What Happens In A Year

by storiesbeyondthestars

Summary

What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay there. Sometimes, things end up going home with you, and the personal drama that comes with it can be just as life altering. Lance would know. He went to Vegas for a vacation, and ended up coming home with a husband.

-This is a 100% smut-free, omegaverse story-

Notes

This is a sequel to my story What Happens In Vegas, and you absolutely DO need to read that one first to understand this one.
See the end of the work for more notes.
“Ladies and gentlemen, as we start our descent, please make sure seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Thank you.”

As much as Lance liked traveling and going to different places, he wasn’t a huge fan of being on planes. He was sure it’d be nice in the first-class seating, but they didn’t have the kind of money for that.

Well, he was sure that Allura and Shiro did, but the upgrade they offered to pay for when they left Vegas would have delayed their return home by another day. Though in retrospect, that may have been the point.

He shifted, looking at the young man was sitting beside him, head leaning on his shoulder as he napped peacefully.

A warm thrill rushed through Lance as he stared down at his mate. They had only met a little over a week ago, marking and bonding one another in a drugged, but as consensual as possible, haze. Then everything went insane over the next couple days. It was one hell of a bonding experience; Lance would say that. Already, he felt like he had known Keith for years instead of days.

Lance couldn’t help but chuckle. Keith had been so excited to experience a longer flight at first, since the one from Vegas to his home in northern Nevada was rather short. Within the first hour after takeoff, while Keith had been amazed by the passing scenery below, he had ended up nodding off.

Keith was strong, fierce, stubborn, forward, and didn’t shy away from a challenge, which almost screams Alpha from description. Yet, as he curled up with Lance, face relaxed, his content, sweet honey-like scent wafting around him, there was no doubting that he was an Omega. Lance’s Omega.

He smiled warmly at that, reaching over and gentle brushing his hand through his hair. “Keith? We’re almost there. It’s time to wake up.”

A small groan escaped Keith’s lips as his indigo eyes slowly blinked open. He looked around with confusion, and pushed open the cover on the window so that he could actually see, grimacing a bit when the sunlight assaulted his eyes. “I slept the whole way?”

“Yup,” another voice answered for Lance. “Snoring like a chainsaw.”

Keith narrowed his eyes as he stretched his arms above his head, careful not to hit anyone, and leaned forward to glare around Lance. “I do not snore.”

Pidge looked up from where she was tucking her laptop back into her bag and shoving it under the seat in front of her. Her lips curled up into a smirk as she said, “I’ve got proof.”

“Bullshit. Don’t make me come over there.”

“Bring it on fucker.”

The woman in front of them turned around, looking completely scandalized. “There are children here!” She was clearly a female Alpha, her mate in the window seat, and their young pup in between them. That was good parenting, stopping them from running all over the place.
“Omegas,” Lance deadpanned. “Can’t take them anywhere.” Just like he predicted, the Alpha blinked with surprised, looking at Keith and then Pidge, before turning around and sitting down. Some people really had no idea what to do when Omegas actually acted out like they were.

Pidge pointed at the woman and mouthed the word ‘bitch’, prompting Keith to snicker. Who had thought that it was a good idea to put them on either side of Lance again?

Not focusing on that, he leaned in closer to Keith, tapping his leg. “Seatbelt.”

“Already?” Keith’s eyes looked up towards the light, having been asleep when the announcement was made. He buckled himself in, kicking his backpack under the seat a little more.

Lance couldn’t help but watch Keith as he looked out the window with interest. His eyes were wide with excitement as he looked down towards what would be his new home. “Oh wow,” the Omega breathed out, positively bristling with excitement.

“This is your first time seeing the ocean, huh?” Lance asked, leaning over and placing his head on his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Keith nodded. He glanced over at Lance. “If the ocean’s right there, why are there so many pools?”

The Alpha couldn’t help but laugh warmly, nuzzling his face into his neck. Keith seemed slightly annoyed at first, before his scent shifted to a warm, amused one. He sighed and shook his head, leaning against him.

Lance wouldn’t lie, he was always a bit nervous when it came to planes landing. There wasn’t a specific reason for it, but he always found that he braced himself in the moments leading up to landing. He was always incredibly relieved when they landed and started taxiing around the airport runways.

Across from them, Matt was rubbing his ears with a grimace, but both Hunk and Pidge seemed fine. In fact, Pidge was grinning at her brother impishly. “Should have plugged your nose and puffed out your cheeks.”

“Yeah, yeah, I always get it mixed up whether it’s better to do that going up or down,” he admitted, taking his phone out now that they were on the ground. He tapped a few things out. “Dad’s already here waiting for us.” He looked over at Hunk. “You good?”

“Yeah, Tinā’s here too.” Hunk looked over at Lance. “She says that she sees Veronica. They’re by the entrance.”

Lance nodded his head as he pulled out his own phone. “I hope she’s the only one. We don’t need a big production in the airport.”

“Airports and big productions go hand-in-hand,” Pidge pointed out, and that was true. Airports were kind of timeless, surreal places where people were leaving old lives, embracing new ones, excited to be going on vacations, exhausted and in need of a vacation from a vacation, going on routine trips that didn’t mean much anymore, those that were stranded there for longer than they’d like, and those that were running like crazy people to get to their flights on time.

Though drama flowed through his veins, Lance didn’t want that right now.

**Lance:** Landing. Just you here?
Veronica: Just me!! Waiting by the luggage!

Veronica: He’s with you, right?

Lance: No, I left him in Vegas.

Lance: just promise not to freak him out

He didn’t check to see if there was another response from her, shoving his phone into his pocket as the doors were open and people started piling out of the plane.

It took a little while, but soon they were properly able to stretch their legs as they walked off of the plane. Lance yawned and cracked his back before turning his attention to his mate. “It’s just my sister here. But uh, she can be a bit…much at times.”

“Don’t worry,” Keith assured him, sounding rather confident. Lance glanced over his shoulder at him, and he nodded his head. “It’ll be okay.” The Omega had been a bit nervous about meeting Lance’s family earlier, but hey, if he wanted to be confident, who was he to question it?

Though healed enough to leave the hospital, Lance did feel a little bit sore as they walked down the long hallways of the airport, going through the gates and heading towards where they needed to pick up their luggage. It was a long walk.

Pidge, Matt, and Hunk walked with them, all talking animatedly. Lance would normally be in on their conversation too, but he felt oddly content with the silent bubble that wrapped around him and Keith.

Keith’s fingers brushed against the back of his hand briefly before he took his hand in his own. Lance squeezed him back gently, not questioning it. Despite his outward confident, Keith was now in a brand new place that he had never been before, and the only people he knew were a small group that he met about a week ago.

It had to be overwhelming. Lance didn’t want to bring it up if Keith didn’t want to talk about it right now, but he wanted to comfort him too. Holding his hand would have to do for now.

It was actually amazing just how brave his mate was. He left everything behind, and kept everything together. If it were Lance, he’d probably be a sobbing mess at this point. He wouldn’t regret his choices, but nerves and regret didn’t necessarily go hand-in-hand.

The two of them ended up lingering behind the other three slightly, taking their time. Maybe the Omega caught onto the bit of discomfort Lance was feeling where his stitches were on his side, since he seemed to deliberately slow his steps. Bless Keith, honestly.

“Nervous?” he asked, unable to help himself.

“A bit,” Keith admitted after a moment of hesitance. “It’s just going to be a lot.”

Lance hesitated for a moment. “You can go home, if you want. I won’t stop you.”

Looking up at him, Keith’s expression softened and he squeezed Lance’s hand. “No. I think, no, I know this is where I’m supposed to be. It’ll just take a bit of getting used to.” He glanced around. “I grew up in a place smaller than this. The Garrison was the biggest draw, and even then, my home was pretty much in the desert.”

“Take your time.”
“Thank you.” Keith looked so genuinely grateful that it broke Lance’s heart a little bit. Most Alphas he knew, outside of his family and a few others that they associated with like Hunk and Pidge’s dad, probably wouldn’t have given Keith the option at all.

It was well within Lance’s legal rights to refuse to let Keith go back to his family, since he was the Alpha and Keith was his Omega. If Keith managed to go anyway, he would just get picked up and returned like an unruly child that had been skipping school.

He wasn’t going to do that though. It was why things were working out between them so well. Keith hadn’t exactly interacted with the best Alphas before, so it wasn’t hard to appear amazing alongside them.

He would have acted courteously towards his new mate either way, but Lance had to admit, seeing Keith look at him with that soft, sometimes amazed expression had his insides twisting around. It made him feel good, like he’d do anything to keep seeing that look.

Good god, he was already gone for this Omega, wasn’t he?

Something welled up inside of Lance, a strange mix of pride and determination. He was proud that Keith was willing to give this entire thing a shot and not just vanish into the desert or something, because maybe he was biased, but he thought Keith was pretty damn amazing.

Though they hadn’t lived together or really experienced what it meant to be together in a normal setting, which was pretty telling. Bondmarks were for life though, and Lance didn’t want to be one of those people who left their spouse only to return for heats and ruts. He wanted this to work.

He was going to make good on his promise to woo the pants off of Keith. Not literally, of course. Well, not at the moment. That would come later. He was going to court him properly. Give him sweet little gifts, take him on romantic (though probably budgeted) dates, the whole shebang!

That was the plan that their intoxicated minds had come up with when they agreed to mark one another, after all.

So yeah, they already left bonding marks on each other’s neck, and they were also legally married, and they had sex once before. They were going to do things right, but in their own way.

Also, did the sex really count if neither one of them remembered it? It definitely happened, but at the same time, in the minds, it hadn’t in a way.

Whatever, that didn’t matter anyway. Lance wasn’t at all going to push Keith for more than he was comfortable with. He was calling the shots in that regard. Besides, he wanted to properly do the courting and dating thing first.

He was dragged out of his thoughts when they finally reached the conveyer belt that was already moving, shifting the luggage around. Pidge had managed to shove her way towards the front of the crowd right by where everything was coming in so that she could grab hers right away, but Matt and Hunk were a little farther back.

A bit of nervousness rushed through Lance at seeing Pidge surrounded by strangers. Sometimes it was easy to forget that she too was an Omega, an unbonded one at that. Most people around probably thought that she was a Beta, though her green collar with vine-like detailing kind of gave away her dynamic.

She’d be okay, he reminded himself. Her brother and Hunk were both right there.
Turning his eyes away from there, he scanned the conveyer belt, moving over to a less crowded spot. “Please don’t let my luggage be dead.” He glanced at Keith. “That happened once coming from Cuba. It got completely smashed.”

“That sucks,” Keith said with a slight grimace. His brow furrowed slightly. “You can go wait for your sister if you want. I can get this.”

Lance blinked at him. “No, I got it, no worries.”

The Omega sighed and rolled his eyes. “You are not supposed to be lifting heavy things for a couple more weeks, especially not before your stitches come out.”

That was very true, and Lance had no desire to rip the stitches or injure himself more, but he also didn’t want Keith to feel like he had to do everything. “You have stitches to.”

Keith’s eyebrow arced up, and Lance instantly felt stupid for that. Keith’s stitches were obviously a little different. “Lance. I am not going to be lifting a suitcase with my face.”

A tall person not far from them snorted with amusement, eyes flickering over to them before looking back for their luggage. Lance made a face at them, but felt his cheeks burning.

Keith took his moment of distraction to move in closer to the conveyer belt, and Lance moved back a little bit. He genuinely was going to peer around for his sister, but he couldn’t help but admire his mate too. What could he say? He wanted to do the courting thing properly, but he could still admire the fact that Keith was hot.

“Well, isn’t this just the sweetest.”

Lance yelped and nearly jumped out of his skin. He whirled around, heart racing rapidly as he stared into an amused pair of light blue eyes. “Veronica!”

His sister smirked that mischievous smirk that always got under his skin. Why was she his favourite sibling again?

“He’s cute,” Veronica noted playfully. “Not quite what I was expecting, but definitely your type.”

“My type?”

“Attractive,” she replied with a shrug.

Lance wanted to argue with her, he really did. But he knew that a part of him was a little bit shallow that way. Whatever. No one was perfect.

Keith came ambling over to them with two heavy suitcases rolling behind him. It looked like he was about to address Lance before his eyes fell onto his sister instead.

“Keith,” he said, moving a little closer to him, “this is my idiot sister, Veronica. Veronica, this is Keith.” He couldn’t stop the slight flush from appearing on his face. “My mate.”

“You’re the one that works in the legal system, right?” Keith asked her.

“That’s right.” She nodded her head and leaned in slightly. “So, I am in a position to help if you need it. Blink twice if you’re here under duress.”

It was a joke, and everyone there knew it was a joke, but an uncomfortable looked passed over Keith’s features, his scent shifting to something slightly more sour. Instantly, Veronica’s shoulders
slumped, almost like she was making herself smaller and less threatening, and Lance straightened himself up, a rush of protectiveness overtaking him.

Their reactions were instinctual and understandable. Keith was a distressed Omega, and they were *both* Alphas. It helped that they were siblings, and that Veronica wasn’t trying to upset him. She was instinctively trying to make Keith better in her own way, while Lance was gearing up to protect him.

Lance didn’t say anything. After everything that had happened, it really was a little too sore of a topic to joke about. They’d have to have a conversation about triggers and emotional boundaries too later on.

“I apologize,” she noted quickly, a warm smile appearing on her face. “So, tell me, what crazy pick-up lines has he used on you so far?”

Keith distress faded as he looked back to her, a smile slowly tilting at his lips. That was good. Lance liked smiling Keith. “Way too many.”

Oh wait, this was at *his* expense. “What are you talking about? You love my pickup lines!”

The Omega patted his arm gently. “Of course I do.” Veronica laughed lightly, and Keith’s smile grew.

Lance crossed his arms and pouted, but that was mostly to cover up the smile that threatened to appear. It was so nice to see them getting along. He had been a little worried, because though his family was pretty open minded, and everyone cared about Omega rights, sometimes they slipped into older ways of thinking. They tried not to, and tried to correct it when it happened, but still, it happened.

Maybe it had to do with the fact that Veronica worked with Omegas all the time. She had a huge database of interviews and conversations with Omegas that were abused, suppressed, raped, kidnapped, tortured, and so much more. She knew how to talk with Omegas without coming across as belittling, or like she was trying to strong-arm them into something as an Alpha.

“Hey Keith!” Pidge called from where her family was waiting close to the door. “Come here for a second.”

Keith glanced at Lance with a raised eyebrow, and somehow, Lance knew he was asking what Pidge wanted. He shrugged, and Keith sighed, going over to the other Omega.

Veronica watched him go before noting, “Just from looks alone, you wouldn’t expect him to have such a strong scent, but it’s not like…a bakery or anything.”

They had discussed scents that they found more appealing before, so Lance knew that *both* he and Veronica weren’t that drawn to super, sugary scents. It was a small factor as to why his past girlfriends had been an Alpha and Beta.

He narrowed his eyes at his sister. “Mine.” There wasn’t any true possessiveness to his statement though.

She snorted, blue eyes dancing with amusement. “Yes, yes, he’s all yours. Too young for me.” She smile faded as she glanced over at Keith and then back at him. “Papá told me about some of the things that happened. She thought it might be something that I could use.”

Something she could *use*? It was just wording, but Lance didn’t like it. “Veronica.”
Her eyes widened. “Not going behind his back or anything! Only when he’s ready and if he wants to.”

“It’s an active investigation. We can’t talk about it,” Lance replied, crossing his arms in front of him. “We’re all probably going to have to go and testify at some point of time or another.” Now that he thought about it, Keith was probably going to be a key witness in that mess, wasn’t he? At the very least, they might be able to get Lotor on kidnapping and assault. Courts would take it a little more seriously, because Keith had a mate, though the context of everything might make that even more difficult. It was a nightmare to think about.

Yeah, the more he thought about it, the more he realized how stupid it was to feel like that was all over and done with. Courts just moved notoriously slow, so it could be a while, but still, it was going to come back and haunt them again.

