “What about me?”

“He said that he was sleeping with someone who looked like you, and it was...I mean, it was a weird
situation, okay? And I think...that Kevin guy was the guy. So I thought that’s what you were upset about...and honestly I was confused about why you even wanted a picture with--"

“Months ago?” Lance feels a stabbing in his chest. “This has been going on for months?”

Shiro shrugs, holding his hands up in surrender. “I don’t know. A few months? They went on a blind date or something. I really don’t know anything about it. But Lance...You really can’t be that mad at him. I mean, it’s not like he was cheating on you or something.”

“I-I know!” Lance sputters. “That’s not the point! The point is he lied to me! Again!” His heart rate is through the roof and he’s having trouble gathering his bearings. “And that guy looks so much like me, I mean, what was he thinking? Wasn’t that weird for him? Like, he’s got my face! He’s got my fucking eyebrows! My heritage! I-I mean, he’s practically exactly like...” Lance trails off, feeling the burning of blush in his cheeks. His pulse, fluttering in his throat.

Holy fucking shit.

Shiro is looking at him with a very knowing expression.

“What?” Lance squeaks. “God, what?”

Shiro shrugs, looking exhausted. “I mean, come on, Lance. Are you really going to make me say it?”

*Keith is in love with you.*

Lance’s hands shake. “I...don’t know what’s going on.”

*Keith has been in love with you for months.*

It’s like all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are clicking into place. Suddenly his vision is cleared. His head isn’t clouded anymore. Everything fits. Pretending to date Hunk. Avoiding Olivia like the plague. Running away from the cabin after spending the entire night with his face in Lance’s neck, on a fucking canoe.

Telling Lance he followed him to Providence.

There is a smile in Shiro’s voice. “There we go. Looks like you figured it out.” He says, studying Lance’s face. “Took you long enough.”

Lance blinks at him, feeling like he just hit the ground, hard, after free-falling for weeks and weeks.

Shiro looks at him sympathetically.

"Hey..." he says softly. "Did you really not see this coming?"

Lance chooses not to answer. His arms hang at his side uselessly. “W-What do I do now?” He asks, feeling dizzy.

Shiro shrugs. “Go find him? Oh, and tell him I’m furious. And worried sick. Also, don’t hate on Kevin. He doesn't seem like a bad dude.” He adds with a joking smirk.

Lance nods numbly, as Shiro pats his shoulder in a fatherly manner. He waves goodbye and continues walking in the direction of his car, leaving Lance to melt into a puddle on the sidewalk.

He feels like his heart doesn’t fit quite right in his chest anymore. It’s too full. Too eager. Too happy.
Just like it had felt when he fell in love for the first time--young, and naive, and foolish. All the damage that has been done to it, for some reason, feels so irrelevant. So healed.

He turns on his heel and starts heading to the train station, heart stuttering with every step.

The only thing he can think to do now is find Keith.

And he suddenly knows exactly where to look.

x

x

x

xxx

14 Hours Later

Lance sees the familiar forest and his legs are carrying him forward much faster than his brain can process the action. It feels like something he’s done a million times. The soil feels the same under his feet. He weaves through the trees in a pattern that can only be accredited to muscle memory, from having run up this bumpy, jagged hill so many times as a child. His heart beats just as fast as it used to. The smell of mud makes his nose wrinkle just as much as it used to. The moisture in the air makes his hair frizz up, just as much as it used to.

This forest makes him think of Keith’s face, streaked with sunlight in the morning and splattered with mud in the evening. It makes him think of Keith’s laugh, much louder than he ever expected it to be. Keith’s concerned frown, face bathed in moonlight. It’s almost like he can smell the time Keith wore way too much Axe body spray in seventh grade, or the time they brought fresh baked cookies to the top of the hill in fourth grade and tried feeding the squirrels. It reminds him of first crushes, first kisses, fishing for frogs and only finding tadpoles. It’s like his story with Keith is weaved into the tree bark. His roots are intertwined with the roots of every single tree.

It makes him feel, strangely, like he can’t even remember a time when he wasn’t in love with Keith.

He’s dizzy with the desire to see him. His feet pound the soggy ground. His heart crawls up his throat and he runs faster. Faster. Faster.

At this point, he isn’t even sure if Keith is here. But he likes to think that if he knows anything at all about Keith; if he has learned anything about him throughout the entire fifteen years of their friendship, then Keith will be here. He has to be. There’s no other possible place.

The clearing appears. The large, red, worn out sign. “Rossway Cliff”.

Lance’s heart hiccups and he breaks into a full-on sprint.

The clearing gets closer and closer and Lance feels the excitement, the nervousness, tingling all the
way to his fingertips. He passes the sign and the trees start to clear and the glow from the stars suddenly fills the air and—

He stands at the opening of the forest, staring at the cliff. His heart pounds in his skull. He can hear the woosh of his blood rushing in his ears. He pants shakily, suddenly feeling nervous. He takes in the sound of running water below. The silhouette of the cloud-like trees and hills against the bight, navy sky.

And sitting on the edge of the cliff, all blue hues and white moonlight, is Keith.

xxx

Just like every other time they have fought, Lance manages to find Keith in the aftermath.

It’s like clockwork. It never fails. No matter how angry they both are, Keith almost always storms out first and Lance always, always finds him.

Keith hears the footsteps, fast and frantic. The crunching of the leaves. The snapping of sticks. He knows it’s Lance. The pattern of those footsteps, those sounds, reminds him of his childhood. It reminds him of home. And at this point he’s not sure if home means Rossway Cliff, or if home just means Lance.

He wonders why Lance doesn’t just give up on him.

The footsteps get even closer and Keith’s heart flutters.

He wonders why Lance still tries to find him.

The footsteps stop and he can hear Lance breathing; panting like he just ran a marathon. Keith feels the corner of his lip quirk upwards at the absurdity of it all. Because he knows why Lance still tries to find him. It’s the same reason Keith pretended to date Hunk. It’s the same reason Keith hooked up with Kevin. It’s the same reason they both ended up in the same damn place, even after all of these years.

Lance walks closer and closer to him, and then he is collapsing next to him; dropping to the ground and hugging his knees impossibly close to his chest. The patch of grass they used to sit at for hours is now too small for both of them. The edge of the cliff feels too crowded for their adult bodies. Keith keeps his eyes trained forward because if he looks at Lance, he’s going to lose it. He at least wants to make it two minutes before completely destroying whatever dignity he has left. Lance has finally gotten his breathing under control and they sit side by side, in silence, listening to the running water. Just like they’ve done countless times before. It’s like no time has passed.

The air is chilly. There is dew on the grass. Lance breathes steadily next to him and Keith kind of feels like his walls are crumbling, bit by bit, with every passing second. It’s just what happens, now. It’s just what Lance does to him, now. Just like the blueberry pie, this has become a crumbled, soggy, smeared-up mess.

But still so sweet.
“The drop doesn’t look that far down, now.” Lance finally says, a little hoarsely. The sound of his voice, clear and right in front of Keith instead of muffled over a phone, loosens every muscle in Keith’s body. It’s like he missed it so much he was weaker because of it.

“Yeah.” Keith rumbles back. “Might be because we’re bigger now.”

“Yeah.” Lance breathes.

The air is eerily silent. It’s like the calm after the storm. Without Lance’s shrill yelling in his voicemails, and without the loud motor of the bus and the flickering light from his motel bathroom, everything just seems so calm that Keith almost feels like he’s underwater.

“You could’ve told me you were here.” Lance mumbles. “I was worried.”

Keith hums. “Well, you didn’t seem very worried while you were calling me a dick via voicemail. I must’ve just gotten confused.”

He hears a tired sigh. “You lied to me about Hunk.”

Keith turns his head the opposite direction of Lance, resting a cheek on his knee. “Yeah.” He whispers, not knowing how else to say it.

“You lied to me about biker guy.”

Keith swallows, caught off guard by that one but still not able to say no. “Yeah.” He says again, impossibly quieter.

“I had every right to be angry And there is a lot you still haven’t told me.”

“Didn’t have to leave me seventy-four voicemails though.”

“You know I had to.” Lance says, raising his voice slightly. “You know that’s what I do.”

“Not with me.”

“Yes with you.” Keith can hear Lance’s scowl but still refuses to turn around. “I needed to talk to you. You were ignoring me.”

“Could’ve texted.”

“Why are you being a dick?”

“Why are you here?” Keith asks, frustrated. He can’t do this anymore.

“You know why I’m here!” Lance shouts back, and it echoes throughout the cliff. It ripples throughout the calm air. The earth beneath them turns slightly off kilter. Then, in a much gentler voice, he repeats, “You know why I’m here.”

And Keith wants to argue more. He’s desperate to feel safe. To push Lance away and to make Lance hate him. He’s dying to be alone and miserable so he doesn’t have to worry about ever hurting Lance again. So he doesn’t have to worry about ever losing Lance again. But he’s just so exhausted. It’s like there was a burst of wild, untamable fire that consumed them both, making them act out and say rash things and lose their minds and now they are sitting in the wreckage, in a pile of smoking ashes.

Keith’s heart thuds mercilessly as he turns his head onto his other cheek, and faces Lance. Lance is already looking at him, and his eyes are glinting in the moonlight. He is looking at Keith because he
knows. He knows what Keith is doing. He knows why Keith is acting like this, and he’s not going to get away with it this time.

Keith sees Lance’s eyes flicking to all the points of his face. Lance’s expression melts into one that just looks so torn. So desperate. And Keith feels the inside of his chest aching at the sight of it. All he can do is stare back, drinking up the beautiful cuts and curves that make up Lance’s jaw. The dark freckles on his cheekbones and the delicate swoop of his nose. Keith almost can’t handle it. He almost wants to give up. The intimate feeling that is building in the air feels like it’s suffocating him, and all he can think about is all the other times they sat on this cliff, in this moonlight. How he’s memorized the way Lance’s face looks out here at 4PM, at 6PM, at 12AM. How everything they’ve been through together has somehow lead them back here. And now Lance is sitting in front of him, still here after everything. Keith’s heart is in his throat and his stomach is in his feet and he feels … he just...

“Shit, Keith.” Lance says gently, voice cracking. Like he can’t believe they made it here. He shakes his head a little and his eyes glisten. Then, in a nervous voice, barely above a whisper, “We’re...in love with each other, aren’t we?”

The words hang in the air with the rest of the stars. They wash over Keith like a wave of flames, and yet somehow leave a cold, tingly feeling in their wake. A part of him knew they were coming, but they hit him just as hard. Keith takes a shaky, terrified breath in and blinks at Lance’s gorgeous face, not even having the heart to deny it any longer. “Yeah.” He whispers, nodding slowly. “Yeah...I think we are.”

Just like that, he can breathe again.

Lance visibly swallows. “Yeah.” He whispers back. And then his face breaks into a breathtaking grin that has Keith’s heart leaping out of his chest. “I think we are, too.”

And for a moment they just look at each other, because what else can they do? Seconds tick by and they just let the realization sink into their skin. They adjust to the shift in the atmosphere.

And then Lance is leaning in, like this is natural. Like this is something they do all the time. And Keith doesn’t even have a second to prepare himself before Lance presses their lips together.

It’s soft. It’s warm. Just a firm push of lips on lips. The smell of buttercream frosting, filling Keith’s nose and making him breathless.

A quiet exhale.

Relief.

It’s enough to have electricity crackling all across Keith’s skin. It’s enough to have goosebumps rising on his arms and it makes his head spin in a giddy, blurry, beautiful and reckless way.

Lance tastes as sweet as he did in high school. Maybe even sweeter. But now Lance is kissing him because he wants to. And holy shit, so does Keith. Keith wants to, more than anything in the world.

They separate, for a moment, just barely, and Lance sighs shakily, pushing forward and nudging their noses together. Keith feels his breath, hot on his lips. It’s simple a simple sensation, yet exhilarating. It’s a feeling he didn’t know he needed; so raw and so real. He watches Lance’s mouth curl into a small smile.

“This is weird...” He says. Just like he did when they kissed for the first time; with nervous, sweaty palms and awkward braces. Lance swallows. “Kissing you...is weird.”
Keith hums, nodding. Because it is a little weird, kissing someone you spent your whole life definitively not kissing. But weird is good. Weird is actually divine, and Keith tilts his head to the side and pushes back in, with more intent this time. To taste Lance’s lips. To breathe in his sweet smell until it creates fog in his brain and clouds all of his inhibitions. He wants to get closer, and closer, and closer.

The water continues to run below them. The air is quiet and the stars still glitter the sky. Lance still smells sickly sweet and Keith’s boots are still covered in mud from the hike up and his shirt still smells musty from his motel bed and everything is exactly the same as it was forty-five seconds ago.

But now he finally tastes vanilla on his lips.

And everything feels so new.

Chapter End Notes

get it? like...in the song. the ed sheeran song...Hearts Don't Break Around Here. "Oh, we're in love, aren't we?" <3

kevins the real mvp because he made keith realize his feelings and then made lance realize keith's feelings? all he had to do was exist. what a bro

I figured the "big spectacle" confession moment wasn't really in the books for these two...they just know each other too well for that "big reveal" type stuff, i think. So i tired something new and a bit more challenging to write, with this one

love you all
Cinnamon Rolls

Chapter Summary

Just.....happy

Chapter Notes

im screaming i can't believe this

NOTE: this chapter starts where the other left off. Lance's house is the one really close to rossway cliff so...yeah.

this has been such a wild ride for me. I went through a lot while writing this story. thank you so much for sticking with me, i love you all so much

I am planning on writing another fic after this--but I'm going to take a few weeks off from writing :) It wont be too long, I promise, so dont forget me. Just need to refuel if im going to tackle another story! so, look out for a new fic from me in a few weeks. thank you so much for all of your support shiohbisofeh !!!!

there is like, sort of smut in this chapter? but its like, just dry humping. nothing too crazy.

AHHHHHHHHFDFUIFD okay pls enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Present Day

Lance’s house is just as comforting as it always used to be.

They haven’t really visited home in quite a while, but the minute Keith hears the familiar creaking of the wooden floorboards, it takes him back a decade. The musty smell of old flowers and worn out wood fills his senses and leaves a buzzing warmth beneath his skin. Lance’s family is asleep--it’s 3AM, after all. It leaves the house dark and quiet, just like it used to be when Keith and Lance would sneak into the kitchen in the middle of the night to eat junk food and leftovers from dinner; with nothing but the refrigerator light filtering through the darkness.

Spontaneously traveling to Rossway Cliff was a very stupid, mushy, and cliche idea in Keith’s eyes. He honestly couldn’t really believe that he did it. It was something straight out of a bad romance novel. But a couple of good things came out of it. A couple...great things.

Because now he’s home again...which is great.

And now, Lance is pressed close to him, tangling their fingers together in a messy bunch and leading him through through the doorway with a soft smile on his face.
And that... is even greater.

“Everyone is asleep.” Lance whispers, turning around. His skin looks so soft in the fuzzy darkness. He doesn’t let go of Keith’s hand. “Wanna go upstairs?”

Keith feels heat flooding his cheeks and nods nervously, letting Lance lead the way. They make their way up the creaky staircase, onto the fluffy carpet of the upstairs hallway. He doesn’t know why he’s nervous. He doesn’t know why he feels dizzy, but it may have something to do with the millions of butterflies that have just been consistently exploding in his stomach for the past half hour.

Lance loves him.

Lance. Lance McClain. Lance with the curly hair and the gapped teeth, Lance with neon rubber bands on his braces and a spatter of freckles, Lance with smooth dark skin and bright, blue eyes.

Lance loves him.

It doesn’t fit anywhere in his head. It doesn’t fit in his chest. It feels like it’s too much, too warm and wild and wonderful and Keith has never had to stomach anything this exquisite. It’s a new feeling that doesn’t know how to make it past the skin on his burning, burning cheeks.

Lance’s fingers detangle from his as they pad into his old room; a room that Keith knows like the back of his hand. Lance doesn’t even have to turn the light on for Keith to see the photos littered on the walls, some of Lance with his family, some of Lance with Keith. He already knows the soccer trophies on the dresser are lined up by height. He knows the sock drawer doesn’t close all the way and hasn’t, for years. He knows there’s an embarrassing stain on his bed from when they tried to sneak red wine in here at sixteen years old and spilled it because Lance’s mother burst in, scaring them half to death.