“I understand,” Veronica said with a nod, and if there was someone who understood the judicial and political systems, it was her. “Personal stuff though…”

Lance knew that part of the strategy Veronica and those she was working with was to give Omegas a voice, to let them share their stories to actually show that there was a problem, to put faces to the horrible stories people went through. Keith’s story might help her a bit, but that wasn’t what he was thinking of right now. “He just agreed to move across the country with me after knowing me for like a week. Leave him alone.”

He promised not to control Keith, but he couldn’t help but feel protective of his mate.

“That’s fair,” she agreed quickly. “Sorry.” She glanced back over to Keith, who was now talking to Pidge’s parents. Sam and Colleen were great, so Lance doubted that they were bothering him at all. When her eyes turned back to Lance, that mischievous look was back. “He’s definitely cute though. I can see why he caught your eye on the first place.” She paused briefly. “Though he kind of looks like he could kick your ass.”

Looking over at his mate, Lance’s eyes couldn’t help but wander across his broad shoulders. Though not big like Hunk, or even like Shiro, Keith was still strong. “I’m pretty sure he can. He can definitely lift me up.” Well, he didn’t mean for that to come across so dreamily, but hey, whatever worked.

Veronica must have caught onto it too, because she burst into loud laughter.

Keith made his way back over towards them, glancing at Veronica curiously. She just waved her hand, trying to get herself back together.

“Ignore her, she’s weird” Lance groaned. “What did Pidge want?”

“Wanted to introduce me to her parents,” Keith replied, and ended up yawning loudly.

Warmth and affection rose up within Lance as he smiled at him. God, he was adorable. “Tired?”

“I shouldn’t be,” Keith said with a shake of his head. “I slept on the plane.”

“Yeah, but even when you sleep, plane trips are exhausting. Let’s get out of here.” He tentatively slung his arm around Keith’s shoulder, grabbing his suitcase with his free hand. When his mate didn’t shrug him off, he allowed himself to relax.

They followed Veronica through the terminal and out towards the temporary parking. The original plan had been for Lance to leave his car in the long term parking (it wouldn’t have been safe staying...
at his place), but given how pricy that was, Veronica had offered to get him when he came back.

Of course, none of them were expecting Keith, but that was fine.

As they approached the car, Lance couldn’t help but coo. “There’s my Blue.”

Veronica sighed and looked at Keith. “Lance loves his car. Sorry, you’ll have to get used to playing second fiddle to Blue.”

“Listen, Blue has been by my side through the good and bad. Good ol’ reliable since I was a little kid. You know this!”

“It belonged to our parents,” she explained to the Omega. “Then our brother Luis, then Marco for a bit, and then Marco gave it to Lance. It’s been around for a while.”

Lance watched Keith’s reflection raise an eyebrow. “Is it safe?”

He spluttered and turned to him. “Of course she’s safe! Blue looks a little rough, but she’s a reliable old girl.” As if to spite him, it turned out to be a bit of a struggle to get the trunk open. It wasn’t his fault it stuck sometimes.

“By the way, I’m driving,” Veronica said, moving to the driver’s side door before Lance could stop. “At least until we get to my place.”

“Your place?” Keith asked curiously.

She nodded. “It’s along the way, just to drop me off.” A small smile appeared on her face. “I know how exhausting traveling can be, so I’m not going to hold you up. It was just most convenient for everyone this way.” Her eyes flashed with mischievousness again. “Keith, why don’t you sit in the front with me? That way, when I get out, Lance just has to hope into the driver’s side?”

Growing up as the youngest of five, Lance had been quick to learn when someone was plotting against him. He narrowed his eyes at her. “Maybe you should sit in the back so you can hop out and we can keep going. Just tuck and roll. I’ll slow down a bit.”

Keith mouthed the words ‘tuck and roll’ as he helped get the suitcases into the trunk, their carry-on bags going into the backseat. The looked up at Lance with a smirk on his face. “Hey, Lance?” He leaned in close to him.

Instinctively, Lance’s eyes fluttered slightly. “Yeah?”

“I call shotgun!” Keith jumped away from him, practically throwing himself into the front seat. Veronica laughed loudly as she got into the driver’s side, leaving a stunned Lance standing outside of the car.

He jumped when she blared the horn, and got into the back seat behind her. “You guys suck.”

Keith snickered, and Veronica twisted around to look back at him. “I like him already.” She turned around and buckled up, starting the car so that they could get out of there.

Lance rolled his eyes, but a smile still spread across his lips as he watched them. “Just don’t kill my baby.”

“Lance, this car is one sudden stop away from giving out.”

“Hey, I keep her up to code!”
Veronica ignored them as she got out on the highway to head back to her apartment, which was in a much nicer neighbourhood than Lance’s. “So, Keith…”

“Don’t listen to anything she says!” Lance burst out suddenly, realizing his sister’s evil plan. “She just wants to gossip about me.”

“Of course not. Keith’s never been here before and he’ll be able to see everything better from up here.” Veronica paused. “That being said, if you look in the glove compartment, there’s a photo album of baby Lance.”

“Veronica!” Lance cried out loudly, flailing in the backseat. He couldn’t believe her, but at the same time, should have expected this.

Keith, the little traitor that he was, quickly opened up the glove compartment, and oh god, she had brought his baby album from their parents’ house. He was annoyed, but at the same time, the way his mate’s face lit up with excitement was kind of nice.

He’d just have to ask Krolia for pictures.

“At least I didn’t bring the pre-teen Lance.” He was about to protest, but stopped. Yeah, those had been rough years for him where he was so short and tiny, not having really had any kind of growth until he was seventeen-ish.

Keith was staring at the pictures of baby Lance with wide eyes. “You were…”

“A potato?” Veronica asked. “Because that’s totally how I saw him.”

He blinked at her and stared with confusion. “I was going to say adorable?”

Relief struck Lance hard at his words. “I stan one person in this car.”

Keith looked back at him, pure amusement on his face. “You’re so thin now. How were you so… round?”

“Never mind,” he groaned, flailing his hands in Keith’s general direction. “You know what, sucks to be future you. I was a big, round baby. That’s what genetics you’ll get from me.” It wouldn’t happen for quite a while, but Lance did know that they both wanted children in the future, and he had been a big baby. Only Luis had been bigger than him.

It took Keith a moment to understand, and when he did, he made a hilariously disturbed face. He looked down at the pictures again. “I was a tiny baby, so I’m just going to hope things swing my way.”

“You’re a twin,” Lance pointed out. “Twins are almost always born smaller, cause there’s two of them. You know what? I’m going to ask your mom to send baby pics over with the stuff she’s going to mail out.” Keith pointedly ignored him, going through the pictures again.

Veronica perked up a bit at that. “You met his mom? How’d that go?”

“She’s an Omega that was a former FBI agent and could probably kill me in my sleep and make it look like an accident but she seems to like me and I’m alive so I think it’s good?”

Veronica raised an eyebrow and looked in the rear-view mirror at him blankly.

Keith looked back at him, narrowing his eyes slightly. “You literally saved my life, so I think you’re
“Did he now?” Veronica asked slowly, once again catching his eyes in the mirror before looking at the road again. “Is that why you were in the hospital according to Papá? She didn’t give details. Wasn’t sure what she was allowed to say or not.”

“I—yeah. It was no big deal. Anyone could have done it.” Lance shrugged, though he knew that actually wasn’t true.

Keith scoffed, closing the book with a sharp snap. “You took a bullet trying to protect me, and then you got back up and saved me again. Not everyone could have done that. Idiot Alpha.” He honestly looked personally offended by Lance shrugging the entire thing off.

Veronica’s eyes were wide. “Jesus.” An uncomfortable silence fell through the car, before she looked at Keith again. “So he made a good impression then?”

A loud snort escaped Keith. “I’m here, right?”

She nodded her head in agreement and proceeded to ask him more harmless questions. That was good, Lance really didn’t want to talk about what had happened at the moment.

Instead, he leaned back, looking from his sister to his mate and back again. Lance couldn’t help but smile at them warmly. He could tell that his sister liked Keith, and it was honestly really nice to see. He really did value Veronica’s opinion. At least he knew that, no matter what happened, he’d have one person on his side.
After dropping his sister off and getting into the front seat, the rest of the drive to Lance’s apartment was fairly silent. For someone who was normally pretty chatty, Lance found that he was okay with this. It was calm, and actually not awkward at all. That was nice.

His Mamá, who was a fairly silent man himself most of the time, always said that it was important to be able to talk to their partner, but to also just be with them without needing words to fill up the space.

That being said, the closer they got to his apartment, the more the embarrassment gnawed at his stomach. They went from the nice clean apartment complex that Veronica lived at into steadily more run-down places.

His apartment complex wasn’t a complete dive or anything, but it also wasn’t the nicest thing in the world. The point was that it had been affordable.

Lance once saw the prices of things in the same area a long time ago, and had nearly threw up. He was kind of glad that he wasn’t alive back then, because he may have had to live with his parents a lot longer than he had. Not that there was anything wrong with that, but he had been terribly babied and wanted a bit of independence. But yeah, the world had been a very different place before the populations plummeted from many things, the Omega Flu being the most notable of them.

Though that had happened within his sibling’s lifetime, even if he had just missed it. It was really the final nail in the coffin. It made it so that someone like Lotor actually did have good reasons and motivations for the things he did, but his actions, ideals, and methods were disgusting.

Pulling into the parking lot by his building gave Lance the opportunity to shrug those thoughts off. “Uh, so, it’s kind of a dive. Sorry.”

Keith peered out the window. “It’s not that bad.”

Lance skeptically eyed the building. The brick siding of the building was old and chipped, a bit of new graffiti on the side (though that picture actually looked pretty cool, so there was that), and there were grates over all the windows. The other buildings around looked similar to that one.

It was kind of Keith to say that, but Lance disagreed. He knew there were much worse places though.

They got out of the car, Keith stretching his arms and legs before insisting on being the one to get the two suitcases, especially after Lance informed him that there wasn’t an elevator, and the apartment was up on the fourth floor.

Of course, Lance didn’t like this. It wasn’t that he thought Keith was weak, he just didn’t want him to feel like he had to carry all of it.

“If I was the one that had stitches in my side instead of my face, you’d be doing the same thing,” he pointed out, and any other argument the Alpha had to that was lost, because damn, he was right.

To be fair, Keith was only slightly winded by the time they got up to his – nay – their apartment.
Lance was going to have to inform the landlord that Keith was living there now, but there’d be no need for new papers or anything to be written up like when Marco had moved in for a while.

Keith scented the air, and Lance grimaced a bit, trying to open the lock and deadbolt. “Sorry. The lady down the hall likes to cook a lot and her stuff in strong.”

“It’s not bad,” the Omega replied with a small shrug. “Shiro and Acxa can’t cook to save their lives. So it always smells bad.”

“You can cook?” Lance asked teasingly. For some reason, he had thought that Keith wasn’t much of a cook.

“I can follow a recipe most of the time,” he replied with a small shrug. “Omegas have to take culinary classes in high school.”

Oh right, how could he forget about that? That was pretty much a national thing across all states. He was pretty sure that childcare classes were in there somewhere as well. He, admittedly, hadn’t paid much attention to that in his junior or senior years of high school.

Finally, he got the apartment door open, and led the way inside, making sure to drag his suitcase behind him so that Keith wouldn’t have to.

Almost instantly, he was mortified by his home. He hadn’t cleaned at all before leaving, and there was even a dirty dish in the sink! Not to mention, he was sure that he had left the clothes he didn’t want to clean at the time in the spare room. Oh, god. He was bringing his mate into this mess?

“I’m sorry!” he burst out, panic and humiliation climbing up his throat. “I’m not usually this bad! Oh my god, this looks like a place you could find rats and shit!”

Keith closed the door behind him and looked around the room. It was so painfully far from the room that they had woken up together in the morning after their intoxicated bonding ceremony. That room hadn’t been Lance’s though. This place was him.

“If I find one, I’m naming it Gerald and keeping it,” Keith said with a shrug.

Lance paused, taking a moment to realize exactly what he meant. “Keith, no. We’re not keeping a rat!”

“Keith yes.”

Lance flailed slightly, unable to hide the smile that broke out across his features, realizing what the Omega was trying to do. He calmed himself, taking a few deep breaths. “I’m sorry this place is such a mess. Seriously. And I know I said that you could have the second room but we gotta clean that out and I just—“

“Yes!” Keith placed his hands on his shoulders. “You didn’t expect...me at all. It’s okay. I guess...maybe it’s a good thing?” His voice rose questioningly at the end.

“How could this disaster be a good thing?”

He broke eye contact, cheeks turning a slight pink. “Well, we can kind of clean everything up figure it out together?”

It took Lance a moment to process that before he understood. That’s right, this was Keith’s home now too. He wasn’t just spending the night and leaving. He should have a say in how things looked.
too. Come to think of it, Lance had been wanting to switch things up for a while now. He had been toiling in this place sadly since Nyma screwed him over months ago. It’d be nice to give it a new feel, since they didn’t have the money to move somewhere else yet.

Lance couldn’t help but smile brightly. “That’s a great idea! We can move things around and redecorate everything! With a budget!” He crooked his arm and held it out. “Let me take you on a tour of your new humble abode.”

Keith raised an eyebrow, but was definitely amused as he looped his arm through Lance’s. “Lead the way?”

Lance took two dramatic steps before stopping. “This is your fully-furnished, luxury kitchen with a sink that doesn’t always drain properly. It also contains like, two plates. Don’t give me that look, Hunk fed me more often than not.” He took a few steps in another direction, taking Keith with him. “This is your new living room! Here, we have our well-worn couch, and our actually pretty nice tv, game system included. Also, internet modem. That’s super important.”

Narrowing his eyes slightly, Keith leaned forward to look at something. “Is that coffee table levelled out with text books?”

Freezing, Lance looked down at his first and second year books that he never ended up selling. “I was going to ask for a little peck in turn for the internet password, but I’ll give it to you if you don’t judge me for that.” Of course he wasn’t actually going to demand that, but hey, hamming things up didn’t hurt, right?

Keith snorted. “Deal.” He then eyed the couch. “And how worn are we talking here?”

Lance hesitated. That couch was even older than his car, but he didn’t really want to admit that. “It’s a little old, but it’s comfy enough.”

The Omega eyed it skeptically. “Uh-huh.”

Deciding that he’d rather not have to deal with questions about the thrift shop couch, he gently drug Keith down the hall, where there were four closed doors. Throwing the first one on the left open, he said, “So, we have a little storage room here, and believe it or not there’s a water heater in there.”

The room was packed with stuff that Lance was sure he didn’t need. “We’ll go through everything and fix it up.” He went to the door beside it, opening that. “This is going to be your room, but it’s a bit…uh…”

Keith eyed the room. “How…much stuff do you actually have?” There were boxes of stuff everywhere. Not to mention an overflowing basket of laundry that Lance had shoved in there in an attempt to ignore it before going on vacation.

“To be fair, most of this is Marco’s, and he’s been an asshole who keeps putting off getting his shit. I’ll tell him to get it, or we’ll sell it. Seems to be doing fine without it.”

Nodding his head, Keith glanced at the laundry basket with a raised eyebrow.

Lance flushed a bit at that. “Don’t judge me.”

“Do you even have any clean underwear?”

“What did I just say!” Lance groaned dramatically before twisting in the hall. “Here is my second favourite room.”
He had no problem dramatically throwing the bathroom door open, because this room was always spotless, perfectly laid out with everything that he needed. He also made sure to take down that stupid poop emoji shower curtain Marco put up one day, because he had an aesthetic to uphold, Marco.

“For some reason, I’m not at all surprised,” Keith replied, sounding more than a little amused.

“Yeah, yeah.” Lance pulled him the couple steps to the last room. “And this is my room.” It wasn’t nearly as clean as the bathroom, he hadn’t made the bed in who knows how long, and his computer desk was a mess, but it was generally pretty neat.

“Did you throw your laundry into the other room so it wouldn’t be in here?”

He groaned. “Keith, you’re killing me. That’s what you’re doing. You’re killing your husband.”

Keith snickered in response to that. “Drama king.”

“And I’m proud of that.” He yawned loudly, stretching his arms above his head. “So, uh, I was thinking. Nap time? Then wake up for deliver and a movie on the couch? Then tomorrow we can go tackle the house and go out to get groceries and stuff?”