He wraps his arms around himself, feeling way too many things simultaneously. He glances around the room, eyes flitting over everything once, twice, three times, before they find Lance’s face.

Lance is smiling at him, softly and earnestly. He looks at Keith with questioning eyes and tilts his head slightly, towards his bed. “Wanna sleep?”

Keith manages a smile back, not trusting his voice, and nods.

Lance, almost as a force of habit, strips off his shirt. Keith is struck dumb by the sight of it, suddenly very very aware of the current situation that they are in and very, very unprepared. He watches Lance kick off his socks. He just stares, like an idiot, the heat in his cheeks finally traveling to the tips of his ears, and then back down his neck.

Lance glance’s back up at him, with ruffled hair from his shirt and glinting eyes. He snorts, a grin breaking across his face. “Oh my god.” He whispers. “You’re totally checking me out right now.”

Keith scowls, feeling very embarrassed, despite the weight of their confession earlier. “No.” He defends. “It’s just been an emotional night, okay?”

“The great Snickers Kogane is checking me out.”

“I’m not.”

“Oh man, you think I’m fine as hell, don’t you?” Lance chuckles under his breath adorably, rubbing his eyes. “I mean, I don’t blame you.” He adds, mostly joking. Keith fights the urge to smile. He fights the urge to giggle like a lovesick fool, but he already feels the beginnings of a laugh bubbling
in his chest. There’s far too much fluttering happening in there right now. He won’t stand for it.

“I wasn’t checking you out.” He opts for saying instead, watching Lance climb into bed.

Lance shrugs, the shit-eating grin still plain on his face. “Whatever you say, Snickers. But you can’t hide what’s inside.” A pause. “Well, not anymore, anyway.” He tucks his long, long limbs into a small bed that used to fit him just fine, but now is clearly too short. Keith can feel his heartbeat in his fucking toes, and for a second he’s not sure he can do this. It overwhelms him. But then Lance peeks out his eyes from under the covers.

“What?” He says, a little defensively. “I know this bed is stupidly small, okay?”

Keith can’t help it, the giggle finally spills out. Oh man, he sounds like a Disney princess. Jesus fucking christ. “It is.” He says, all too fondly.

“So what’s the deal? You not joining me?”

Keith blinks down at the bed, wringing his hands nervously. “Uh…”

Lance raises a thin, very sassy eyebrow at him. “Yes?”

“I mean…” Keith huffs tiredly. “I feel like there’s a learning curve to stuff…like this.”

Lance laughs lightly, sitting up a little. “Stuff like this? What, cuddling?”

“I mean…like, isn’t this a little crazy to you?” He’s already breaking out into a bit of a nervous sweat. “Like, isn’t it…?” He trails off, searching Lance’s face for some kind of recognition. He feels like an idiot, because after months and months he’s finally gotten what he wanted and now he has no fucking idea what to do.

When Lance’s face softens slightly, Keith knows that he understands. Slowly, he leans forward and peels the corner of the covers away, opening up the space next to him and smiling gently at Keith. “Let’s just give it a try.” He says, voice quiet.

Keith swallows hard and looks at the open space. It looks like it would fit him just fine. He would fit comfortably against Lance if he were to lay there. Lance would be close. He would feel…so close.

Keith inches forward slowly. Lance smiles encouragingly at him, and it’s just a breathtaking smile. Suddenly Keith can’t even imagine being anywhere else but pressed up all over him. He climbs into bed, shaking a little because this is so new. They’ve cuddled before, but they were drunk. And they hadn’t just confessed their love for each other. So obviously it was a little different.

Lance hums contentedly and wraps his arms around Keith’s middle from behind him. Lance has always talked about being the big spoon. Apparently it’s his thing. And Keith, admittedly, thought about it a lot. Even when he didn’t know he had feelings for Lance, he always thought, in the back of his mind, what it would be like just to be held by him. It was a very genuine curiosity, because Keith never cuddled with anybody, and when he pictured cuddling with people, for some reason it was always easiest to picture it with Lance. Because they’re so close. Because they always cared about each other.

Damn. How long did Keith love Lance before he actually realized he loved Lance?

Lance presses up along his back and burrows his face into the nape of Keith’s neck. Keith feels him breathing warmly into his hair. A shiver runs down his spine. This is Lance. This is Lance.
It’s just so...

Movement stops and then they are just laying there. Silence fills the room. Keith feels Lance’s chest, rising and falling steadily against his back.

“This is so strange.” He finds himself whispering, against his best interest. Because he doesn’t want Lance to let go. He wants Lance to get closer. To seep into his skin. But he can’t deny the fact that this is...

Lance’s laugh rumbles in his chest. “Yeah. The childhood bed isn’t really helping.”

“Not really.” Keith agrees, feeling himself smile a little.

“I can’t believe we just sucked face on Rossway Cliff.”

Keith’s smile breaks into a full on grin and he barks a laugh, covering his face with his hands. Lance’s arms tighten around his waist. “Like we literally just became a stereotype.” He giggles. “We became those lousy teenagers who make out on cliffs.”

“You make it sound so romantic.” Keith deadpans, biting down his grin.

“Nah, it totally was.” Lance amends, voice softer.

A brief silence falls over them, oddly comfortable. Oddly satisfying. The smell of frosting surrounds Keith like a warm hug. He feels giddy. He feels weak. Then he is talking again.

“Are you scared?” He asks, whispering. “Like, suddenly we’re…” He pauses, trying to find the right words. Trying not to screw this up before it even starts. “We’re...not the same anymore?”

A brief moment goes by and then he feels Lance nodding slowly against the back of his neck. He shivers again at the contact.

“Course I’m scared.” Lance says quietly. “There’s a very large chance we’ll fuck this up.”

Keith actually feels like chucking at that. “Yeah…” He says. Then, “I...don’t want to lose you.”

“Hey…” Lance mumbles. His arms fall away and he nudges Keith’s side. “Turn around.”

Keith sighs a little shakily, because he really doesn’t think he can handle doing that. But slowly, he finds himself shifting and turning towards Lance anyway. When he finally turns around all the way, their faces are an inch apart.

Keith thoughts are suddenly a whirlwind in his head, not able to decide what they want to do. He glances down at Lance’s lips. Now that he knows what it’s like to really kiss Lance, it’s all he can think about. He needs it. He needs the sugary sweet taste. It’s making him crazy.

“Snickers.” Lance says quietly, causing Keith to look back up at his eyes. “I love you.”

Keith blinks at him, shocked to hear it. He may have heard it before, but that doesn’t mean he’s suddenly used to it. He’s not used to the earnest tone of Lance’s voice. The soft, fondness behind his words. Lance’s voice drops quieter. “I love you.” He says again. “And I’m pretty sure I always have.” He leans forward and brushes his nose against Keith’s. Keith wants to melt out of his skin. “You won’t lose me. That’s a promise.”

Keith clears his throat slightly, a little awkwardly, finding that he’s not sure how to navigate an intimate moment like this. “I...love you too.” He whispers back, regardless. “So much.”
They look at each other for a long, long moment; both distinctly uncomfortable, but not in a bad way. In a...settling way. Like they both realize this is going to take a lot of getting used to, but neither of them really care.

xxx

Keith is so gorgeous.

It’s not like a “I saw your face from across the bar and you’re hot” gorgeous. It’s not “I’d totally tap that” gorgeous. It’s not rainbows, or sunshine, or sunsets, or fluffy clouds or green grass or any type of beauty that is easy to grasp.

Keith is gorgeous like the fragments of light that reflect off of shattered glass. He’s gorgeous in the way that a forest fire is gorgeous; the wild and uncontrollable beauty in destruction. Everything about him is unique. Breathtaking. And Lance can’t believe so much time has gone by without him seeing it. He studies Keith’s face in front of him, sleepy in the darkness, slightly squished against the pillow. He’s desperate to absorb every detail. To commit it to memory and never ever miss anything about it again.

Keith huffs out a shaky, nervous sigh and Lance watches his chest rise slightly, then fall. “So...what do we do now?”

Lance swallows. “I dunno.” He says, voice coming out a lot lower than he thought it would. He finds his eyes trained on Keith’s lips, suddenly feeling desperate. The bow of them looks so delicate. He wants to taste it so badly. “But I wouldn’t mind kissing you again.”

Keith blinks up at him with his large, stupidly pretty eyes. He looks nervous for a moment, but then a small smirk graces his lips. “Mmk.” He rumbles, and his voice sends goosebumps across Lance’s skin. “I wouldn’t mind either.”

“Gotta get used to kissing you, anyway…” Lance mutters a little distantly, already losing interest in the conversation and hyperfocusing on Keith’s lips.

“Mmm.” Keith hums in agreement, rather sleepy. He blinks slowly. “Yeah.”

Lance doesn’t even realize they were moving closer together until their lips brush together. It sends a shockwave down his spine. His breath hitches a little pathetically, not used to the sensation. Keith chuckles lowly, pushing forward and pressing his smile to Lance’s mouth, harder this time. Keith still smells like mildew and whatever else he picked up in wherever the hell he was, but there’s still a faint hint of his spicy deodorant, clinging to his clothes, and Lance wants to bury his face in it. He wants to touch Keith’s warm skin through his shirt. He wants to feel his heartbeat beneath the cotton.

He is finding out, rather quickly, that he wants to bury his face into a lot of things. A lot of Keith-related things.

But Keith pulls away before Lance can even process the fact that their lips were even touching. “Lance…” he whispers, voice a little raspy. “I’m sorry, I’m literally falling asleep right now. And I wanna be awake for this.”

Lance ignores the tiny tug of disappointment in his chest. He giggles, instead. “Yeah, I can tell.” He says fondly. He barely recognizes his own voice when it’s this sweet. “Get some sleep.”
A small smile spreads across Keith annoyingly beautiful lips. “Yeah…” He breathes. His eyes fall shut, and for a moment, Lance is sure he’s just going to fall asleep like that. Not that he minds—getting to watch a face like that is a gift all in itself.

But then, quite surprisingly, Keith “don’t fucking touch me, ever” Kogane scooches forwards, nuzzling his face into Lance’s collarbone and wrapping his arms around Lance’s waist. He is tense for a moment, like he is realizing what he just did. But then his body loosens, and he melts into Lance. Lance feels Keith’s heart, jackhammering through his shirt.

“I love you.” Keith whispers again, like he’s trying it on for size. Trying to see how the words feel on his tongue. Lance feels the nervous breath on his neck. He lifts a hand and cards it through Keith’s hair, surprisingly soft given how dirty it probably is.

“Ditto, Snickers.” He muffles into the top of Keith’s head, unable to control the stupidly large smile now blooming across his face.

xxx

When Lance wakes up, warm sunlight is streaming in lines through the blinds of his window. He wakes up almost fully underneath Keith; which doesn’t surprise him in the least because he knows that Keith always ends up on the other side of his bed in the morning. It’s a sleeping habit that he’s had ever since he was little. He always tends to flip over, just once, in his sleep. Just to move to the colder side of the bed. And Keith never did a whole lot of “sleeping next to people” in his life, so it was never really a big deal.

It is, however, a big deal to Lance, who has never experienced Keith in this way and doesn’t know what the fuck to do with the firm, burning line of Keith’s body against his and the slim, toned thigh pressing dangerously close to his crotch, making him wonder how it was even possible that he never thought about Keith in...this context before.

Keith is an extremely hot dude.

Like, exceptionally.

Lance tries to ignore the dark spiral that his mind is traveling down now. He pushes away all thoughts of nudging Keith’s thigh over just a little. Of tilting his head down slightly and kissing his neck until he wakes up, flushed and turned on.

Lance huffs, a little astonished with himself. He was so busy falling in love with Keith that he never took the time to think about any other factors involved the aftermath. He never took the time to really think about the muscles rolling beneath Keith’s shirt, or the tightness of his ass, or what he would even sound like if he….

Oh man there’s that spiral again. He’s gotta stop doing that.

He remembers what Shiro said about Keith with that Kevin guy. How Keith slept with him for months because the “resemblance is uncanny”...

Does that mean…?

Keith has thought about Lance like this? Keith has wanted Lance like this?
Finally deciding that staying in this predicament isn’t good for him or the situation in his boxers, Lance sighs and, very reluctantly, starts pushing Keith off of him. Keith mumbles irritably but he always does that when something so much as threatens his slumber. Lance bites his lip, stifling a giggle, as he climbs out of bed. Keith curls back in on himself, hugging the covers closer to his chest. Lance has seen Keith sleep thousands of times, but he doesn’t think he’s ever seen Keith so incredibly vulnerable. The raw emotions from the night before still linger in the air, making Lance’s heart feel a little too open. A little too tender, as he stares down at Keith’s small, permanent pout on his sleeping face.

His heart flutters as he feels himself sitting back down on the edge of the bed, not quite ready to face the world yet. Keith doesn’t even snore when he sleeps, he’s just a statue. Lance avoids looking at the place where is his shirt is hiked up, revealing the tight, pale skin on his stomach. Instead, he swallows hard and leans over slightly, pressing a kiss to Keith’s temple.

It’s a small, incredibly cheesy, romantic gesture that has feelings hitting him like a train. Heat floods his cheeks and he laughs a little nervously to himself, shaking his head and wondering how the hell he got here.

How the hell he ever managed to love anyone this much without even realizing it.

He can hear his mom messing about in the kitchen. She must have just woken up. He sighs, stealing one last glance at Keith before making the executive decision that leaving the room is probably good for his health at this point.

He walks quietly down the stairs and sees his mom in the kitchen, sitting tiredly at the table. The whole room smells sweet. Lance sniffs the air as he enters the kitchen. “Mmm, smells good.” He says, trying to contain his grin as his mother looks up, shock painting her face. She gasps. “Dios! Lance! You are here! I knew it!” She gets up and trots over to him, enveloping him in a hug. Lance laughs into her shoulder. “I saw your shoes at the door and thought I was going crazy!” She exclaims, letting go of him. “When on earth did you get here? In the middle of the night? I could kill you! Do you know how dangerous it is to drive at--?”

“Keith is here.” Lance suddenly says. As much as he loves being scolded by his mother, he suddenly is hit with the realization that all of this...is real now. And their families have no idea. “He’s upstairs.”

His mother smiles. “Yes, I saw his shoes too. I figured you two would visit home together.” She says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “That’s why I’m making cinnamon rolls! He loves those, doesn’t he?”

Lance sniffs the air again. Right, that’s the sweet smell. He knew it smelled familiar. “He loves them.” Lance says fondly. “Well, he loves Cinnamon Toast Crunch but yes, also Cinnamon rolls. But uh--”

“Oh god, what are you doing here?” Lance turns around and sees his older sister, Elena, walking into the kitchen. “This is my weekend to receive endless love and affection from mom, not yours.”

Lance’s mom giggles. “Elena came home because she needs your father to help her with her taxes.”

Elena gives her trademark sassy frown. “Also because I missed you.” She says. Another giggle in response. She turns to Lance, opening her arms and giving him a hug. Lance grins.

“Always a pleasure, Elena.” He says sarcastically. Then he mumbles, “But really, good to see you.”
He loves Elena to death, despite her bite and her bluntness. She always got along with Keith really well—their personalities are *insanely* similar. Lance always used to joke about them getting married someday, when they were younger. Keith would always wrinkle his nose and slap him upside the head.

Speaking of Keith, Lance clears his throat, now with two pairs of eyes on him. “Keith is here.” He says again, dumbly, not really knowing what else to say.

Elena snorts. “Yeah. I kind of figured.”


Elena smiles, shaking her head. “Uh, yeah. Where else would he be? Mine?” Lance mother nods in agreement. Lance stares at them, growing increasingly frustrated. How does he say this? How did he not think this through?

“No I mean *in my bed*, where he slept. And I slept there...too.”

Elena rolls her eyes. “Oh my *god*, Lance, do you really think we are under any illusion that you two don’t sleep in the same bed? That’s what happens when you date someone. You’re an adult now, we get it.” She says lightly, shaking her head with an incredulous smile and turning around to open the fridge. “You can talk to us about sex, we’re not five.”

“Elena!” Lance’s mother gasps. Then she turns to Lance. “We understand, Lance. Really. You don’t have to tiptoe around these things.” She says gently. Lance face flushes.

“Wait, what? How did you know about me and Keith?” He shrieks, feeling himself flush even further. Elena and his mother blink at each other, and then back at him. Elena raises a questioning eyebrow.