Keith mirrored his yawn and said, “That actually sounds really good.” He glanced over his shoulder to where they left their suitcases, looking mildly inconvenienced by how ‘far’ away they were.

“You can take my room until we get the other one cleaned out. I can take the couch,” Lance assured him.

With a slight huff, Keith turned towards him. Lance expected him to be a bit annoyed for whatever reason, but he had a small smile on his face. “Lance, I do appreciate you giving me my own space while I get used to everything. It means a lot. But I don’t mind sharing a bed with you. You know that.”

That was true. When Lance was still in the hospital, Keith had curled up with him in that small space, and they shared a bed in their hotel room too. That wasn’t the issue. The point of two separate rooms was to give Keith a place that could just be his for now while they worked everything out. Two separate rooms also helped out if Lance went into a rut, or Keith decided he wanted to be alone during his next heat.

If Lance was completely honest, he wanted to snuggle with Keith. Maybe that was something they could do during naptimes?

“I’m down for it if you are,” he replied confidently.

Keith’s expression softened a bit, and nodded his head. He quickly closed the distance between them, leaning up the miniscule distance between them to kiss him.

Lance hummed appreciatively at the sweet, gentle brush of lips against his, returning the kiss just as softly.

Pulling back, Keith tugged at his arm a bit. “Come on, I’m exhausted and a nap sounds amazing.”

“Take your shoes off before you get into the bed, you little heathen,” Lance muttered, tiredness suddenly overcoming him.

They had time to wait to do everything else. For now, curling up together on Lance’s bed was really
the best thing that they could do.

…

Keith squinted a bit as the sunlight hit his eyes, not used to waking up like that. He always kept his bed on the other side of the room, as far away from the window as possible, with blackout curtains. He could get up pretty easily in the morning, but he wasn’t used to the sun trying to laser his eyes out of his head.

He closed his eyes again, sinking back into the warmth of the bed. Behind him, Lance sighed, arm tightening around his waist. Keith tilted his head to look back, and saw that the Alpha was still sleeping peacefully.

Keith had seen his mate sleeping peacefully before, but there was always something about being back home that made things even better. A small part of Keith kind of wanted his small, twin-sized bed back in Nevada, with his impossibly soft sheets and the mountain of different blankets that he had.

Maybe Keith was a bit rough around the edges compared to many other Omegas, but hell if he didn’t take comfort in soft things and nesting. He wondered if Lance ever nested when he was sick or anxious, since it was something that a lot of people did in those situations.

His mother would be sending his stuff like that though, so there was no need to worry about trying to replace it all.

A soft chirp escaped Keith’s lips as Lance nuzzled his face against his scent gland in his sleep. The Omega’s eyes fluttered and he leaned back against him slightly, a faint purr rumbling in his chest. In response, despite being asleep, a contented smell surrounded them.

If he was honest, it had been a long time since he felt this comfortable around another person like this. Not to mention, he had never once taken comfort in an Alpha’s scent since his father passed away. With Lance though, he instantly felt himself becoming a contented, boneless pile.

He could get used to this. Yes, he did want his own room, a place that could just be his in this brand new life he found himself in, but cuddling like this definitely had to keep happening. He surprised himself with that thought, since he wasn’t exactly a touchy-feely type of person.

Keith had to admit that just goofing off, watching tv and eating Chinese takeout the night before had been a lot of fun, and got rid of nearly all the nerves that he had been feeling had faded away. It hadn’t felt like they had thrown themselves head-first into a very serious relationship, but like they were starting at the beginning of a normal one.

It was exactly what they had wanted.

A yawn escaped Keith’s lips as he opened his eyes, once again grimacing at the sun. He shifted forward, reaching for the bedside table where his phone was charging. It was pretty early, but that was probably for the best. As much as he wanted to lay around, they had a lot to do that day.

It was too early to text his mother or any of his siblings about things they might need. He had never lived on his own before, after all. Then again, Lance had been living here for a while, so he probably had most things they needed for day-to-day living.

Honestly, he didn’t have a problem with anything in the apartment as it was, and it wasn’t like he was some home décor guru or something, but it was kind of nice that Lance had agreed so enthusiastically that they could do a bit of redecorating together.
It was just one of those things to make it seem like both of their home for now, not just like he was visiting a boyfriend’s house.

The twinging of his bladder was ultimately what got Keith to remove himself from the bed. He shivered slightly in the direct blast of the fan that was going, but judging from the rest of the apartment, it was going to be a sweltering day. Then again, it was August in Florida.

Instead of crawling back into bed, he looked around the combine living room and kitchen. They really should get to work on cleaning everything and figuring out what they needed.

He yawned and looked around the room. There was really no rhyme or reason to anything, but he knew from the bathroom and Lance’s bedroom that his mate definitely did like to have themes to things. Out here looked like he had acquired the cheapest things possible. That made sense, it wasn’t like they had a lot of money.

Keith bit his lip. Allura had given him a prepaid Visa with a fairly hefty sum on it. He hadn’t exactly told that to Lance, but she had insisted on it, so that he could get some things without being a burden to his mate.

That was the hard thing for Omegas. With highly limited options of education (even with permission from their Alphas), their job options were limited as well. Also, no one really wanted to hire a young Omega, assuming that they’d probably become pregnant sooner rather than later. It was why he worked with Shiro. Come to think of it, he had almost all his savings from that, not having really spent it on much before. It might help a bit.

Maybe he’d be able to get a part-time job with Lance’s help somewhere. He didn’t want to work with customer service, but he would if he had to. He didn’t want to just mooch off of his mate.

Keith also didn’t want to force Lance to change a lot of things to accommodate him too, but again, having a little bit of a say in how things looked might help him feel like this was his home too, and not like he was visiting a boyfriend’s house.

Reality was, they weren’t boyfriends. Yes, they agreed that they were going to do the whole courting thing as properly as they could (gifts and dates that generally led to being boyfriends, and if that kept going good, to being mates, but obviously they skipped every step along the way), but that was more to get to know one another naturally more than anything else. They were mates. They had marked one another already. They had a legally binding bonding ceremony on top of that, making them not just mates, but husbands too.

He hadn’t really thought about it in that sense before, because that was kind of crazy. Lance wasn’t his boyfriend; he was his husband. That was a little bit different.

Keith snorted at the thought. A little bit. Right. He took a deep breath, going over to his bag and digging out a pad of paper and a pen. He was sure Lance had those things around here, but he didn’t want to wake him up to ask or dig too much yet.

Flipping to a new page, Keith started thinking about all of the things that they had to do, all of the things that they might need. He really needed to write things like that down, because if he didn’t, he tended to just wing things and that didn’t always garner the best results in the world.

The first thing he wrote down was the word ‘sheets’, because he definitely needed more comfortable ones. Lance’s were a little too scratchy, and he was sure that the ones in the other room wouldn’t be much better, if there was anything there.
Keith wasn’t an extraordinarily clean person, as in he didn’t need things sparkling, and he could get pretty messy himself when he was distracted, but again, basically running a house was something that they taught all Omegas in school. He had hated those classes.

Despite his embarrassment, Lance’s apartment wasn’t that bad. The biggest part of the cleaning was probably just going through the impressive amount of boxes that were there. The building itself though, that was a little different.

Keith kind of felt like a brat, because he grew up in the desert, and it wasn’t like their home had been really fancy, but at the same time, it felt secure and safe. This place, not so much. Of course, maybe he just needed to adjust and get to the idea that there were strangers only a few feet away on the other side of the thin walls shared with what would be his room, the spare room, and the combined kitchen and living room.

He’d get used to this for now, but he definitely, without question, was not going to bring a kid into a home like this.

He paused in his writing, blinking at the thought. Prior to now, the Omega hadn’t truly thought about that. He knew that people were going to be asking him left, right, and center, when they were having kids; that was what people asked young, mated Omegas (or how many kids they had). He was expected to have them, and he would, but not because of that. He would because he wants them and so does his mate. Society could go fuck itself.

The problem was, for the life of him, Keith could not picture caring for a little baby here. He couldn’t see a toddler running around excitedly playing. It wasn’t like he needed a giant house with a huge yard or anything, but somewhere nicer than this would be preferable. Then his mind shot to Lance’s car, and he grimaced. Yeah, no. No child of his was getting in that thing. Lance might love it, but Keith was a bit skeptical.

Did that really make him a brat? Probably. Lance was lucky in the fact that, though he was technically an intern, he was getting paid like any other worker, and once he got his Master’s, it was likely he’d do even better. They’d be more than okay with what he made in this apartment.

Of course, Keith knew that if he went to Shiro or Allura, they’d help in an instant, but that just wasn’t him. He’d do it if they really needed it, but only as a last resort.

Keith supposed, again, that he could try to get a part-time job, but instead of using that money, he could save it for when he wouldn’t be working.

It was very true that Keith didn’t want to be one of those Omegas that stayed home, cleaned, cooked, took care of their children, and essentially treated their Alpha like an additional child. He wanted to do more. Not that he was going to belittle people that stayed home and loved doing that, because hell, taking care of a family and a house was hard. He was all for the people that chose to do that. He just wanted to do more for now.

In the future, in a few years, when they had kids, Keith could actually see himself wanting to stay with them as much as he could. Part of that, he knew, came from those primal, Omega instincts to care for their pups. Of course, that wasn’t the end-all, be-all to things. Like any instinct, that could be ignored or lessened, but Keith already had the feeling that he was going to be that over-protective type that got downright dangerous to protect their families.

So if he wanted to be out of this place, with a safer vehicle, he’d have to help out too instead of just demand it, because that wouldn’t be fair at all. So, right. Somehow get a job to save money. Do this whole, strange courting thing with Lance. Get used to living with one another. Compromise on some
 things (which was probably going to be a struggle for them both but his mom insisted that compromise and communication was key). Maybe fall in love.

Okay, despite being slightly pessimistic at times, Keith could see that happening. He already had strong feelings for Lance within hours of knowing him, and a week later, he definitely felt some pretty strong affection towards him. It was actually kind of terrifying to think about. He needed to keep going with his list.

He’d have to meet Lance’s family, of course. They’d grow together. Hopefully get a new place to live. Then kids would come after.

Of course, there were huge tax cuts, as well as other benefits, when having children. It was an incentive that the government put out not long after the impacts of the Omega Flu were truly felt. The more pups, the more benefits. Often times, families with low wages were moved into nicer homes, so there was that.

Sometimes that prompted people to have child after child and not take care of them. Keith kind of wanted to meet those assholes in the nearest Denny’s parking lot at 3:00 am.

Yes, if they were caught, they were thrown in jail and heavily fined, their children taken from them, but he knew the foster care system and it, in and of itself, was kind of problematic.

On his paper he wrote the word ‘Denny’s’. He’d have to ask Lance where the closest one was. Just in case.

All of this though, all of this was looking into the future, and it was kind of freaking Keith out a little bit. He didn’t need to worry about kids yet. That wasn’t going to be an issue for a few years.

The fact that there was no food in the house minus the leftovers from last night, and some kind-of questionable food at the back of Lance’s fridge, was an immediate issue that needed to be dealt with.

Focusing himself, Keith looked around the room. There really was so much they needed to do that day, wasn’t there? He was sure they wouldn’t be going long without meeting the rest of Lance’s family, but he personally would like to get settled in first.


Keith’s medical records would have automatically been attached to Lance’s after their bonding ceremony was recorded, so that was good. Still, they’d have to go get their stitches out sooner rather than later too. Keith before him.

His fingers brushed against his cheek, grimacing a bit. Keith wasn’t a vain person, but he had always known he was attractive. The scar that was going to be left behind wasn’t going to be exactly pretty. It was a wide cut that narrowed as it reached just under his eye, and he was pale, so it was probably going to stand out like crazy.

A pronounced yawn broke Keith out of his thoughts once again. He looked up at Lance, who stumbled into the room, rubbing his eye and scratching his stomach. He hummed slightly, going towards the fridge to look inside.

Keith cocked an eyebrow, waiting for the Alpha to acknowledge him in his sleepy state. Lance made an unhappy sound, apparently realizing there was no proper breakfast food, and straightened up, closing the door and turning around. He froze when he saw Keith and yelped.

Well then.
“Holy shit! It wasn’t all a wild dream!” Lance cried out as he stumbled towards him, hands landing on his shoulders. “I mean, I knew it wasn’t. My side and your scent and all, but at the same time waking up here and everything looked just like before, and you weren’t there, so I kind of thought it was all a really nice dream.”

The Omega had no idea how to properly respond to that. “Everything that happened counts as a nice dream?” Nope, _that_ probably wasn’t the right response.

Lance stared at him for a moment before his lips tilted up in a teasing grin, leaning a little closer. “Well, _you_ certainly make it a nice dream.”

Keith was actually pretty good at keeping his composure, but he could still feel his cheeks flushing, caught off guard by that comment.

Snickering, Lance looked down at the pad of paper. “Look at you! You’re already going!”

He shrugged a bit. “I was up anyway, so I figured I should at least do something useful with myself.”

Lance smiled at him softly. “You know that you don’t need to prove yourself or anything, right? I’m glad you’re here.”

Keith wet his lips slightly, warmth welling in his chest. It had been a long time since someone actually wanted him around. (Not including his family, of course. Definitely not including the Alphas that hurt him in the past.) “If there isn’t a list, I’m going to be all over the place.”

Lance snorted. “Isn’t that a fun thing to have in common.” He stretched out again, back cracking in the process. “So, how about I run out and get some breakfast to bring back, and then we tackle cleaning?”

“I don’t mind eating the leftovers for breakfast,” Keith replied with a small shrug. He wasn’t a very picky person, and he kind of had a weakness for takeout and fast food.

The sound that Lance made kind of reminded Keith of a balloon letting out air. “Absolutely not. Breakfast food at other times of day is amazing. Lunch food at breakfast? No. Wait here! I know a place that does amazing breakfast takeout!” He winked at Keith. “Don’t worry, I remember what you like from when you were the best mate ever in the mornings and got me real food and not the nasty hospital food when I was stuck there.”

Keith looked stop a playful smirk from spreading across his lips as he leaned forward slightly. “Better get it right.”

“Testing me?” Lance asked, fluttering his eyelashes slightly. “Want me to prove that I can be a good Alpha and provide?”

“This is what’s going to make or break us,” Keith joked.

Lance laughed loudly, the sound echoing through the apartment. He turned around, probably to haul on some clothes so that he could go out without being accused of public indecency, but paused. “Oh! Why don’t you have a shower while I’m gone? Then when we get back and eat, we can tackle cleaning?” His eyes widened. “Not that you have to! I swear, it’s just a suggestion.”

“Relax,” Keith said. They were going to have to work out morning routines and everything eventually, which was odd to think about. “A shower sounds good anyway. Maybe I’ll be a little less groggy.” He set aside his paper and pen, heading towards his bag to get a clean set of clothes, having brought his toothbrush, deodorant, and everything else to the bathroom last night.
Leaning against the counter, Lance took another look at his list. “Sheets? I have an extra set that are the same as mine. Don’t worry, I wasn’t going to make you sleep in old ones.”

Keith couldn’t help but flush slightly. “Well…I…yeah…I guess.”

Blue eyes looked towards him skeptically. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing big, never mind.”

“Keith. Come on.”

He shrugged. “The sheets are a bit uncomfortable.” He paused. “Again, no big deal. If you have a spare set here that’s good enough.”

Lance was already frowning though. “I hadn’t thought of that.” He tilted his head slightly. “Some Omegas have very sensitive skin, right? No one in my family’s like that, so I wasn’t sure if it was a stereotype or not.”

Keith nodded his head, a bit relieved that Lance understood. “Yeah, I’m like that. It didn’t really come up last week.”

The Alpha reached out to take his hand, but stopped. “Oh! Right. Space. Sorry.”

Realizing what he was about to do, Keith shook his head and set the clothes down that he was going to wear. “I don’t mind you touching me.” He knew that, if he got uncomfortable, Lance would immediately stop whatever he was doing, and that spoke a lot about him.

Lance stared at him, reaching out and gently running his hands down Keith’s bare arms. The Omega shuddered slightly at the contact, and couldn’t stop himself from stepping closer to him, resting the palms of his hands against Lance’s chest.