“Wait, what are *you* talking about?” She says. “Did something else happen?” She gasps. “Did you propose?”

“W-What?” Lance throws his hands in the air, waving them wildly. “No! That’s-- *no!* We just! We’re *dating*!”

Elena’s face falls back into confusion. “Yeah, we *know* that. Not exactly breaking news.”

Lance frowns. “No, like, *recently*!” He says. “Like, ‘we just started dating at 3AM this morning’ recently!”

Lance’s mother looks at Elena with wide, shocked eyes. Elena mirrors her expression. Silence falls over the kitchen for a moment. Then Elena looks back at him. She bursts out laughing.

“Oh, Lance. Good one.” She says through her laughter. “You really got us.”

“I’m not joking!” Lance scowls. What on earth is going on?

The laughter stops and they both look at him, something like sympathy coloring their surprised eyes. “Wait... *what*?” Elena asks slowly.

“You…” Lance mother frowns. “You haven’t been with Keith this whole time?”
“What the heck are you talking about?” Lance exclaims. “No, of course not! I mean, we lived together, but—no! We were just friends!”

“Shut up.” Elena says in disbelief. “Do you seriously expect me to believe that?”

“Yes!” Wow, did everyone know they were in love but them? “I had a girlfriend up until about three weeks ago. I brought her to Shiro’s wedding!”

Lance’s mother hums. “Keith’s parents didn’t say anything about a girl.” She says skeptically.

“Well, I don’t know why they didn’t!”

“Wait, you and Keith have been living together for like eight years and you never got together?” Elena cuts in, still in mild shock. “Like, not even in college?”

“No!” Lance defends. But now he regrets it, because damn, Keith was fine as hell in college, too. Maybe he just repressed it. Maybe he was in denial. How did he even resist him?

“You two are spectacularly stupid, oh my god.” Elena says, shaking her head. “Like, me and mom literally thought you started dating after your graduation. It was so obviously not friendship anymore. We just assumed.”

“You people are crazy.” Lance denies through his burning blush. “I can’t believe this.”

“Lance, mijo…” Lance’s mom says, shaking her head. “You are the crazy one.” She says it fondly, like she is disappointed but in a “welp, that’s my silly son” kind of way. Lance’s heart beats a bit quicker as he looks back and forth between them.

Oh man.

He really is the crazy one, isn’t he?

xxx

Keith wakes up with a foggy head and blurry vision. He feels like he’s risen from the dead. It’s been a long time since he slept that long, that well; and when he lifts his head, he notices that Lance isn’t there. But the spot where Lance was is still warm. He rolls over and burrows his face into the vanilla scented pillow. He actually lets out an audible, happy hum.

God, he’s so happy.

He doesn’t think he’s ever been this happy.

He hears Lance downstairs, shrieking about something. He hears Elena’s voice, too. And Lance’s mother. It reminds him of a lot of the sleepovers they used to have, except Keith is usually the one who wakes up first. He’s usually the one who goes downstairs and talks to Lance’s family while he waits for Lance to wake up. Elena is always a blast. Lance’s mom is usually making cinnamon rolls.

Oh man, Keith can almost smell the cinnamon rolls.

Wait.
He smells cinnamon rolls. For real.

He sits up slightly and sniffs. Yes, that’s the actual smell of real cinnamon rolls. His stomach growls impatiently and he rolls out of bed, making his way to the bathroom to brush his teeth before actually talking to people. He finds, a little uneasily, that he’s nervous to see Lance. It used to be a foreign feeling, because Lance was always the person who made Keith the least nervous. But now it’s a feeling he is used to, ever since he found out he had feelings for him all those months ago.

It’s not a bad nervousness anymore though. It’s more like anxious excitement. Like he can’t wait, but he’s also scared. Just a little.

As he walks down the stairs, he hears the tail end of the conversation.

“Lance, mijo…” Lance’s mother says. Keith pauses, because it sounds a little serious. “You are the crazy one.”

Nah, nevermind. Not serious. Keith knows that tone of voice-- it’s more teasing than anything. He skips down the last couple of steps and pads into the kitchen.

“Why is Lance crazy this time?” He deadpans, smirking a little. “Not that I disagree, just curious.”

He flops down at one of the stools next to the island. Lance’s eyes lock with his and Keith watches his face melt, a soft blush appearing on his cheek.

“Hi.” Lance says fondly.

“Ugh, I’m leaving.” Elena interjects, wrinkling her nose at Lance. “Good to see you again, Grumpy. I’ll be back in a bit.” She says, nodding at Keith. “Gotta go find dad.” She kisses her mother on the cheek and then walks out, closing the front door behind her.

Lance’s mother laughs, then turns to Keith. “Good morning, sunshine.” She says, a little sarcastically. Probably because Keith looks like a rumpled mess.

Keith feels himself smiling. “It’s so good to see you again. I know it’s been a while since we visited.” He says apologetically. “Things have been...crazy.” He sniffs the air. “Are you making my favorite?”

She nods, eyes alight. “Yes! I figured you’d need them. Apparently you two only like to travel during the most dangerous hours of the night--”

“Mom.” Lance groans, rolling his eyes. Sounding just like he did when he was fourteen and frustrated with his parents. “There were extenuating circumstances.”

His mom frowns. “You know how I feel about you being out so late.”

“I’m twenty three years old!”

“And too young to die!” His mother scolds, wagging a finger in front of Lance’s face. Lance sighs. Keith feels something warm curling in his chest-- the familiarity of the interaction clashes spectacularly with the unfamiliarity of their current situation. It’s like nostalgia, but it’s combined with excitement about the future. It’s bittersweet.

Or maybe it’s just sweet.

The oven beeps and Lance’s mother takes out her oven mitts. “I have to go to the store this morning.” She says, opening the oven. She balances the tray carefully as she moves to plop it onto
the counter. “Do either of you need anything? Perhaps a bottle of champagne to celebrate?” She
grins wickedly at them. Keith blushes furiously. Okay, so Lance obviously told her what happened.

Lance huffs, turning towards Keith. “Snickers! Apparently my entire family thinks we’ve been
dating for three years!” He says in disbelief, voice cracking like it does when he’s severely
perplexed. “Three years!”

Keith blinks owlishly at him. “What?”

“Enough of that!” Lance’s mom interjects. “I have a very busy schedule today. Keith, I’m glad you
have finally come to your senses, congratulations to you both! But now you are both here and I have
a list of chores that need to be done.” She says, grinning again. “You can do them together! As a
couple. Very romantic!” He opens the cupboard under the sink and pulls out a bucket and a few
rags. “The first dates are always the most memorable, after all!”

Lance groans. “Mom--”

“I really have to be going, mijo.” Lance’s mom says, and she sounds genuinely sad about it. “But I
will be back in a couple of hours, and we can really talk, okay?” She grabs Lance’s face and kisses
his forehead. “Te amo. I’ll see you soon.”

Keith watches the exchange fondly, still in mild shock from what he heard earlier. Apparently
everyone in the world knew that Keith and Lance were screwed long before they did. The thought
just makes the gooey, melty feeling in his heart even gooier. He smiles as Lance’s mother plants a
kiss on his cheek, too. It’s something she always used to do, even when he was younger, because he
would always growl a little and wipe his cheek off afterwards. Physical affection...wasn’t his thing.
Lance’s mother always laughed.

Now, he feels his face warming significantly as she pulls away, and she gives him a small, knowing
look. A look that says “I love you.” A look that says, “I know you’ll treat him well.”

Then she is off, leaving Keith’s heart rabbiting in his chest.

They both watch the door shut, and kind of stand there for a second. The Keith looks at Lance, who
is glaring wantlingly at the cooling cinnamon rolls and rubbing his hands together.

“Wanna get plates?” He asks, looking up at Keith. “Come on! Before they get too cold!”

Keith snorts, getting up and walking over to where Lance is standing. “When have I ever eaten
cinnamon rolls with a plate?” He asks, reaching over Lance and plucking a particularly delicious-
looking roll off the tray.

“Well, I don’t know! Usually I’m asleep while you’re eating these.” Lance chuckles, watching Keith
mercilessly stuff half the roll in his mouth. “I’m not used to being up this early.”

“It’s literally noon.” Keith deadpans, muffled around the food in his mouth. “The day is literally half
over.”