“You know,” Lance stared, his voice a little lower. “I suppose I should get better sheets for my room too, and maybe a cover for the couch.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“I do. I want you to be comfortable here.” His expression softened. “You left everything behind to come with me. I think making it so that your skin doesn’t itch or whatever isn’t too much to ask.” He grinned sheepishly. “Also it means more places for cuddles. You know, for when you’re up for that.”

Keith couldn’t help but laugh a little at that. God, how is it that he just happened to run into the sweetest Alpha that he had ever met? How had he managed to convince him to be his mate after only a few hours? It was insane.

His eyes fluttered shut as Lance leaned down, pressing his lips against his. Keith hummed happily, fingers curling into Lance’s thin shirt. He couldn’t help but feel so safe and warm as he tilted his head, Lance’s arms sliding over his shoulders as his went around him.

Someone’s phone started ringing, but Keith didn’t particularly care whose it was as their lips moved gently, without an ounce of urgency or rush to them. The ringing stopped, but then started again a moment later.

Lance moved back first, staring down at him happily. “Now what happened to taking things slow?”
“Nothing wrong with this,” Keith replied easily, because there wasn’t. They were already comfortable with kissing and cuddling in private, and that was fine. Those things often did come first in relationships, because they were the easy things. It was the emotional intimacy that they needed to work on, learning more about one another, and adapting to one another.

Lance chuckled, and seemed to accept that answer, pecking his lips before stepping away. “Gotta go pull on pants and go get some food.”

“Pants are a requirement for being in public,” Keith agreed, unable to hide his amusement.

“Wouldn’t want anyone gawking at the goods, right?” Keith just stared at him. “Babe, you’re supposed to agree with me.” He sighed and stumbled into his room. “I’ve got little old ladies that tell me I’m a handsome young man all the time!”

“Are you telling me I have to go fight little old ladies?” Keith called out to him, once again grabbing his clothes and heading towards the bathroom. He yelped when he got to the door of the bedroom, and Lance practically launched himself at him, clinging onto him.

“Aw, you’d fight little old ladies for me?” Lance cooed. “I think you’re going to end up wooing the pants off of me first. That’s not fair. I said I was going to woo you.”

With a snort, Keith wiggled out of his arms, able to slip through them with ease. He stood at the door to the bathroom and couldn’t help but smile. “Come on, I thought you wanted to prove you could be a big, strong Alpha and provide.”

“Oh, I can provide. You wait and see.” Lance grabbed his wallet and keys, practically flouncing out the door. Keith chuckled and rolled his eyes, listening as Lance locked the door and the deadbolt, before turning to take a shower.

Chapter End Notes

Ah! I am so glad that so many of you are excited for this, because I am too! It's primarily going to be about Keith and Lance's relationship building and growing, so lots of fluff, but of course, expect other things to happen.

For these first few chapters we're going to be following sort of daily stuff a little bit, establish a few things, but after that it's all up in the air. (There is only so many times I can describe the boring, daily things adults need to do to function properly.)
Lance practically felt like skipping when he got out of his car at the diner. He didn’t tell Keith what this place was, exactly, but he knew that he’d end up bringing him there eventually. He could get a good discount there, after all.

The diner itself was a rather homey place with booths around the outside, and a long counter with stools at the front. It was clean and comfortable, with warm, invigorating colours. Lance loved it there.

The woman at the cash register spoke happily to a couple that were paying for their food, waving them off after everything went through. She turned to look at him, her bright eyes going wide as a big smile crossed her face. “Lance!” She moved down to where he was, leaning over the counter to hug him tightly.

“Hey Lisa,” he replied happily. “Luis in?”

“He’s in the back with the others.” She motioned towards the kitchen behind him, where another waitress went to pick up food for one of the booths. “How are you? Did you have a good trip?”

Lisa was Lance’s sister in law, mated and married to his oldest brother, Luis. She was a happy woman who was normally silent, except when she was working or with those that she was comfortable around. Honestly, he kind of adored her. That being said, she could be a little nosy at times too.

Her question honestly surprised him though. “Didn’t…Mamá or Papá mention anything?” Veronica had certainly known, and it wasn’t like his family to not include someone because they were an Omega, so he was sure that wasn’t the reason why she didn’t know what happened.

Her eyes darted left and right before landing on him again. “They did, but they also gave us very strict instructions not to talk about it with anyone else. I thought that maybe you wanted that, and had another story, but I guess not.”

Lance was completely taken back by that. What the hell? “No, I’m not hiding anything. What happened, happened.”

Lisa nodded her head. “He’s not here with you?”

Realizing that she was asking about Keith, he shook his head. “Nah. We have a lot to do, and I volunteered to get food. We have nothing there. Bless him, he was willing to eat leftover for breakfast.”

The look on her face at that was hilarious.
“So you came to get food here. Good choice,” Lisa said with a nod. “So, what can I get you guys?”

Lance rambled off two different orders, fairly confident that he knew what Keith liked when it came to breakfast food at least. That wasn’t hard to keep track of. He also definitely knew how Keith liked his drinks.

Despite this, and knowing that Keith was teasing him about this being a test, he still suddenly felt his gut twist.

As Lisa put through his order to the kitchen, and went to help others, Lance sat and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. His phone buzzed in his pocket, and he was glad for the distraction.

His brow rose when he saw that it was a new chat with three other familiar names, the one that made the chat kind of freaking out.

Shiro: Is Keith okay? I called a minute ago and he didn’t answer me.

Lance: He’s in the shower?

Allura: I told you! It’s way too early for this.

Lance: Are you two texting in the same room?

Allura: Shiro just left. Keith called him back. Sounds unimpressed. Sorry about this!

“What are you smiling at?”

Lance jumped and looked up, eyes widening at the sight of his oldest brother. “You’re not supposed to freak out the customers, Luis.”

“You’re not a customer,” the man snorted, brown eyes flashing with amusement.

“Oh, I’m paying for food.” Sure, it was at a discount, but he was still paying for it.

Lance took in his oldest brother, frowning a bit at the dark circles under his eyes. “You okay? You look tired?”

“It’s nothing to worry about,” Luis assured him. He turned his attention back to Lance’s phone. “So, what were you smiling at? I really hope you’re not looking at dick pics in my diner again.”

“That was Marco,” Lance stressed, because he wasn’t a classless moron like his brother. Well, that was kind of mean, but the point still stood. As much as people thought that Lance was the flirt of the family, both Marco and Rachel were worse than he could ever hope to be. Wanting to change the topic, he said, “And Shiro was being paranoid.”

“Shiro?” Luis asked curiously.

“Oh, right. Keith’s older brother.” Instantly, Lance caught onto the fact that Luis straightened his shoulders. Uh oh.

“Keith. Your mate, right?”

Instead of answering that directly, he instead decided to get some answers while the cooks in the back prepared his food. “Do you know why Papá and Mamá don’t want people talking about him? Cause I’m cool with it personally.”
Bingo. Luis absolutely looked interested. He glanced around the room and leaned closer. “I think that it has to do with Veronica, you know? Her cases and everything.”

What? “What?”

“Look,” Luis said with a shake of his head. “I’m sure everyone just wants the real story first, that’s all. And I’m sure Papá will want to have a get-together.”

Lance quirked up an eyebrow. “Uh, I actually like him, so if everyone could not freak my antisocial mate out, that’d be nice.”

Dark brown eyes searched his face curiously. “Do you?”

There it was. His family was close, and he knew that some of their minds were going to go to the same place that Hunk, Pidge, and Matt’s did first. They knew him, so they were taking his side in an argument that didn’t exist over whose fault the situation was. They probably thought that Keith lured him in and used him.

“Yeah.” He opened his phone again, going to the pictures and pulled up one of Keith looking confused while Hunk laughed heartedly. That was on purpose. If Hunk trusted Keith, it was a pretty good indication to others. “Look at him. He’s beautiful. Strong. Can be a bit grumpy. Tries real hard. Is adorable oblivious to some things.” Lance sighed, picturing his mate.

Saying that he liked Keith was putting things simple. The attraction had been there since the beginning, and they had definitely seen one another in some pretty bad situations so far. This wasn’t at all what Lance had planned, wasn’t where he thought his life was going to go, but all things considered, he couldn’t complain.

“Huh.” Lance looked up at Luis, who stared back at him with interest. “Well look at that. You do like him.”

“I just said that?”

“Yeah, but you’re using your ‘I have a massive crush on this person’ voice and face.” A slight smirk spread across his lips.

Lance spluttered at that. “I have no such face.”

“You absolutely do,” Lisa toned in, walking behind Luis towards the counter between the kitchen and the front, where she grabbed two plates to bring down to an elderly couple that always ate there. Lance saw them every time he showed up in the morning.

He groaned and slumped down slightly. “Can I just have our food to go? Got lots to do today.”

“Oh yeah, like what?” Lisa asked curiously, looking at the take out boxes that were placed behind her. Lance was a bit disappointed to see that they weren’t his, but another woman’s a few seats down from him.

“We’re cleaning the apartment top to bottom,” Lance said with a groan. He really wasn’t looking forward to that, but it would make everything seem new again. “Gonna redecorate a little bit too, get some groceries.” He narrowed his eyes at Luis. “Did Marco lose his phone again? He won’t answer me, and he needs to come and get his shit out of Keith’s room.”

“Keith has a separate room from you?” Luis asked with a raised eyebrow.
“He just moved across the country to be here with me, leaving his home and family behind. I have a spare room. I think it’s only fair that he gets his own space, right? I mean, he’s totally down for cuddling too, but it’s the right thing to do. This whole thing is new.” He couldn’t help but smirk, wanting to share an idea of his. “Plus it means there’s still a door I can drop him off at after dates.”

Before Luis could answer, Lisa said, “That’s actually really sweet of you, Lance.” She nudged her husband. “Take some notes from your brother. He’s clearly the romantic in the family.”

Luis looked unimpressed, but Lance couldn’t help but preen. He had always been a little jealous of Luis, despite their age difference. His brother was, in general, bigger than average, kind of like Hunk. He was taller, broader, stronger. He was everything an Alpha should be.

Lance knew that he couldn’t truly judge people with those outlines they gave you in school health classes of what typical Alphas and Omegas looked like or anything like that, but that was easier said than done.

“We should have dinner sometime!” Lisa added, looking at two more boxes, nodding her head, and setting them in front of her. “Just the four of us.” She paused thoughtfully. “Well, maybe the kids too. Get to meet him.”

Lance looked down at the foot, opening both of them to make sure that they were right. Not that he doubted the cooks or anything here, he just really didn’t want any surprise lactose. He was pretty sure that Keith had his pills for it, but didn’t want it on there, just in case. “I don’t know…”

“It’s going to happen sooner rather than later,” Luis pointed out to him. “If it’s antisocial, would it be better to do it in small groups?”

Well, he did have a point. “I’ll talk to Keith about it.” He wasn’t going to force his mate into a situation he was super uncomfortable with, even if he knew that his whole family was going to be introduced to him eventually. “Gotta take him to meet Mamá and Papá first, you know?” Surely they understood that.

Luis nodded his head in assent to that, because yes, he did get it. Lance stood to get up, grimacing a little bit as he moved his side the wrong way. His brother looked at him, concern written across his features.

“It’s fine, just my stitches.” He laughed. “Keith’s lucky. He gets to get his stitches out in a couple days. I have to wait a week longer.”

“What stitches?” Luis demanded, and Lance’s smile fell.

Right, Veronica hadn’t known about that too. His parents hadn’t told them anything. There was more than one reason that he needed to talk with his parents first to figure out what the hell was going on.

Looking around to make sure no one was watching them, Lance put a grin on his face as he tugged his shirt up to show them the stitches. “I’m a badass hero. Can’t talk about it though, it’s an on-going investigation.” He dropped his shirt and went through his phone, looking for a picture that showed the right side of Keith’s face. “He’s a badass too.”

An odd array of emotions passed over Luis’ face. “Lance…”

“Calm your worried scent,” he replied quickly, already catching it. No one liked the scent of a worried Alpha. “Neither one of us did this to one another, and the ones that did are behind bars.” He paused, knowing that showing up home with a gunshot wound wasn’t really winning him or Keith
any brownie points. “Look, I was miserable for the past year, you know that. Now, I’m feeling pretty good. Doesn’t that mean something?”

“It does,” Lisa said. “It means more than anything, Lance.”

There was a reason that he always liked Lisa more than the people that Marco and Rachel always brought around. “Thanks. Now, I need to head home before this gets cold. Gotta do the food justice, right?”

Luis smiled a bit. “Bring Keith by for lunch here sometime so we can show him what else we have.”

A wave of warmth rushed through Lance. Luis was taking him at his word. He wouldn’t have offered if he wasn’t willing to listen and give Keith a shot too. Knowing that he had half of his siblings on his side made him feel a lot better.

He waved his hand as he picked up the two boxes. “Will do!”

As Lance left, he heard Lisa say, “See, it’s just like Veronica said. Maybe we don’t have to worry about him as much as we thought.”

“Maybe not, but we’ll see.”

He frowned a bit. They would see that there was no reason to worry.

…

“Honey, I’m home!” Lance cried out as he threw himself into the apartment after struggling to get the door open with arms filled with food and coffee. He had originally intended on knocking, but he kind of wanted to do that for once. It was a bit of a struggle, but he managed to do it.

Keith peeked his head out of the door to the room that would be his, lips ticking up to a smile. “What happened to your special knock?”

Setting the food and drinks on the counter, he looked back at Keith with purposely wide eyes. “Right you are! For all you know, I could be Lance’s sexy, identical twin, come to swoop you off your feet before he can.”

An unattractive snort escaped the Omega’s lips as he rolled his eyes. “Can’t have that. Get knocking.”

A bit thrilled that Keith was playing along, Lance did the same rhythmic tap as earlier and then pointed at the food with dramatic jazz hands. “Come, eat!”

He couldn’t help but take Keith in as he came in closer. His hair was tugged back off of the base of his neck, which was probably for the best since the house was pretty warm, a grey tshirt, and black jeans on. It worked for him, it really, really did, but Lance felt hot just looking at him.

“Question, do you have shorts?” Lance handed him the drink with his name on it, and the meal without the cheese.

“Not with me,” Keith replied as they made their way over to the couch to eat. “Mom’s already got a lot of things packed and she’s going to get them shipped out today. I should have some in a few weeks.”

Lance watched him balance his food and drink, grimacing a little bit. He really wished he had
enough room for a table, especially since there was something very wrong in his mind about having a mate but no table for them to have a decent meal at.

“Go Krolia,” he said, instead of ranting about that. “You know, if you’re too hot, you can wear some of mine for now. Your hips aren’t that much wider than mine, so you should be okay.”

Keith looked down at himself before looking at Lance with a raised eyebrow. Okay, that wasn’t a fair comparison. Keith definitely didn’t have the defined hips that some Omegas did, but they were wider than Lance’s. Whatever. He wore most clothes except for his jeans baggy anyway.

The Omega hummed thoughtfully. “Yeah, that might be nice. I’m used to the heat, but the humidity…”

“Yeah, that’s a killer.” He eyed his mate for a moment. “Did I do good?” He motioned towards the food.

Poking around and tasting the food, and then the drink, Keith smiled at him with that small, gentle look. “Yeah, you did good.” He peered curiously at the food. “This is actually really good. Where did you get it?”

Lance preened a little bit. “A diner my brother and sister-in-law own and run.” He thought about their offer for a moment. Might as well get that over with too. “They offered to have us over for dinner, or we could go to their diner too. But, only if you want. And not today or anything.” He smiled sheepishly. “I have a big family. It might be best to introduce you to them one small group at a time.”

Keith tensed slightly, but then relaxed. Chewing his food carefully, he was clearly lost in thought for a moment before nodding. “I’d rather do that. Small groups.” He bit his lip for a moment. “Shouldn’t your parents be first?”

“Yeah, them and my abuela. She lives with them. But again, not today, and not tomorrow either. We’ve got time.” He smiled. “I kind of want to be selfish and keep you to myself for a bit.”

The wariness on Keith’s face lessened and his words, amusement overtaking it. “Oh, yeah? What do you plan on doing with me then?”

Mother of god. Did he have to word it that way? Lance saw the mischievous look on his eyes, and realized that he had worded it that way on purpose.

Two could play at that game.

He leaned a bit closer. “Well, I was thinking…” He trailed a finger up and down Keith’s arm, watching the muscles jump under the touch. “Maybe, if you’re up for it, we could…clean up the house and go shopping?”

Keith barked out a surprised laugh, eyes shining with genuine amusement. “Yeah, that’s doable.”

The two of them ate in a comfortable silence, Keith taking their garbage to throw out afterwards, while Lance went to grab both of them some more acceptable clothes (also, he definitely needed a shower). They were going to be doing a lot of working, and he didn’t exactly have AC.

They’d probably have to look into getting a portable one, or more fans at least.

Keith was already hard at work again by the time Lance came out of the shower, feeling fresh and clean. It almost made him feel lazy, seeing how much Keith had gotten done.
He hadn’t gone through any of Marco’s stuff, of course, but luckily, Marco had put everything into boxes. He just kind of left it there since he didn’t need it when moving in with his current girlfriend, claiming that she had everything he needed there.

Keith had stacked all the boxes in an impressive pile in the hall. Lance raised an eyebrow at it, because his mate clearly had some mad Tetris skills. “Is that all his boxes?”

“I dunno,” Keith admitted, wiping a bit of sweat away. “It looks like all the boxes that were in the room, and I took the sheets and everything off the bed, and put all the clothes into that hamper that was here. There are some things in the closet though I didn’t want to touch.”

Lance made a choking sound when he saw the two hampers full of stuff. “Keith! You’re not supposed to mix colours and whites! Everyone knows that!”

Keith stared at him. Lance stared back. Then he pictured Keith’s normal attire, which was 95% black, despite the fact that he was currently wearing one of Lance’s blue tanktops and a pair of his grey shorts. Then he pictured Keith’s family, and got the distinct feeling that white wasn’t a thing around often.

Okay, maybe it was excusable.

“Fine, I’ll be in charge of the laundry,” Lance said with a sigh. Maybe he’d actually do it regularly now, not just when he ran out of underwear. It wasn’t like he was going to leave everything around for Keith to do. He made his way into the room and looked at the closet. “Yeah, this is all Marco’s stuff. The liar. I thought he said that he packed everything. One sec.” He dashed out of the room, heading into the storage room that they were going to tackle next. Then again, a lot of that stuff was Marco’s too. How is it that his brother had so much stuff, but was fine with leaving it all here?

He found a couple empty boxes, and brought them back to the room, where he took to cleaning out Marco’s stuff, just in case there were some inappropriate things. For as much as he had the rep as a flirt, his brother was all that and more. Also sometimes a bit of a stoner, but who was he to call him out?

Keith was working on cleaning the room, wiping the dust off of the dresser that was there – a spare his parents put in there when they got a new set. Thankfully, all the drawers were empty, since Marco did need his clothes.

Eventually, all of Marco’s stuff was piled in the hallway. Lance stood in his own doorway, wiping sweat from his forehead. Yes, they needed to look into getting a cheap AC system. Or a not cheap one. He was willing to splurge on that instead of groceries at this point.

Lance groaned as he eyed the pile of boxes, taking a picture of it to send to his brother. “If Marco doesn’t come get his shit, I swear, I’m going to sell it.”

“I don’t think your brother would appreciate you selling his stuff.”

“I wouldn’t be, yet.” Lance said with a grin, sending that exact text to his brother. “But it’s not a bad idea to sell some stuff. My stuff I mean. I have things I’m storing for no real reason.” It could be their AC fund.

“You don’t have to do that to make room for me,” Keith assured him, guilt flashing in his eyes.

Lance got the feeling that Keith absolutely could live in a minimalistic environment, but he didn’t want that. “It’s not that,” he clarified. “This is a time of change. Good things. Growing up in all the
best ways. Opening a new chapter of our lives. You know?"

He wasn’t lying or making excusing. Now that he thought about it, that was absolutely what he wanted. He had been the baby of his family for a long time, even with his niece and nephew around. In fact, he was still treated that way by the majority of his siblings.

He had a mate. He was married. He had helped take down a trafficking ring. Had been shot in the side, and then managed to take someone else down. In Lance’s opinion, he was now a certified badass. He didn’t want to be treated like a child anymore.

The honesty must have come through in his words, or his scent, or both, because Keith’s expression softened a little bit. He nodded and said, “I like that idea.”

Lance couldn’t remember a time when he did something that felt so wonderfully domestic with either of his past girlfriends. Well, this was domestic, but that wasn’t the point. He didn’t like cleaning, and he was getting tired and a bit annoyed at times, but it was still nice.

Of course, they had their small squabbles too. It was bound to happen when working in the heat for so long.

“We can’t move the TV there,” Lance had argued over how they could move things around in the living room. “The sunlight will hit it!”

“If you put the couch here though, it kind of separates this room into living room and kitchen areas,” Keith had pointed out.

Still, the need to see the TV meant that Lance won that round.

When they were going through the kitchen, looking for things they’d need to buy (Lance had embarrassingly few dishes and cooking utensils – something Hunk had always frowned at), Keith seemed to realize something very important.

“We need a new knife set,” he noted, looking at the old knife block that Lance had.

“What’s wrong with that?” the Alpha asked him. “It cuts things.”

Keith stared at him blankly for a moment before picking up one of the knives and throwing it at the wall, where it bounced off and fell onto the floor.

“What the ever living fuck?!” Lance couldn’t stop himself from raising his voice. “Why would you do that?”

“If it was a good one, it would have stuck in the wall,” Keith noted. “We’re getting a new set.”

Lance eyed the knife on the floor and decided to give in to that one, but only because if it didn’t make a mark on the already peeling paint on the wall, it probably wasn’t that great for cutting.

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“Ugh, I need another shower,” Lance said while stretching. He felt disgusting, but at the same time, he couldn’t help but feel accomplished. The apartment looked good. Almost like a nice blank canvas that they were going to throw their own personal mess of paint on soon. How was it only a little after noon?

Okay, yes, they got up really early, but still, it felt like it should have been later.

Keith hummed a bit. “Another shower sounds good. Probably should have just waited earlier.”
“Nothing wrong with just cooling yourself off and wiping off sweat,” Lance pointed out while still slumped over one arm of the couch. “Just don’t wash your hair again. That’s bad for it.”

“What would I do without you here to save my hair?” Keith replied sarcastically, leaning on the other arm.

“Grow a mullet?”

Keith snorted, opening his eyes and looking at him, fingers reaching up to tug on his own black hair, still back in a ponytail. “I could chop it all off.”

Lance caught the challenge in his voice, because damn, he had already let it slip that he liked Keith’s hair, didn’t he? Conceding, because for some reason, he could see Keith picking up the dull knife from the floor and hacking his own hair off, he muttered, “Don’t do that.”

A part of Lance wanted to joke about saving time by sharing the shower, but he wasn’t going to push for that. Not that he wanted anything to do with shower sex, that was just a cracked skull waiting to happen. Intimate shower time though? He was there for that.

They weren’t ready for that though; it was only part way into their first day actually living together. Instead, he once again let Keith go, knowing that he’d only be in there for a couple minutes to cool off.

While he was waiting, his phone finally buzzed, a text from Marco coming through. One that made him huff and frown.

Marco: Why is all my stuff in the hall?

Lance: Gotta get it out of Keith’s room.

Marco: Why are you giving your mate my room? What’s wrong with your bed?

Lance: You didn’t pay rent even when you were here.

Lance: I ain’t no storage place.

Lance: Just come get it.

Out of all his siblings, he tended to clash with Marco and Rachel the most. Maybe because they were closer in age. They both just knew how to get under his skin.

“You okay?”

Startled, Lance looked back up at Keith, who was once again wearing the clothes that Lance lent him, wet hair sticking to his neck.

“Marco’s being a dick is all,” Lance admitted. “Don’t worry about it. It happens all the time.” He stood up, stretching as he headed towards the bathroom. He didn’t often take more than one shower, but it was gruesomely hot that morning, and they had done a lot of physical work.

He didn’t take long in the cool water, and when he was dry and clothed again, he headed back to the front room to see that Keith had divided the leftovers onto plates, handing him the first one that came out of the microwave.
With the loud grumbling of his stomach, Lance almost wanted to cry at the thoughtfulness. He had been so tired and hot that it hadn’t even occurred to him that he was hungry too. He really needed to get out of that bad habit of forgetting to eat. It happened more than he’d like to admit.

Sure, they argued a bit that day, and didn’t agree on everything, but Lance felt incredibly optimistic about this sudden cohabitation. There were going to be hard times and trials ahead, he wasn’t stupid enough to think otherwise, but he had a really, really good feeling about this.

... 

Lance didn’t want to admit that he was that person, but he really, truly did love shopping. Often times, it was an activity that people said Omegas wanted to do and enjoyed, and that if Alphas did, it made them softer, or wrong in a way.

He strongly disagreed with this. Some people found it stressful or annoying, but not him. Lance loved browsing, love testing tastes, scents, new clothes and so much more. He could honestly spend hours going from store to store.

Keith, as it turns out, was not into shopping all that much, but Lance kind of expected that. It was why, as much as he’d like to browse a lot, he mentally narrowed it down to just a couple places.

Given the general desire that Omegas had to have just the right sheets and blankets for their heats, there were a lot of stores that specialized in linen and houseware. There was one that his Mamá always enjoyed and claimed they had the best sheets, blankets, towels, and so much more. It seemed like a safe place to start.

“How much are we buying that we need a cart?” Keith asked him with amusement.

“You need sheets, I need sheets, we need a cover for the couch, and we might as well get those fancy knives and pots and pans that you wanted.”

“They’re not fancy. It’s practical,” Keith replied with a roll of his indigo eyes. Despite this, he did sound genuinely amused.

Lance liked to think of himself as a sophisticated person, but admittedly, his Papá got him a set of sheets on sale and he had them since college, so no wonder Keith found them uncomfortable.

The fact that there were stations where you could test the feel of the fabrics was not something Lance was aware of before that day. Keith sent him the oddest look when he admitted that.

“They have things like this in department stores,” Keith said slowly. “Usually just little tiny things in the isles that don’t help much, but they’re there. How else would you know if you want something?”

Lance had no argument for that. He stood with Keith, running his hand over the different fabrics, and couldn’t help but be in awe at Keith’s ability to tell the smallest bit of difference when they felt the same to him. He wondered if this was something all Omegas could do, or if this was a Keith-thing.

“These ones are all okay,” he decided, pointing to a few different ones. “This one’s my favourite here though.”

Lance felt the fabric, and couldn’t help but smile at it. “Okay, I like this one. Let’s get everything in this.” He wasn’t just joking about it. The thought of laying on it and curling up in it made him want to go home then and there to have a nap.

“You do realize they come in different colours, right?” Keith asked, indigo eyes flashing with
amusement. He pointed at the colour tag by the fabric. “I think that tells of which one it is and we just look for colours?”

Lance narrowed his eyes at the purple tag and nodded his head. “Let’s do this!”

The two of them made their way around the store. For Keith’s room, they ended up getting a lamp, a desk, a small carpet, new pillows, and a sheet set to match the blankets that Krolia would be sending. He insisted that he didn’t need a lot, and the room already had a dresser and rickety shelf that he said was fine. It was a lot to fit into a small room, but they could make it work. Everything for him was greys and reds to go with his red and black blankets.

Lance settled on soft blue sheets, practically preening at his find. “They’re just the right colour, and they’re going to be so soft. God, I want a new blanket to match.”

“You’re like an Omega at heart,” Keith replied with a laugh.

“I really, really am.” There was absolutely no shame in that. In fact, he would never go back to normal things again now that he was introduced to this kind of luxury. Bless Keith for coming into his life.

Towels and clothes were another thing on the list, but Lance had always had a love for fluffy towels, so they didn’t have to spend too much time figuring that out.

Honestly, as much as Lance loved shopping, he was surprised by just how much fun he was actually having with Keith. Though he was starting to feel a bit apprehensive about how full their chart had gotten by the end of it. It was absolutely overflowing.

“I have a confession,” Keith said as they waited in line for the cash register. “I have a prepaid card that Shiro and Allura gave me. It’ll cover all this no problem.” He looked almost ashamed of hiding that fact, and Lance was going to ask why he did, but realized that this was one of those things that Keith could have. Small secrets like this weren’t an awful thing at this point.

“Remind me to thank them,” was what he settled on saying, and it seemed to be the right thing, because Keith instantly relaxed and shifted closer to him again.

Grocery shopping was one of those things that Lance didn’t overly enjoy, but for some reason, it was actually pretty fun with Keith. Maybe that was just the fact that they were still newly mated, hell, they everything about them was new. Everything was new now.

The second that they pulled back into the parking lot of the apartment though, Lance looked up and scowled. “God, I wish we had an elevator.”

Keith hummed in acknowledgement, eyeing all of their purchases. “Normally, I’d say let’s just try to drag it up but—well.” It wasn’t their combined strength or stubbornness that was in question. It was the size and shape of everything.

That being said, they still took up as much as they could in one go. It was pretty impressive, but Lance’s side was aching by the time he got upstairs. He tried to hide it, but Keith shook his head and pressed a hand to his shoulder. “You start unpacking stuff here, I’ll go get the other stuff.” He picked up the keys to Lance’s car, neither one of them wanting to leave it unlocked.

“You got your knife?” He was only partially joking. Lance wasn’t exactly proud of where he lived. Nothing had actually happened nearby, but you never knew.

“More than one.” Keith smirked at him, no doubt noticing the way that Lance looked him over to see
where he could *possibly* be hiding not one, but *two* weapons on him.

The Alpha decided that he’d rather not know, and honestly, it sent a thrill through him. Oh no, did he have some kind of secret danger kink or something? He didn’t need that in his life. Or did he?

He *should* have tackled the groceries first, but he really wanted to break out the new couch cover. By the time Keith got back, carrying an impressive amount of stuff, Lance had successfully covered the couch with a simple, dark grey colour that instantly made the room look a lot better in his humble opinion.

Lance yawned and held his arms out to Keith. “Nap and cuddle?” He was *really* tired.

Keith chuckled a bit. “Groceries.”

“But—“

“Food goes bad Lance.” They hadn’t found a fan or AC that day, so yeah, that was kind of fair. Still, he made a show of groaning and slowly getting up, before diving into the rest of the domestic work that they had to get done that day.

Yeah, Lance thought as he glanced at Keith. He was sure that they were going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

The siblings slowly start appearing! Also, take all my fluff and domestic junk! Don't worry, things eventually get going more, but this is kind of what you signed up for with this fic.

Thank you for all the amazing feedback even though I didn't get to respond to everyone! You're all amazing!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was a knife pressed against Keith’s cheek, the blade digging into his soft skin at the slightest movement, making him hold his breath, no matter how much his chest burned.

A tall figure loomed over him, platinum hair falling down around them like a silvery prison, dead, navy eyes staring down at

“Be a good little Omega,” Lotor said in his silky voice, one hand pressing the knife into his skin, the other sliding down.

“No,” Keith muttered, wanting to struggle but the blade made his face burn. Panic welled up in him. “Get off of me!”

The hand stopped, but then slid back up, grabbing Keith’s chin and jerking it to the side. He cried out as the knife cut him, and the scent gland that started just behind his pulse point and ran around the back of his neck was exposed.

The scent gland that had no mark on it.

“No!” Keith struggled as Lotor shifted closer to him. “No!”

A hand slapped his face with enough force to jerk his head the other way. He blinked wildly, and suddenly, it wasn’t Lotor on top of him. Instead, it was a very different, but just as familiar, man.

“Shut up! You asked for this. Why else would you come over here so close to your heat?”

“I didn’t! I didn’t know! Let me go!” He struggled and struggled, but this Alpha was much stronger than him, this Alpha had been prepared, tying his hands down.

"You owe me.” He moved towards Keith’s exposed scent gland. “You killed my pup, so I’ll put as many more in you as I want.”

"No! Lance!”