“You’re the one who woke up after me!” Lance defends, a small grin breaking across his face. Like
arguing with Keith is genuinely bringing him joy. “That’s not fair!”

“I was exhausted. Those motel beds were horrible.” He mumbles.

“Apparently sleeping directly on top of me was more comfortable.” Lance shoots back, raising a
playful eyebrow, and Keith feels the flush starting in his chest.
“I did not sleep on top of you.” He says, voice level.

“You did.” Lance finally grins broadly, inching closer to Keith. “Right on top of me.”

Keith has to crane his neck upwards a little as Lance gets closer. It’s times like these when he truly realizes their difference in height. “That’s absurd.” Keith says, voice dropping a little. It feels weird to talk at a normal pitch when Lance is so...damn close. “I don’t cuddle.”

Lance hums. “I beg to differ.”

Keith swallows. “..Agree to disagree?” He finds himself saying, a little weak now, because Lance lifts a hand and brushes some stary icing off of the corner of Keith’s mouth with the warm pad of this thumb.

“Mmhm.” Lance’s eyes flick down to Keith’s lips, only for a second, before flicking back up. “You know, I still need to hear the story.” He says quietly, thumb tracing lightly over Keith’s bottom lip. Back and forth. Back and forth.

“What…” Keith takes a shaky breath. “What story?”

Lance’s thumb catches on his bottom lip and drags downwards slightly, letting it go. He plants it at Keith’s chin and holds it there, softly. “You know. The whole story.” He mutters. “All the stuff you didn’t tell me.”

Keith leans forward, desperate for a kiss. Lance leans back a fraction, smirking. Keith surprises himself when a low, small growl escapes the back of this throat. Lance laughs lowly.

“You figured everything out already.” Keith says, a little irritated. The one time he has the confidence to do something, Lance stops him.

“No, I didn’t.” Lance tenderly moves his hands to cup the back of Keith’s neck, thumbs leaving feather light strokes on the line of Keith’s jaw. “You didn’t tell me about…” He leans down and plants a tingling, barely-there kiss below Keith’s ear, “...Kevin.”

Keith falters, feeling a swift swooping in his stomach from the sensation of Lance’s lips on… fuck. “Please don’t talk about--”

“Or Hunk.” Lance moves to the side, pressing his lips to Keith’s neck again. “Or Providence…” He leaves several kisses now, each one more firm than the last. They trail down Keith’s neck and Keith grips at the edge on the counter behind him, letting his eyes flutter shut. “Lance…”

“I feel like I deserve to hear about it, hmm?” Lance says, sliding his hands down from Keith’s neck, fingers dragging over his chest. His ribs. His bellybutton. Keith’s breath hitches.

“I’ll tell you if you...” Another shaky breath. Lance hikes up Keith’s shirt and runs the back of his knuckles lightly along Keith’s bare stomach.

“If I what?” Lance asks innocently.

“Stop...touching me like that.”

“Like what?”

Keith scowls. “Do you want me to tell you or not?” He asks, using every last ounce of his willpower before his voice just gives out.
Lance studies his face for a moment, smirk fading a little. He hums roughly in consideration, but then he’s leaning in, moving to close the distance between their mouths. “Maybe tell me later…” He mumbles hungrily, almost impatiently, as he crashes their lips together.

When people say that love is like a drug, usually Keith just snorts and rolls his eyes. But this has got to be what they mean.

Keith feels so high.

Apparently all of the awkwardness from the night before is no longer an issue. Keith thought it would take them a lot longer to get used to this, but it turns out that when you want something badly enough, there’s nothing to really do but just fucking go for it. And holy shit, they are going for it.

Kissing Lance can’t even be classified as kissing. Because Keith has kissed a decent number of people and never once has it left his hands shaking, or his knees buckling, or any other of the millions of cheesy, dramatic things people say when describing love. But this? This feels otherworldly. Lance’s lips are just so Lance; sugary and gentle and determined and eager and wonderful. They’ve barely changed, for as long as Keith has known him. Kissing them makes him think about all the times he’s just looked at them. Not even in a romantic way. Just all of the times he ever looked at Lance and saw his face. Lance in a convenience store, under fluorescent lights, lips pulled into a smile as he buys Keith a peanut butter Snickers bar. Lance on Rossway Cliff in seventh grade, lips pinched in a tight frown as he tells Keith about his anxiety. Lance’s lips around the neck of a beer bottle at the Halloween party in tenth grade, right before he kissed Scott Marren. Lance’s lips, close to his ear as he laid with Keith on the lawn, outside of the house party, celebrating their last day of high school.

Lance’s lips tell so many stories. Keith doesn’t realize how much he’s time he actually spent looking at them until they are pressed against his, hungry and sweet and delicious.

“I--I..” Keith stutters out, a little sloppily, as Lance licks hotly into his mouth. “S-shit I’ve wanted this for so long--” It comes out like a whine, and Lance pulls him closer, making a low, sexy sound and pressing their bodies together. He drags his hands down Keith’s back. Keith is still shivering and he doesn’t even know why. He buries his fingers into Lance’s hair and it feels so fucking soft. So much softer than Kevin’s. Exactly how he imagined it would feel. Shit, he’s spent so much time fantasizing about this he can’t believe it’s actually happ--

“Holy shit, you’re so hot.” Lance mumbles, lips wet against Keith’s. “How did I miss it? F-for so long? How did I--?”

Keith is the one to push forward this time, nearly tripping and knocking over the tray of cinnamon rolls. Lance giggles against his lips and Keith lifts a hand to swat at his head. They stumble into the living room and fall into a messy pile on the couch. Keith is eagerly sliding his hands up Lance’s shirt, not wasting any time. The skin is hot and so smooth underneath his rough fingertips. He sees the small mole next to Lance’s belly button. He sees Lance’s gracefully toned abs, shifting attractively underneath his golden skin. He lifts the shirt more and sees the splatter of freckles beneath Lance’s collarbone. Lance chuckles, grinning up at him with mischievous eyes.

“At this point, just take the shirt off, Snickers.” He says teasingly, biting his lip.

And Keith wasn’t sure how he’d feel about Lance calling him “Snickers” in a setting like this, but he surprisingly doesn’t mind it.

Also, this shirt needs to come off right now.
Keith pulls it off of him in one swift motion, and then swoops back in again, catching Lance’s lips with his. With every passing second, the kiss gets more heated. Lance’s hands grip harder. Keith presses in closer. They are completely aligned and Keith’s skin burns at every point of contact, like they’re both on fire. It’s an all-encompassing feeling. Lance tugs at his hair, pulls at his shirt, like he can’t get close enough. Like he needs more.

Keith moves his mouth slightly downwards, eyeing the hollow at the base of Lance’s neck. He remembers Lance pointing to it, with a carton of sesame chicken in his other hand. He remembers Lance saying it’s...one of his spots.

Keith daringly leans forward, not even bothering to harbor any ounce of self control before darting his tongue out and licking a small stripe along the pretty dip in Lance’s skin. Lance’s whole body titches.

“Fuck.” He hisses. “I forgot I told you about--nng.” Keith closes his mouth over the spot and sucks a little generously, letting go with a loud pop and dragging his teeth over the sensitive area.

“Yeah…” He whispers into Lance’s skin. “I remember them all.”

Lance raises an eyebrow, placing a finger below Keith’s chin and lifting his face so they are looking at each other. “Oh really?” He asks skeptically, voice still wavering a little. “I don’t believe you.”

“Well…” Keith’s hands travel from Lance’s shoulders down to his chest. He lightly brushes a finger over Lance’s nipple, and Lance swallows. “I know this is one.” Keith says in a gravelly voice, running his finger over Lance’s nipple again. Lance makes a small, soft, involuntary noise, eyes locked with Keith’s.

“Mmmf...Maybe that’s one of them…” He whispers, jerking slightly as Keith does it again.

Keith moves his hand down to grip Lance’s wrist. He brings it up to his mouth and kisses the soft skin on the inside of it, gently. “This is another one.” He says, muffled into Lance’s skin.

Lance looks at him through heavy lidded eyes. He blinks slowly, wetting his pink, bitten lips. “Mmhm…” He says shakily.

Keith’s hand slides to the side; past Lances thigh and onto the soft, surprisingly squishy skin right above the waistline of his boxers. “And another…” He rumbles, tracing Lance’s happy trail down to where the fabric begins. “This one might be my favorite one.” Keith says appreciatively, watching Lance’s hips twitch upwards as he drags his fingers across the hot skin.

“Fuck…” Lance says weakly. “Keith...you do remember them...”

“Of course I do.” Keith rasps. And then he is moving back up again, kissing Lance for the hundredth time. And this time, he presses his hips forward and moans when he feels himself rub deliciously against Lance’s thigh.


“Lance.” Keith growls frustratedly. “We aren’t going to get anything done if you keep talking.”

“R-right. Sorry I just--weird, ‘worlds colliding’ thing happening but it’s not a big deal or anyth--fuck, Keith .” Lance arches upward, gripping helplessly at Keith’s back as Keith grinds down even
harder. Keith lets out a shaky “a-ah” sound and buries his face into Lance’s neck, letting the smell of vanilla cupcakes intoxicate him.

They build a rhythm; a little sloppy and a little desperate, but a rhythm nonetheless. They rut against each other lazily, yet forcefully. Still basically fully clothed. The bucket filled with all the cleaning supplies still sits on the floor in the kitchen, untouched. The cinnamon rolls sit on a now cold cookie sheet. Lance’s mom will probably be back from the store soon. In terms of first dates, this has got to be the least romantic one Keith has ever had.

But definitely the best one, too.

And now Lance is breathing harder. Desperate, low noises are escaping from somewhere deep within his throat and Keith can feel the vibrations as he kisses Lance’s neck, biting at the skin below his earlobe and panting heavily into the sensitive area. It feels like there is static electricity building between them. It feels like at any point, they will be shocked. There will be an explosion. Maybe this is what people describe as seeing fireworks when kissing. Or sparks flying. But it’s more than that. It dangerous. Its reckless. Its addictive.

It’s just Lance.

And as Keith feels himself getting closer, he lets his eyes flutter open and looks at Lance’s face; red, flushed cheeks. Pink, wet, bitten lips. Messed up, shaggy hair and covered in a sheen of sweat. Lance has his head tilted back slightly, mouth parted. He’s breathing heavily, mouth falling open further, eyebrows pinching, face tensing. Keith falls forward defeatedly and nudges his nose along Lance’s jaw. His cheek. Because if that’s not the hottest fucking thing Keith has ever seen in his life, he doesn’t know what is.

And Keith feels Lance’s hips start to jerk against his, sporadic and untimed and Lance makes a low, whining noise. “Keith…” He says, sounding wrecked. “I—I--fuck--”

“I know, me too…” Keith replies gruffly, feeling the telltale clenching of the muscles below his belly button. The building heat, coiling in his abdomen. His thighs shiver involuntarily. Violently. He feels like he’s being engulfed in flames. The desperate noises Lance is making have his hips stuttering and holy shit it’s so hot. Lance is so fucking hot.

Lance comes first. His back arches off the couch and his nails dig into Keith’s shoulder blades, dragging down painfully. Lance makes a rough, choked noise as it happens, pressing his hips fervently into Keith and riding it out until it is over. Hearing Lance moan like that is all it takes for Keith to come too, burrowing his face into Lance’s neck and feeling the sound come from somewhere deep down in his throat.

They collapse into each other, breathing heavily. Keith unclenches his shaky fingers, watching them twitch against Lance’s bare chest. He feels Lance’s heartbeat below his ear, still reeling from his orgasm. Keith can barely catch his breath. Holy fuck, they didn’t even do anything. They barely even did anything and that was--

“So fucking hot.” Lance pants. “Holy shit.”

Keith nods wordlessly, not trusting the use of his voice yet.

“For the record, I usually last longer.” Lance says self consciously. “It was just. The moment was heated okay? So don’t like...Usually I last longer than that.”

Keith finally opens his mouth. “Lance--”
“But like holy *f*uck have you always been that sexy? Like? No wonder all those bartenders wanted to sleep with you.” Lance is blabbering. Keith knows it’s because he’s nervous. It’s kind of a new, odd situation for both of them. But Keith thinks it’s incredibly endearing. Keith blushes a little as Lance continues rambling. “I mean, you remembered all of my spots! You honestly could have just touched me there and it would’ve been enough but you had to go on this massive dry humping rampage so really it was your fault that—”

“Lance.” Keith finally sighs, cutting Lance off. He feels Lance swallow beneath him.

“Yeah?” Lance replies nervously, biting at his lower lip.

Keith lifts his head, looking Lance in the eye. “It was perfect.” He says, a little uncomfortably, not really sure how to express how much he loved it without rambling just as much.

Lance blinks at him, looking a little dazed. “Really?” He asks quietly.

Keith smirks. “I mean, I had a good time.” He says casually. “I think it was good first date material, don’t you?”

Lance looks shocked. “Snickers, this is not our first date.” He says firmly.

Keith laughs, letting his head fall back onto Lance’s chest. “Then what is it?”

“It’s...you know! Buffer time!”

“Buffer time?”

“Like, limbo. Purgatory, if you will.”

Keith hums. “I guess the purgatory version of sex is dry humping, so, that makes sense.”

Lance laughs. It shakes his whole chest and Keith wants to be absorbed by the feeling of it, happy and fluttery under his cheek. “I guess so.” Lance replies fondly.

Keith swallows. “Does this mean we have to clean the house now?”

Lance hums. “I mean, you know my mom will kill us if we don’t.” Lance shifts slightly underneath Keith. “But I kinda need to shower first.” He says adorably.

Keith tries to bite his lip to quell the grin that is threatening to break his face in half. He fails, of course, and grins anyway. “You are so cute.” He blurs, blushing like a fool and lifting himself off of Lance. “God, I can’t take it.”

“And I can’t take it when you compliment me like that!” Lance exclaims, sitting up slightly and watching Keith stand up. “Stop being nice to me or I’ll explode.”

Keith grins at him. “Okay.” He says, definitely not agreeing but letting it lie for now. Then, “I bet I can beat you to the shower.”

Lance raises an eyebrow at him. “What? Are you serious?”

Keith laughs lightly, feeling like all of the weight on his shoulders is officially gone, and sprints up the stairs. He giggles when he hears Lance’s angry squawk from behind him. “Oh you’re on, Snickers!” He shouts, bounding up the stairs behind Keith. Keith’s heart roars loudly in his chest, and he hasn’t felt this *much*, this *ecstatic*, in years.
It doesn't matter who gets to the shower first, because they shower together anyway.

5 Days Later

The end up throwing an “Apology Party” for all the unfortunate souls who were negatively affected by their severe stupidity. Of course Lance, being a party planner, thought that a party was the best way to make sure he and Keith didn't destroy every lasting relationship they ever had just because they couldn't admit they loved each other.

And besides, everyone likes parties! It’s foolproof.

After spending the rest of their “first date” cleaning Lance’s entire house, Lance’s mom came home and made them dinner before they left. Keith and Elena had a not-so-thrilling talk about how much they hated the last movie the both saw. A very typical Keith-and-Elena talk. They stopped by at Keith’s house for a couple hours after dinner, just to say hello and have a cup of coffee before their scheduled bus trip.

It was a really great first date.

Keith’s parents, somehow, were under the impression that they were together, too.

Lance is kind of bummed because this seems like it’s a bigger deal to both of them than it is to everyone else. But it’s also comforting to know how obvious it is. How perfect they really are together.

And now there are only a few minutes before everyone arrives; “everyone” being Pidge, Hunk, Shiro, and Allura. Lance knew that Olivia probably wouldn’t show up, so instead, he just called her. He apologized profusely, almost to the point of making it awkward. She sounded surprisingly happy to hear from him. Apparently she has been keeping herself busy, and is even thinking of moving out of the city. She was thrilled that Lance told Keith how he felt, and wished him the best.

It was a little bittersweet. A little charmingly awkward. But Lance is glad he did it. He feels like a weight has been lifted from his chest.

Hunk, on the other hand, may be a bit harder to tackle.

Lance hadn’t meant to be so harsh, but the situation kind of just called for it. After having an extensive talk with Keith on the bus ride home, Lance realizes that Hunk really only had the best intentions.

Which is a relief, because he really thinks he can see Hunk becoming one of his best friends. And he never wanted to let that go.
“Lance…” Keith says cautiously from the kitchen. “Did you…eat all of the doritos in this bowl?”