Keith’s eyes snapped open as he gasped for air. A second later, he was sitting up, looking around wildly, not recognizing his surroundings at all. His hand went to the back of his neck, slapping onto the skin harshly, feeling the now familiar mark that was there.

Right, he was in his new room in the apartment he shared with Lance, his mate. Lotor was in prison awaiting a trial, and the other Alpha, while still free, had a restraining order, and had taken another Omega as well. Not only that, but they were both across the country.

He was in Florida. He was so far physically removed from all of that. Yes, his environment was unfamiliar, but he was living with an Alpha that respected him and treated him as an equal, one that he knew would never hurt him. Not like them. He was okay. Everything was okay.

Keith rolled over on his bed, a slight, instinctual purr running through him as his skin slid of the comfortable sheets. He wasn’t one to purr often, having grown up in a place that still held that old fashioned belief that purring in public was a faux pas, barring cubs and their mothers, of course. It
was much more accepted these days, a sweet sign of affection akin to a quick kiss or a hug. Then again, there wasn’t too much that could be done to prompt proper purring in public, since it required a high level of comfort. Comfortable, cool materials, and a safe environment, were easy ways to bring the sound out of Keith.

He looked at his phone, fully charged now, and groaned a bit. It was far too early to be up once again, but there was absolutely no way he was going back to sleep after that nightmare. Still, the sun was starting to come up, so it wasn’t like it was too early.

With another groan, Keith rolled himself over so that he was sitting at the edge of the bed. A part of him wished that he had curled up with Lance in the Alpha’s room that night, but he was also glad that he hadn’t. The comfort would be nice, but he also didn’t want to wake him up. His mate had been nothing but amazing throughout everything that happened. At the very least, he deserved to sleep in.

Not to mention Keith wanted to get used to his room. He was actually beyond flattered that Lance thought to give him his own space, and he was going to use it.

As he stretched his arms out in front of him, his mind began to wander. A part of Keith had always known that he’d end up with a mark on his neck. He had thought that, if he had a choice in it, it would be a Beta’s mark, but a part of him had also accepted the fact that there’d likely be no choice involved. Either way, the illusion of complete independence and freedom was not one that he expected. In fact, he had never heard of a newly mated couple having separate rooms.

In a way, he understood why that was. Some deep, instinctual part of himself didn’t like being alone now. He wanted to be surrounded by the calming, nutmeg smell that Lance exuded, but he also still was very thankful he had a little spot that he could call his own, where he could put his own things around without worrying that he was taking up too much of Lance’s space.

Keith stood up and stretched again. He yawned loudly and walked out into the hall, managing to step over a spot that he already knew squeaked loudly as he moved across the hall to go to the washroom. He glanced at himself in the mirror, grimacing a bit as he ran his hands through his messy hair, his fingers sliding down to the stitches that would be coming out soon. The doctor in Vegas had apparently sent everything to Lance’s doctor here (or, well, his assistant did), so someone should be getting a hold of them soon. It was going to leave a fantastic scar across his face.

Lance told him that it should remind him that he’s strong. That he was able to fight in a way many others couldn’t, and that the scar would make him look like a badass. That was still up for debate.

Right now, it was making him think of his nightmares, of the vicious people that hurt him in the past, thinking that they had a right to him.

Taking a deep breath, Keith shook his head, using the washroom and then washing his hands. He stared down at the sink, knowing he wouldn’t be able to get back to sleep.

Lance mentioned over and over again that he wanted to do the whole courting thing as right as they could. Generally speaking, that meant dates and exchanging gifts, all in a fairly innocent sense. It was distinctly different than actually being together as significant others, especially since it wasn’t uncommon for more than one Alpha to try and court an Omega at one time. So it spoke volumes when an Omega responded to one of them. When the two people officially got together, they weren’t courting anymore.

Keith never did that whole thing with his past boyfriends. Not entirely. Sure, there were some sweet moments with gifts and stuff, but it didn’t really count. That made sense though, because they were
only young and figuring things out. Most people didn’t count anything teenagers did, but if a relationship lasted, Keith didn’t see why it couldn’t count.

Admittedly, others had tried to court Keith after he graduated, but he liked to think that he turned them down politely and quickly so that he wouldn’t be leading anyone on. Then he had to be stupid and get pulled in by a pretty face that hid the monster underneath. Even after that, when he was directly dealing with the trauma, others had tried to approach Keith to court him, but Acxa and Shiro were very swift in chasing them off. Until Lotor, that is.

Keith had made it very clear to Lotor that he wasn’t interested. Very clear. Now, he wanted to make it undeniably clear to Lance that yes, he wanted to do this. He had no interest in some weird, kind of sleazy situation where they only met up for heats and ruts. The thought genuinely grossed him out. He would never want to be part of something like that. Not that it was common, but he had heard of it.

Alphas were normally the ones that started the whole courting thing, and though Lance had given him so much so far, none of it really counted as a courting gift. That was just settling into their new home. That’s why Keith was going to be the one to do it first.

Okay, maybe making breakfast didn’t count in general, but he was going to make it count. Though Lance insisted that he didn’t have to impress him in any way, he was still going to try.

The day before, he had sent Hunk a text asking what Lance’s favourite thing for breakfast was. The other Alpha had responded all too eagerly, and Keith got the distinct feeling that it had been a long time since someone had done something nice for Lance simply because they cared.

Though they were still figuring one another out, there was no doubt in Keith’s mind that he cared about Lance a lot. He wouldn’t bother trying to make this work if he didn’t.

Keith, admittedly, wasn’t the most amazing cook in the world, but he didn’t hate cooking by any means. It was nice to be able to make himself (and others) something that wasn’t just instant noodles when he felt the urge to (it didn’t happen often). Like all other Omegas, he took classes that involved cooking both while he was in school, and technically after it as well. It was very common for Omegas to form groups to improve upon things like that. That and all other ‘Omega appropriate’ activities.

He couldn’t eyeball recipes for the life of him, but he could follow instructions well enough, becoming more familiar with things over time, but that’s how it worked for most people, wasn’t it?

Breakfast though, that was something he was really good at. Probably because it was generally pretty easy, but also because he loved breakfast food. Lance, as it turned out, really liked breakfast sandwiches, which were easy enough to make. It probably wouldn’t be as good as what they made at his brother’s diner, but hey, he had something to prove.

Keith blew his bangs out of his eyes, only for them to fall back in. Instead of taking his hair back into a ponytail, he tugged his bangs up into one on the top of his head. It looked ridiculous, but hey, that was fine.

And to think, Lance thought that getting their small, little grill was a bad idea.

Bread. Eggs. Bacon. Ham. Cheese (for Lance only). This was something easy that Keith could make with very little concentration, so as he cooked, also grabbing some oranges and apples to cut up, his mind wandered.
Yesterday had been an oddly fun day. He didn’t normally think of daily chores as fun, but somehow, it had. It let him see small things about Lance – like how he was okay with most things not being name brand, but there were a few things that just had to be. He, on the other hand, didn’t care in the slightest.

Keith definitely still felt a little displaced in his environment, but to fair, it was only the start of his second full day in Florida. It hadn’t completely sunk in yet that he was actually staying there, that this was his home now, and not just a vacation.

He had actually given up everything to come across the country with a man that he barely knew, just because they were mates. The logical thing to do would have been to wait until he was closer to his heat, keeping in touch with Lance and learning about one another from the safety of his own home. At the same time though, they probably would have been miserable, and they definitely would have been strangers still when his heat was due.

Keith’s breath caught in his throat, and he nearly let the bacon burn before he kept moving. Back in Vegas, he had gone through his chemically induced, yet also chemically shortened heat without Lance, and he had been miserable. He couldn’t imagine going through an actual, proper heat without his mate there to scent him, help him in any way he could. No thanks. Keith was already comfortable with the knowledge of how that was going to end up. Three months down the line? If they weren’t comfortable around one another by that point, they were doing something severely wrong.

The one good thing about being an Omega (a healthy one, at least) was that heats were generally very easy to track and predict (when someone actually tried). Alphas, on the other hand, had absolutely no way to know or control when they were going to go into a rut.

Generally speaking, they were triggered by certain pheromones, usually from Omegas, but there were other factors that could make them more likely to go into one, or to make one rut worse than another.

Keith shuddered at the thought of it. Alphas in ruts always smelled disgusting to him, and his own personal experience came with a traumatic memory that made his stomach twist horribly still. The putrid smell, the lack of control or care to if the other was hurting, it was horrifying.

Of course, he knew that Lance wouldn’t react to any other Omegas, only him, so it wasn’t like he was going to come home in a rut and surprise him. He also knew that Alphas could control themselves more than they let on, he had seen his sister in a rut before, and she hadn’t done anything horrible (even if she still smelled awful). In fact, she explained to him that in the health classes that were separate from Omegas, that they explained that Alphas could train themselves to use a safe or trigger word that would snap them out of whatever headspace they were in. Keith was her twin, so he had known hers’ (as had their mother and SHiro) in case something bad happened, but she had enough control of herself so it never had to come up.

He’d have to find out if Lance had something like that, because apparently ruts could be pretty fun if both partners were willing. Still, it left Keith feeling uncomfortable. If Lance went into a rut that day, he didn’t think he’d be able to deal with that. Supposedly he’d be drawn to his mate’s scent, but what if he wasn’t?

What if he was?

Shaking his head, Keith forced himself to think of something else. He glanced at the clock, making a mental note to sit down and actually call his mother later to assure her that everything was okay. Maybe Shiro as well.
A loud yawn caught his attention, and Keith looked over his shoulder as Lance stumbled into the room, nearly tripping over his own feet. The apprehension that he was still feeling instantly washed away as he watched his mate stumble over nothing. How could he ever be afraid of him? Lance wouldn’t hurt him.

The Alpha yawned a second time, coming close to him. “Is this how it’s going to be every day? Me waking up and you already running around like you’ve got something to prove?”

No, definitely not. Keith shook his head. “I’m just getting used to a new place. I never sleep well in new places in the first couple nights.” It made moving houses for his brief stint in foster care really suck. Not wanting to think about that, he leaned back so that his back was against Lance’s chest and looked up at him. “Besides, I’m courting you as much as you’re courting me. I wanted to make food to impress you.”

Lance seemed taken back for a moment, his expression softening, cheeks turning a dusty pink. “I adore you.” Those words alone made Keith flush, a rush of happiness passing through him. “This smells so good.” His hand reached out towards the stove.

“Nope.” Keith shoved his hand away. “Not done.”

“Just one piece?” Lance asked, no doubt pouting behind him.

“I’ll fight you,” the Omega warned him.

Lance paused for a moment before laughing a bit. “Fine, fine. Anything I can help with?”

“You can cut up the fruit if you want?”

Lance must have nodded, because he moved away, getting one of their new knives and working at cutting up the apples and oranges.

Okay, maybe this wasn’t actually a courting gift or anything, but there was something really nice about working together to make their breakfast, especially when Lance went ahead to make their morning coffee, even thinking to get Keith’s lactaid to go with the sheer amount of cream he liked in his.

They didn’t have a table, but they did buy a couple of tv tables yesterday so they wouldn’t have to rely on the…questionable coffee table. They weren’t exactly the fanciest things around, but they also weren’t the old, ugly, flimsy things that Lance had found in the storage room the day before. Keith had set a book on one of those and it had fallen over.

“The next place we live in needs room for a table,” Keith blurted out.

Lance paused, having been almost viscerally enjoying the breakfast sandwich Keith had made for him. “Is that all?”

“Hmm?”

“The next place we go? Is room for a table the only thing on your mind?”

Keith was honestly surprised by the question, because who wanted to talk about moving to a new place when they had just cleaned and fixed up this one to the best of their abilities?

What did Keith want in his future home? He wanted a yard. It could be a little one, but he wanted a
place to go outside that was relatively safe. He wanted a few different rooms, and they might even need two bathrooms, though that wasn’t a necessity. He wanted a separate kitchen and living room (or at least a big enough space to clearly divide the two).

His thoughts surprised himself. When had *that* become his life? Then again, he had never truly let himself think about the future in an optimistic sense. A part of him had figured that he’d essentially end up as some asshole’s breeding mare (that asshole eventually being Lotor), and another part of him knew that he wouldn’t be able to live with himself that way. He never *really* saw a future for himself, let alone a future where he got a say, where he got some choices.

Now that he did, apparently the first thing on his mind was future kids and what he wanted his home to look like. Good god, what was *wrong* with him? He wasn’t exactly a domestic being or anything, and Lance wasn’t going to force him to do something he didn’t want to. He had as much freedom as an Omega in the US possible could.

“I don’t know,” he finally answered Lance’s question, not wanting to go into detail. He wanted to keep his thoughts to himself for now. “Just room for a table.”

Lance laughed. “Yeah, I think I’d like that too. *Especially* if you cook stuff like this.” The moan that escaped him as he ate almost made Keith blush. “I dunno whether I want to share this with the world or horde it to myself.”

“My limit of ‘good’ cooking is breakfast,” the Omega pointed out. “Rest is passable at best.”

“Eh, that’s what we have Hunk for.” Lance shrugged, clearly not caring that Keith felt like he couldn’t actually cook. Bless him for putting his actions where his words were: Lance definitely didn’t care if Keith was a perfect homemaker or not.

They ate peacefully, and Lance took their plates away when they were done to be cleaned later on that day, before flopping back down beside him, leaning onto him. “Hmm, I missed you. I woke up and was super confused why you weren’t there. I’m spoiled now.”

Keith felt his heart leap, and he couldn’t stop himself from smiling as he slid his arm around Lance’s shoulder, allowing the Alpha to lean onto him more, nuzzling his face into Keith’s neck. “Me too.”

“Separate rooms was stupid,” Lance mumbled.

“Maybe,” Keith agreed, “but I like my room.” He was glad to have his own space. It meant a lot to him, but he had missed being surrounded by Lance’s scent.

Instead of being insulted or put off, Lance’s face lit up. “I’m glad.” He leaned up, brushing his cheek against Keith’s gently. “Compromise with daily cuddles together?”

“I’d like that,” Keith admitted. He never thought he’d be a cuddler, never wanted to cuddle with his past boyfriends. Maybe it was because he was older and not an awkward teenager anymore, maybe it was because they were mates, maybe it was because Lance wasn’t this overwhelming, in your face Alpha. Yet, he was still strong in his own way, and really comforting too.

“Good,” Lance gently shoved him, and Keith went willingly so that his head was resting against the arm of the couch, Lance snuggled on his chest. “Cause I only have a few more lazy days left and I wanna be lazy.”

That was fair, all things considered. “Right, you start your job on Monday, right?”

Lance nodded his head. “I’m excited for it, I really am, but I also wanna be here with you.” He
pouted a bit. “I also have some classes to go to when I’m not working, and a thesis advisor and everything else. I’m going to be so busy.”

They were close enough for Keith to smell the guilt starting to come from him. He shook his head, running his hand up and down Lance’s back, fingers tracing his spine through his thin shirt. “It’s okay. Might give me a chance to figure out what I want to do with myself. Or what I can do.”

“Well, if you wanna take any classes or anything, just shove the papers my way to sign,” Lance mumbled, turning his nose into Keith’s neck.

“I still have my savings,” Keith noted thoughtfully, tilting his head slightly. “Are there any Omega friendly gyms around here?” He wanted to stay in shape, and exercise was a great way to pass time as well. Omega specific gyms were actually a fairly common thing, since all the shallow Alphas wanted their partner to look good, even after having pups. That took work and dedication, and even then, sometimes their bodies didn’t go back to the way they were before.

It was almost like growing kids was hard on someone’s body. Imagine that.

And also it gave a place for an Omega to go that was safe. There actually were quite a few things set up like that. Most people also didn’t want any harm to come to most Omegas, which seemed a bit contradictory, but that was fine by Keith if it worked in his favour.

“You know, I never thought to check.” He could feel Lance’s frown, even if he couldn’t see it. “But there should be. We can go take a look around.” He paused and looked up at Keith, blue eyes meeting indigo. “We can go by where I work too, so you know how to get there.”

Keith raised an eyebrow. “What good’s that going to do me?” Well, knowing where Lance was might help if something happened, so there was that.

“I was thinking, you have your license, right?” Keith nodded. “Right, so we yours changed, and I’ll sign the permission forms for you to drive, and you can drop me off for work so you’re not stuck here! The car’s just going to sit in a parking lot otherwise.”

Oh hell. This Alpha was going to kill him, and he wanted nothing more than to kiss him, but the angle was awkward and all he’d be able to do is press his lips against the top of his head, and that wasn’t what Keith wanted right now.

To hell with humility. He sent Lance a stern look and said, “Kiss me.”

Lance blinked once, twice, and then a teasing smile spread across his lips. He grabbed Keith’s hips and yanked him down so that his head slid off of the armrest and onto the couch’s cushion. He loomed over him, forearms braced on either side of Keith’s head. Despite this, the Omega didn’t at all feel caged in or uncomfortable.

Leaning down, the Alpha barely brushed his nose against Keith’s, one of his thin eyebrow arcing up. “You lllllliiiiiike me. You want me to hug you and kiss you and keep you forever.”

Keith narrowed his eyes at his mate, hands sliding up into his hair as he held him steady while leaning up and pressing his lips against his, because apparently he had to do everything.

Lance responded quickly, tilting his head so they could press against one another just-so, soft lips tasting of the citrus they ate that morning. Keith hummed appreciatively as his eyes closed, fingers digging into Lance’s humidity-curled morning hair.

A small little chirp escaped Keith’s throat, a distinctively Omega sound that only happened when
they were truly comfortable and happy. He rarely ever made that specific kind of sound before, but then again, chirps, coos and things like that didn’t really seem to go hand-in-hand with his deeper voice, and it was always a bit embarrassing.

Not that Lance seemed to care. He paused for a moment before kissing him with even more vigor. He shifted, leaning his weight on one arm while the other cupped Keith’s cheek, his thumb gently stroking back and forth across his skin and Keith parted his lips.

Time seemed to stop around them, even as they continued to move. It was getting far too warm to Keith. Not in a heat-kind of was (like what Omegas went through once every three months), but in a way that made him feel safe and loved, and it kind of made him want to cry. Honestly, he felt like he could give Lance everything then and there and not regret it in the least.

They were so distracted with one another that they didn’t hear a jingling outside of the door, nor did they hear the locks clicking. The peaceful bubble around them didn’t pop, it practically exploded as the door suddenly flew inward.

Lance’s reaction was so swift that Keith wasn’t even sure when he had moved. One second, his lips and tongue were wonderfully brushing against his, the next the Alpha was standing at the side of the couch between Keith and the door, a very light rumble of a growl causing him to vibrate.

Reality caught back up to the Omega, and he did feel alarmed at the sudden intrusion into their home. He stood up, shifting closer to Lance to stare at the intruder.

The young man was tall with dark brown hair, eyes regarding them almost blankly.

“Do you ever knock?” Lance snapped, and a quick look up at him told Keith that though they weren’t in any kind of danger, he wasn’t too happy.

“I have a key,” the man replied, holding it up.

“That doesn’t mean you’re not supposed to knock!” Lance growled at him. He glanced over at Keith, slipping a hand over his shoulders. “This fuckwad’s my brother, Marco. Marco, this is my mate, Keith.”

Subtly, Keith scented the air, and either Marco was using some kind of suppressant, or he was a Beta. The second one seemed more likely, given that neither Lance nor Veronica used suppressants.

Marco made no move to shake his hand or anything like that. He looked around the apartment before looking directly at Keith. “Well, things make a little more sense now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Lance demanded.

“He’s good looking. Makes sense why everything happened, even apparently wasting money and changing things here.”

Keith’s eyes widened at that, his stomach twisting at the accusation, not quite sure how to defend himself from things that he was still worrying about.

Luckily, he didn’t have to. Lance bristled a bit and said, “Please tell me you’re here to get your shit. It’s gotta go. I need your key back too.”

“Why?” Marco asked as he made his way farther into the room, not removing his shoes. That caused Keith to grimace. He didn’t want to be that person, and normally he wouldn’t care, but they had just cleaned everything the day before. “He told you to?”
“Because it’s *my* apartment that you don’t pay rent on and *I* want it gone.” Lance’s arm tensed across Keith’s shoulders. “It takes up more than half the space anyway, so I should have got you to get it a while ago.” He relaxed slightly, a warm smile appearing on his face as he gazed towards Keith. “I just got the motivation to actually do it.”

Keith’s stomach twisted with warmth, but that was quickly shattered as Marco asked, “Where am I supposed to put it all?”

What the ever living fuck? What kind of question was that? It took everything Keith had not to blurt that out. He wanted to make a good impression on Lance’s family, and it seemed like Marco had him pegged as a bad guy from the beginning.

Lance raised an eyebrow. “Uh, *your* apartment? Where it should be? Would have been the same thing if I got any other roommate.”

Marco scoffed for a moment before looking at him. “Fine, fine. Help me carry it down to my car.”

Knowing that Lance was going to agree, Keith reached up, placing a hand on his chest to stop him. “Those boxes are heavy. I can do it.” Maybe he could actually talk to Marco without the Beta being so challenging. Seriously, he was acting more like a posturing Alpha than Lance was.

Before his mate could answer though, Marco said, “Wow. That’s really sad, Lance.”

Nope. He was done. Keith whipped around to face him, taking a few steps towards Marco before Lance could stop him. The Beta took a step back, clearly not expecting it. “He has stitches in his side and he’s not supposed to carry heavy things. By all means though, judge me for giving a shit about another person.” He turned around to go and at least tug on some shorts. He wasn’t going to parade around outside with just underwear on.

Keith had known that it wasn’t going to be easy to click with all of Lance’s family, his mate had warned him that his mother, a male Omega like Keith, might come across as a little hostile since he was overprotective of all his children, especially the youngest one. Marco had been described as ‘chill’ by Lance. He just thought he was a jerk.

“What the fuck, Marco?” he heard Lance snarl from the living room. “What did Keith do to you?”

He paused, wanting to hear the answer while be able to hide his own instant reaction.

“Let’s think. You went on vacation to see a concert in Vegas. You came back after getting involved in some kind of FBI investigation with stitches, and a convenient mate that you met what, a week ago? One that dragged you into the whole mess probably? God, Lance. You’re the master at doing stupid shit, but this is something else. Now you’re here playing house like you’ll actually be able to be together like real mates?”

Keith crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, glad he wasn’t out there at the moment. Yes, he and Lance had talked about all of this a lot, but he still felt a lot of guilt over what happened. He knew it wasn’t actually his fault, but he was the connecting point between the mess with Lotor and Honerva, and Lance and his friends.

“What the fuck, Marco?” he heard Lance snarl from the living room. “What did Keith do to you?”

“He paused, wanting to hear the answer while be able to hide his own instant reaction.

“Like you and, who is your newest one? Monica?” Lance instantly shot back. There was a pause and he groaned. “Oh my god. You broke up with her. That’s why you’re here. You thought you could come back! Sorry. Space is no longer vacant.”

“Because it’s normal for a couple to have separate rooms. Who are you kidding? Do you even realize what you’ve actually done? The real ramifications?”
“Of course I know! We know. We talked about it a lot! Stop treating me like I’m five and still need to be supervised.”

“You’ve done nothing to prove otherwise!”

Once again, Keith was done. He came out of his room, grabbed one of Marco’s boxes (purposely going for a heavy one to show off because he was pretty sure he was stronger, judging by Marco’s noodle-arms). He set it into the hallway, outside, going back an getting another one to do the same.

The two brothers watched him for a moment before Marco snapped, “Who gave you permission to move my stuff?”

“Stop it,” Lance hissed, but Marco ignored him. That was okay, because Keith was ignoring Marco, swiftly taking things out.

Huh, for all the talk, the Beta hadn’t done anything to physically stop Keith. That was interesting.

“I asked you a question, Omega!”

Keith paused at that, before looking over his shoulder at him. “Huh, and to think, Lance said you were open-minded. You’re acting just like those rut-headed Alphas I’ve had to deal with before.” He dropped the box in his hands on the floor, not caring if anything broke as he went back in to grab more things. “But I’m probably not what you’re used to with Omegas.” He didn’t bother making eye contact, didn’t bother to stop what he was doing. “You got a problem with me, you can come and deal with me directly instead of being a bitch to your brother.”

He dropped the last back to the floor outside of the apartment, his arms burning from the strain of carrying everything, but anger fuelled him like nothing else as he finally met Marco’s eyes. They weren’t blue like Lance and Veronica, but a dark brown. “Unless, of course, you’re too scared of an Omega.”

Marco regarded him for a tense moment, and Keith was genuinely starting to think the Beta would take him up on that challenge. That was unfortunate. He’d fought tougher people.

Lance snatched the key from his hand and started shoving him towards the door. “There’s your stuff, you can carry it down on your own. Take it and leave, or I’m throwing it out the window.” He shoved his brother out of the door without another word, slamming it and locking it quickly.

“Lance!” Marco growled at him from the other side, breaking out of his stupor as he banged on the door loudly. “Really?”

Keith watched as Lance breathed heavily before turning and grabbing the television remote, turning it onto something random and then upping the volume. He then grabbed Keith’s hand and guided him back to his room, closing the door behind them.

Running his hands through his hair, Lance groaned. “God, I’m so sorry. I am. I didn’t expect this from him. I’m sorry.” He looked at him. “And don’t go back into that thing where you think you’re bad for me again. We talked about it.”

“I know. I know,” Keith assured him, grabbing both of his hands again and squeezing them. “You realize he was scared of you, right?”

“What?” Lance looked at him like he had grown another head.

“He didn’t try to touch me, didn’t try to stop me from moving his stuff. Maybe it’s cause he’s even
more of a noodle than you,” he smiled at Lance’s pout, “and I could totally take him, but I think it had to do with you.”

It wasn’t uncommon for Alphas to get ferociously protective of their mates. With a newly mated pair, everything was so much more intense, so there was a chance Lance might have just acted if Marco had grabbed him or physically tried to stop him.

Keith looped his arms over Lance’s shoulders and stared at him. “He was right to be scared. Not because you’re mean, but because you’re a total badass.”

Lance’s smile finally reappeared and he rested his hands on Keith’s hips, shifting so that they were pressed close against one another. His smile fell again and he said, “Guess we’re going to have to make time to see my parents sooner rather than later. He’ll probably go tattle to them.” He grimaced. “I won’t lie he’s probably not going to paint a very good picture for them. Though I’ve already talked to Papá and she wants to meet you, so there’s that.”

There was a flash of fear in Lance’s eyes, his scent souring a bit. Keith frowned at that, leaning forward and scenting him. “Well, no matter what, I’m not going anywhere. So they have to deal with it.”

Lance sighed and nuzzled him. “I’m still sorry about that. Marco can be annoying but he’s normally so chill about everything.”

“He just wants to protect you,” Keith said, because after all the good things Lance said about his family, he could understand how they could be protective over one another.

“They want to protect me from what? You?” Lance prompted. “From myself?”

“They don’t know me, right?” Keith shrugged as best as he could while still hugging him. “It’s easy to make me the bad guy. And that’s basically how a lot of people are around their Omega siblings.” He knew that very well. Though Acxa hadn’t been overly protective when they were younger, after he was assaulted, she and Shiro both became not just overly protective, but nearly viciously protective for a bit before cooling down some.

“Are you telling me that I’m the Omega sibling?” Lance asked skeptically.

Leaning back slightly so that they could actually see one another, Keith raised an eyebrow. “Do you have one?”

Lance blinked. “Luis, Veronica and I are Alphas and Rachel and Marco are Betas.”

“And you’re the youngest?” Keith prompted.

It was kind of amusing watching Lance think for a moment before his eyes went wide. “I’m the Omega sibling. Oh my god.” He tried to let go of Keith to dramatically flop back onto his bed, but that didn’t end up working out, since he decided he was going to be a koala. The end result was that Lance was on the bed and Keith was splayed on top of him.

Lance didn’t let that phase him at all. “Like, okay, I get that I’m the baby, but that doesn’t mean I want to be treated like a baby. I mean, we just made this shitty apartment go from depressed, neurotic university student to, strictly on a budget, but still an adult place. Like, this apartment belongs to a family now! You know?”

Keith snorted and rolled off of him so that he was against his non-injured side, not wanting to hurt him by keeping his weight on him. “Lance, when we have kids, I’m not raising them in this
apartment."

The Alpha was about to protest but stopped. “Okay, fair. But the two of us are still a family now, right? And you know what I mean, don’t you?”

Technically speaking, they were a family, weren’t they? They were mates and they were married. They didn’t need a baby to be a family at all. That was kind of mind blowing, and he couldn’t help but smile. “Yeah. You want them to see you as an actual adult, not as someone that needs to be coddled and babied about every little thing. Trust me, I get it.”

Lance was silent before rolling over to face him. “Yeah, you would, wouldn’t you?”

It took Keith a moment to realize that there was still something wrong. “Hey, no. Look, there is no use at comparing problems. Cause like…that was typical alpha levels of douchiness he showed right there. Betas aren’t always innocent either.”

Lance snorted and held him close. “I just…can we snuggle for a bit? I kind of need it.”

Keith nodded his head, holding his arms out to allow Lance to wrap himself around him. He allowed a gentle purr to rumble in his chest, and the Alpha sighed happily, relaxing in his embrace.

Maybe their good morning took a bad twist, but Keith was going to try as hard as he could to get the day back on track. He wanted things to work out, and knew that it meant they were going to go through some bad times too, but he didn’t want to do that today.

He’s figure out what to do after they took an early-morning nap together.

…

It was kind of strange being alone in the apartment. It felt like he was in a place where he wasn’t supposed to be in a sense. Not that it was the first time, but that didn’t make it any less strange.

Lance stepped out to get the mail, but apparently there was a package that was too big to find into the small mailboxes on the bottom floor, so he actually had to go to the post office to get it. Apparently, it was something he bought online even before going to Vegas, and he wanted it before he had to go to work Monday.

Keith could have gone with him, he was kind of tempted to, but it was still sticky and humid, and he hadn’t had a shower yet. Lance kept assuring him that he didn’t have anyone to impress, but still, sue him for wanting to look at least decent.

It gave him a chance to shower, and afterwards, a chance to actually talk to his mother on the phone. He had nothing to hide from his mate, but it was just easier to talk to her without Lance there for now.

They had been talking for a little while at this point, about the flight there, what it was like in Florida, and other things before moving onto the situation with Lance’s siblings. Veronica seemed to like him enough, but the situation with Marco was a mess and though he didn’t say it to Lance, he actually was worried about how that would impact things with the rest of his family.

He didn’t lie when he said that it wouldn’t make him leave, but Keith already knew Lance’s family meant a lot to him. He didn’t want to be the cause of any kind of rift between them.

Maybe he was also a bit worried that Lance would realize his family was right and that he was no good.
“Nonsense,” his mother interrupted his tirade. “Even before you left, it was easy to see that he adored you. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.”

“I know,” Keith groaned, leaning back on the couch. “I just…uhg.”

She chuckled at his eloquence. “You certainly defended him to us.”

“That’s different,” he argued, because it was. “He helped save me from Lotor. You saw that. From their point of view, I’m the reason he got into trouble and…they’re not wrong.”

“Your grandparents didn’t approve of me either at first,” Krolia said, and Keith knew this, he had heard the story before. “They came around eventually.”

He hadn’t known his grandparents, they passed away when he was two, but they had to have been good enough people to raise someone like his father, and Keith knew that he was a lot like his mother, so maybe she was right. Maybe it would be okay.

As if sensing his confusion, Krolia quickly changed the topic. “Do you like it there?”

“I do,” Keith admitted, because he truly did so far. “Sometimes it feels a bit odd, like I’m just visiting?”

“That’ll pass with time,” she assured him. That was right, she had probably gone through the exact same thing too. “If you regret it though, you can always come home.”

A part of Keith actually did long for his familiar room in his familiar house, to see his mother, Acxa, Shiro, and Allura. He even missed Coran, and that guy always had him on edge, because he always just seemed to know everything. The bad memories from there outweighed the good ones too much though. “You moved in with dad almost right away, right? How long did it take you to get used to it? Did you feel weird?”