Lance is sitting on the futon, playing on his DS. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” he lies.

“I literally just filled that bowl with Doritos!” Keith exclaims, marching into the living room. “I went to the bathroom for two minutes! It’s empty!”

“You have no evidence that it was me.” Lance says, looking up at Keith and grinning.

“Yes I do.” Keith says, walking over to where Lance is sitting. “It’s all over your face.”

Lance raises an eyebrow. “You can’t read me as well as you think, Snickers.” He says back snarkily. “I’m a closed book.”

Keith groans. “No I mean it’s literally all over your face.” He says, corner of his mouth twitching upwards. “I mean you have cheese all over your mouth.”

Lance blinks up at him, flushing embarrassedly. “Oh. Fuck.”

Keith bursts out laughing. It sounds like music to Lance’s ears. “You are the worst.” He says to Lance, shaking his head. “Now nobody is going to be able to eat anything.”

Lance feels warm all over, with the way Keith is looking at him. His eyes are practically twinkling. His smile is fond. Lance feels himself smiling as well. “C’mere.” He mutters, holding out his hand. Keith takes it cautiously, and yelps a little when Lance pulls him down. Keith falls into his lap, and Lance wraps his arms around him, nestling his face in the crook of Keith’s neck. Keith just got out of the shower. He even put cologne on, which Lance likes much more than he’ll ever admit.

Obviously, Keith knows how much he likes it.

Keith knows a lot of things without Lance ever having to say them.

“Mmmm.” Lance hums into Keith’s neck. “Hi.”

Keith laughs a little breathlessly, hugging Lance back. “Hey.” He says softly.

“Sorry I ate the Doritos.”

“You’re good.” Keith mumbles back, voice rumbly and satisfied as Lance cards a hand through his hair. “They’re unhealthy anyway. I’ll die later than you, now.”

“I think that might be slightly dramatic.” Lance says, biting his lip through a giggle. Keith chuckles.

“Maybe.”

“Hey Snickers?” Lance asks.

“Hmm?”

“You’re my favorite person.”

A huff a breath. “Favorite person in what?”

“I think that might be slightly dramatic.” Lance says, biting his lip thorough a giggle. Keith chuckles.

“Maybe.”

“Hey Snickers?” Lance asks.

“Hmm?”

“You’re my favorite person.”

A huff a breath. “Favorite person in what?”

“Just...ever. You’re just my favorite person.”

Keith is silent for a minute and Lance knows it’s because he’s blushing. Then, in a very gentle voice,
When everyone arrives, Keith realizes how much he really missed them. Hunk looks downright relieved to see him, and gives him a giant hug when he enters the apartment. Keith was expecting him to still be angry, but instead he says, “I’m so happy for you!” and proceeds to squeeze the life out of Keith. He isn’t really sure why he expected anything else. Ever since the beginning, all he ever really wanted was Keith and Lance to get together. It may have gotten a little messy along the way, but it ended up happening.

Pidge is happy to see Keith, and while Lance apologizes to Hunk for being such a dick, Pidge walks with Keith into the living room and sits next to him on the futon. A new semester just started and she is being rubbed really thin, yet again, but she still smiles at Keith and laughs at his bland attempts at humor. Keith is glad he was lucky enough to find a friend who would ditch when things got rocky. And it helps that she has the same dry humor as him.

“We honestly thought it was hopeless.” Hunk says, sitting down at the table and laying out a couple of plates. “We thought you two would just die without ever knowing.”

“Oh come on.” Lance says defensively. ”You really had such little faith in us?”

“Hunk had little faith in you.” Pidge says. “I had no faith in you at all.”

“Thanks, Pidge.” Keith deadpans.

“I mean, you denied my step by step, very meticulous plan that I was going to write for you on my whiteboard!” Pidge defends. “And instead, you went with having a fake boyfriend! My approach was scientific. It would have resulted in many less issues.”

“Maybe, but my plan worked.” Hunk says proudly. “Well...it worked like, eighty five percent. There are still a few tweaks.”

Lance huffs frustratedly. “You guys really put me through it.” He says. “Totally wasn’t fair.”

“But it got you thinking, did it not?” Hunk says, grinning. “And now look at you two! So happy and very much together. What a good day.”

Lance giggles and Keith rolls his eyes. The door swings open and Shiro walks in with Allura, both with happy grins on their faces.

“Keith! You’re finally home!” Shiro says excitedly, putting the plate in his hand down onto the counter. “I was worried about you.” He hugs Keith briefly, and then steps away, looking between Keith and Lance. “Jeez, congrats to the happy couple. Finally. We hoped you’d figure it out sometime before we died.”

“Why is everybody being so dramatic about this?” Lance exclaims.“We’re not that stupid!”

Allura snorts loudly, covering her mouth and trying to muffle her laughter.

And that’s...pretty much how the rest of the night goes.

Keith stays close to Lance’s side, tucked underneath his arm. He presses into him at any moment he
can, because he can now. He revels in the way Lance’s laughter shakes his whole body, like it has for years. He loves how Lance eats his food, humming and savoring every bite. He is enamored with the delicate curves of his profile and the way his entire face lights up when he smiles at something Hunk says. Everything about Lance, all the way down to the pattern of his freckles, makes Keith feel safe and terrified all at the same time.

Lance is just... Lance. The Lance he’s always been. The Lance Keith has always loved, in one way or the other.

So Keith keeps himself tucked into Lance’s side.

Because that’s where he wants to stay for a very, very long time.

xxx

Lance hates cleaning up after parties.

You’d think that as a party planner, he’d like every aspect of the job, but clean-up is always the worst.

But now he’s cleaning up with Keith. So, it’s not so bad.

Keith is humming something very off-tune, under his breath. He barely ever hums at all, so when he does, Lance knows it means he’s in a great mood. Keith scrubs away at the dishes as Lance clears the table; stacking the plates and watching the crumbs fall into his hand as he sweeps across the surface.

This is their usual routine. This is usually how they clean up. It’s almost like barely anything has changed. Lance never realized how close they were to being in a relationship—they were practically already in one. It makes him giddy. It makes warmth spread throughout his chest, out to every inch of his body.

Because Keith always washes the dishes and Lance always clears the table. Then afterwards, Lance always plays his DS and Keith always sits next to him on the futon, doing extra work or watching Netflix. One of them is always humming. Keith usually stays in his clothes but Lance always changes into his pajamas. They eat snacks late into the night. They talk about their friends from high school and college. They complain about work. Lance always does a face mask. Keith always rejects doing a face mask. They gossip, they laugh, they fall asleep in uncomfortable positions.

It’s how they’ve always been.

It’s so mundane. It’s so normal, and routine, and expected. There are very little fluctuations in it. There are very few changes.

But it’s those small exchanges between him and Keith that have built this friendship. It is their entire lives, all the boring moments, all the moments that one of them could have dropped off. All of the times that they didn't really have to hang out with each other, but did anyway. All of the times they just sat together, doing homework or talking about crushes or trying to pop each other’s pimples. It’s a culmination of every bad moment, every fleeting moment, every moment that can only be remembered if Lance tries really, really hard.
It turns out, all of the moments that created this feeling between them had nothing to do with romance at all.

And Lance always dreamed of being a prince to somebody's princess. He fantasized about being a knight in shining armor; of falling in love and simultaneously falling into sunshine and rainbows and this fantasy world that he spent years creating in his head. He wanted a wedding with diamond encrusted wallpaper and 800 guests and large ballrooms and chandeliers. He wanted someone to buy dozens of roses and chocolates for. He wanted a love that was perfect; someone who never fought with him, never called him out, never had anything bad to say. Just a person who would cuddle with him, and do things that couples were supposed to do. He loved the idea of falling in love, without even really knowing what love was.

He wanted a fairytale; a world filled with dramatic gestures of love and lavish celebrations and a happily ever after that never faltered.

He got Keith, instead.

And holy shit.

Keith is so much better.

Chapter End Notes

we made ittttt

btw i have a kofi! It's also udner klancekorner. If you liked this, show me some love!

thank you all so so so much!!! <3 hopefully ill be back up and running very soon <3 message me on tumblr!

End Notes

My tumblr: dimplesandcurlssss
My art insta: allscribbledup

message me i’d love to hear from you! <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!