“It felt like I didn’t necessarily belong here, especially since there were other Omegas eyeing him.” She paused for a moment, no doubt lost in the memories of his father. “You’re so much like me, but also made of something stronger. You’ll be okay.”

Keith really, really hoped so. He was about to replied when a knock sounded from the door. It startled him at first, but then he got up. “Gotta go. Someone’s at the door.”

“You have your knife?” his mother asked quickly.

He almost laughed at that. “Of course. Bye mom.”

“Love you,” she replied as they both hung up.

It might have been a bit paranoid, but Keith wanted to have his phone ready to dial the cops, just in case.

He leaned against the door, staring out the peep hole to see a little old man waiting patiently. Though he knew not to let his guard down entirely, he doubted this old man was here to try and rob them or anything, so he turned the locks and opened the door.

The man looked taken back to see him, looking around with a bit of confusion. “Is Lance here?”

Keith narrowed his eyes. “Who wants to know?”

“His landlord?”
He instantly flushed and his shoulders slumped. “Oh! Uh, he’s out, but I can…uh…take a message?” Someone please shoot him now. This was humiliating.

“I left a message with him that I was coming around to check the fire alarms today,” the old man replied in a matter of fact voice. “I left it a couple weeks ago.”

Keith was going to beat Lance. He stepped aside, sure that he could handle himself if this man tried anything funny. He was definitely an Alpha, though one that had a mate, and nothing about him was aggressive in the slightest.

The man walked in and paused as he took in the room. “What happened here? Normally this place looks like the boy is barely alive.” He glanced over at Keith, narrowing his dark eyes slightly behind his glasses, nose twitching slightly. It was common for most people to scent the air when they were around new people to see who it was they were dealing with, but many of the older generation found it impolite.

Then again, they also came from a generation where Omegas had much more freedom and Alphas fought over them less, so there was that.

“I see,” the landlord said, the edges of his lips tipping into a smile. “I suppose I should congratulate him and yourself, shouldn’t I? I am Mr. Patel, the owner of this building. You’ll be living here as well?”

It took Keith a moment to realize that that this stranger must smell Lance on him in a way that only a marked Omega could smell like their mate. It was like having a little bit of your partner’s scent on you at all times. “Uh, yes. I’m Keith Kogane…no I’m not. I’m Keith McClain.” Holy shit, that was weird. He was going to have to practice his signature all over again so he didn’t write the wrong name.

Mr. Patel chuckled. “I went through the same thing when I first took my wife’s name.” He smiled at the obvious confusion on Keith’s face. “She and I are both Alphas.”

“Oh!” Keith watched him as he held up a little device to check the fire alarm. “Uh, do you need some help?”

“Nonsense,” the man assured him, but he was still smiling. “Hmm, I’ve got a good feeling about you.”

“A good feeling?” Keith repeated.

“Yes,” he nodded his head as he brought the device back down, no doubt checking whatever readings he was looking for. “Poor Lance has been sad and moping, almost lifeless for so long. A person’s environment says a lot about them, and this is bright and happy and new. It’s a good thing. He’s a nice boy, and if you bring out the good this way, you must be a nice boy too.”

Keith flushed a little bit at that, unsure of how to reply.

As it turned out, there was no reason to think of a response. Lance came flying through the open door, completely alarmed. “Are you okay?”

Keith stared at him blankly. “Huh?”

“The door was open and I—Oh! Mr. Patel! Oh shoot, I forgot that you were coming today.” He looked at Keith sheepishly. “Sorry.”
“It’s quite alright,” Mr. Patel assured him, heading towards the door. “Keith was very kind to let me in. He’s a very good catch.”

A genuine smile appeared on Lance’s face. “He is.” Keith felt his cheeks burning again at that.

“I will leave a form for you to update persons living here in your mailbox,” the landlord said as he walked into the hall.

“Thank you!” He closed the door gently, and looked back at Keith again, package in hand. “Yeah, sorry about that.”

“He seems nice,” Keith replied with a shrug.

“Yeah. As sketchy as this place is, he’s a nice old man.” Lance set the package down on the counter. “So, I made a couple other stops on the way back. Got an appointment for Monday for you so that you can get your stitches out. I’m done orientation at the Aquarium at three so there’s a lots of time. But, more importantly, I talked to Hunk and Pidge while I was waiting in traffic.” He smiled. “Feeling up to a movie night tonight?”

Keith was a bit surprised by the request, but still smiled. “Sure, why not?”

He just wanted everything to start feeling normal again. Movie nights seemed like a great way to do just that.

Chapter End Notes

Veronica likes Keith. Marco does not. Lance is the Omega of the McClain family apparently. Lots of fun all around!

Thank you for all the amazing feedback!
Humans vocal cords were always something of interest for people to study. Some theorized that they could accurately predict who was going to be an Alpha, Beta, or Omega years before they presented by their vocal cords alone. Their reason for saying this was because of the distinct types of sounds Alphas and Omegas could make.

Omegas were known for their louder purring, their higher pitched noises like chirps and coos, not to mention the unholy shrieks they could make as a defense against perceived dangers. It didn’t matter if the Omega was a man with a naturally deep voice, they could still make sounds like this.

Likewise, Alphas could naturally make these deep, intimidating growls, and snarls, as well as lighter comforting noises similar to coos, just deeper. They couldn’t purr nearly as easily or as much, and it usually just resulting in a rumbling in their chests with very little actual noise behind it. Any Alpha could do this, even the women with squeaky voices.

Betas could purr just like Omegas could, but they seemed to be able to do a wider range of vocalizations, though not nearly as high or as deep. Nor did they have the ability to command like Alphas, or make people freeze in their tracks like a distressed Omega. Though their sense of hearing and sight were generally much more developed, making up for their lesser sense of smell compared to their counterparts.

These were actually all common things found in dynamics over and over again, but that didn’t mean that a person still couldn’t make high pitched sounds even if they were an Alpha. Point and case: the unholy sounds that escaped Lance and Hunk as they threw their arms around one another and hugged each other tightly.

Keith stared at them with wide eyes, not quite sure what to make of the scene before him. Pidge slipped around the two of them, coming up to his side. “They do this every time.”

“…I feel like I’m supposed to be jealous right now,” Keith admitted, still unsure of what he was actually supposed to do. It had been only, what, two days since the two Alphas last saw one another? He hadn’t even missed his mom this much in two days’ time.

Pidge snorted at that and then turned her attention to the room, her mouth falling open. “Oh wow! This place is actually habitable!”

That seemed to catch Hunk’s attention. He looked up from where he was hugging Lance, his eyes going wide. “It’s beautiful!” He glanced towards the kitchen and gasped, moving over to it. “You have actual knives now! And a grill!” He opened a cupboard. “More than two plates! I am so happy for you!”

Keith didn’t know what to make of this at all. “Was it really that bad?” He cast a glance at his mate, who looked rather embarrassed.

“No!” Lance crossed his arms in front of him. “I mean, low moments happen and it got bad, and finals was horrible, but everyone else is dramatic!”

“That’s true,” Hunk agreed with Lance’s statement.
“It was still bad though,” Pidge added. She patted Lance’s back. “See, this just proves that Keith is good for you.”

Lance’s shoulders relaxed, and a smile appeared on his face. The next thing Keith knew, the Alpha threw his arms around him, hugging him close. “He really is, isn’t he?”

“He would really like to breathe,” Keith said as he struggled, but Lance had latched onto him. In a desperate attempt to get away, he poked Lance’s armpit, causing the Alpha to yelp and let go.

Hunk laughed loudly. “Lance is super ticklish.”

“Don’t tell him that,” the Alpha in question whined. “Real friends don’t snitch like that! Fake friends!”

Keith couldn’t help but smile at the two of them. It was nice to see Lance interacting with his friends on his own turf.

Though it wasn’t lost on him that Pidge seemed to gravitate towards him, and that made him a bit curious. He glanced towards her as Lance and Hunk started going through the fridge to make snacks, and nodded towards the couch.

They both sank down onto it, Pidge touching the soft fabric with interest before nestling herself into the cushions. “This looks and feels way better. Lance can be a princess at the best of times, and Hunk is super thoughtful, but they just don’t get what I mean by certain things like the couch being too rough.”

“It was pretty horrible,” Keith agreed. “I converted Lance though. He gets it now. Everything in the house feels like this now.” He looked around at the other two before looking back at her. “Does Matt ever come to these things?”

“Sometimes, but it’s rare.” Pidge frowned. “He came to Vegas with us because I wasn’t allowed to go with just Hunk and Lance. Two, at the time, unmated Alphas, you know? My parents let me home here because they know these two goofs and know they’re not interested in me, but Vegas was different.”

Keith hadn’t thought about that, since Pidge’s toffee-like scent was very subtle thanks to a careful cocktail of suppressants, and neither Lance nor Hunk had been drawn towards her. Though if Keith was right about this group of friends, they could also have to do with pack bonds.

Pack bonds could be biological family groups, but it was more common for it to be a couple different families, or people who weren’t related at all but became close for other reasons.

Keith wasn’t entirely sure how it worked, but he knew that packs could form the same type of bonds as biological families, where Alphas simply weren’t sexually drawn towards other Omegas in the packs, unless they were already attracted to them and really couldn’t form that kind of brotherly or sisterly bond with them (not that there was anything wrong with that if they couldn’t, they just couldn’t be around those Omegas are certain times). The same went for Omegas towards the Alphas.

Not all groups of friends were packs, but it really looked to him like Hunk, Lance, and Pidge were part of their own small one, even if they didn’t realize it. It had never once occurred to Keith that he should question why neither of the Alphas was interested in her.

“That has to feel nice though,” Keith noted, before biting his lip, because he hadn’t meant to say that out loud. At her questioning look, he said, “Not that your brother had to come with you, but, you know, that you can be around Alphas like them and you’re still just…Pidge.” Not someone to be
hounded and hit on, someone to be tied down and treated like some kind of living blow-up doll.

Pidge smiled as she looked at the two Alphas. “I pretending I was a Beta for the first year or so I knew them. When they found out I was an Omega, Hunk said he knew, but Lance was shocked. Then things just went back to normal.” She scowled. “Sometimes though, when people know, they give me these looks when I hang around with them.”

“Probably thinking you were courting both of them, stringing them along or something,” he rolled his eyes. Amusement rushed through him and he said, “One time a new kid in school accused me of doing that with an Alpha. Being close but not going the extra steps to make it clear we were together. Not like it’s uncommon for a few Alphas to be courting one Omega at a time or anything anyway, but that’s not what was happening.”

Her eyes widened. “Please tell me they were talking about your sister.”

“They were talking about my sister,” Keith confirmed, and she burst into laughter loud enough to attract Hunk and Lance’s attention. He just waved them off.

The TV tables were placed around them, eventually loaded up with different kind of nachos and drinks. Since the couch wasn’t that big, Lance and Hunk gathered a bunch of the extra blankets, sheets, and pillows to sit on the floor.

Keith watched with a raised eyebrow as they two of them rearranged the fabrics. Despite popular belief, Omegas in heat weren’t the only ones that made nests. Not only were they known to make them just for comfort, but both Betas and Alphas tended to feel the urge to make them when they were sick, depressed, anxious, or stressed.

The thing was though, Keith had literally been taught in school how to make strong, sturdy nests. They were even presented with a ton of different ways that they could build nests, and one of their final projects in that class had been to come up with their own, personal design. That was a class for Omegas and Omegas alone, since nesting was so personal, and there absolutely was a stigma against the other dynamics making nests, especially Alphas.

That’s why, though Hunk and Lance weren’t doing a terrible job, Keith still found himself feeling almost twitchy as he watched them build their little nest to watch the movie in. There were stray sheets poking out the side, and didn’t they know if they rearranged the pillows, it would be much more comfortable?

He cast a glance towards Pidge, who had a pinched expression as she stared at them. Finally, she said, “Please stop.”

Both of the Alphas stopped and looked up at them.

“What’s wrong?” Lance asked, reaching up and squeezing Keith’s knee gently.

Keith didn’t quite know how to say that the nest the two Alphas worked hard on was kind of offending him. Pidge didn’t seem to mind being blunt. “Your nest is an insult.”

Lance made a face at her. “What? Do you want to switch or something? Show us how to do it?”

The two Omegas stared at one another before nodding and saying, “Yes.” It was strange that they wanted to be surrounded by pillows and blankets on the floor rather than being on the couch, but Keith didn’t care.

Switching places, Keith found that Pidge didn’t seem to be a very picky nest maker, unlike him. She
seemed to catch onto this though, letting him take the lead in making a nest with a very comfortable bottom to sit on, and back to lean against, with secure sides.

When he made them for his heats, he liked to build what ended up becoming basically a very secure fort with sheets strung up and hanging down around him. There was no need for that now though.

Nests were a strange thing. They were generally a pretty intimate thing, something to be in with mates, pups, and pack-mates on occasion. Temporary nests like the one they just built were considered less intimate, and it was perfectly acceptable to have close friends, family, and pack in them, but still, it wasn’t something that strangers did.

The fact that Pidge was willing to sit beside him said a lot. She was part of a little pack with Lance and Hunk, and it warmed Keith’s heart a bit to know that he was being included in that now too.

He liked the idea of packs way more than how a lot of Alphas were doing things: isolating their Omegas and pups from everyone else.

“Okay, I’m jealous.” Keith leaned back and looked up at Lance, who framed his legs on either side of him. “You make the best nests ever.”

Keith chuckled and leaned a little more heavily on his leg. “Nah, this is nothing to the nests I actually make when I have the time.” Still, he couldn’t stop himself from internally preening a little bit, because he was an Omega, and his Alpha just complimented his nesting abilities. That was a pretty big thing, especially since this one was a little sad compared to what he could normally pull off.

His happiness at the comment must have come across in his scent though, because Pidge raised her eyebrow at him, an amused smirk playing on her lips. He shot her a slightly annoyed look and made himself more comfortable again, grabbing one of the plates of nachos off of one of the TV tables as he settled in to watch whatever movie this was going to end up being.

This was nice. It felt so painfully normal, even though he was still getting used to this situation, to these people. Having Hunk and Pidge there somehow made it seem less intense, and more like he was being included in the outside world.

Pidge was comfortable enough to help him build a little, casual nest, and to stay in it with him. In making nachos for all of them, Hunk had used the lactose-free cheese for his and made sure that he knew which one was his. Lance had complimented him on his nest, and was now gently resting a hand on his head as he whispered to Hunk, his thumb moving back and forth soothingly.

This was absolutely something Keith could get used to.

…”

“You don’t have to clean up right now, you know.” Lance said after he closed the door behind Pidge and Hunk. Though they always had movie nights together, they never stayed the entire night, unless Matt happened to be around and joined them. Of course, he knew that part of this had to do with Pidge being an Omega.

Neither he nor Hunk would ever hurt her. Neither one of them had ever been drawn to her scent outside of wanting to protect her. Lance couldn’t fault her parents though. He’d want peace of mind too in this environment. With Keith there now though, and her parents having met him already, there was a better chance that she’d be able to stay more often.

Now that Lance thought about it, that was probably why she was so quick to introduce him to them. Though she had been the tiniest bit apprehensive about Keith back in Vegas, enough to look him up,
and had spent less time with him than Hunk had, she did seem to latch onto him pretty quickly.

He observed his mate as he filled the sink with warm water and that environmentally friendly dish soap they got (one of the few things Lance insisted on spending extra on). It was pretty late though, so really, there was no need to do the dishes now. They weren’t going anywhere.

Keith glanced over at him and made a face. “Might as well get it over with now. Easier to get the dirt off.” He looked down at the plates as if they personally insulted him somehow.

Deciding not to bother arguing, Lance yawned and moved to go and clean up the rest of their mess, figuring he could help out too. That meant putting the TV tables away, cleaning off the couch and straightening the soft cover that they had put on it. He glanced at the nest on the ground though and hesitated.

Touching someone else’s nest without permission, no matter who they were, was a big no-no. He wasn’t a heathen, he knew that you respect the nest rules. That being said, he kind of really wanted to get in the nest.

“You can take it apart,” Keith said, glancing at him quickly.

“But you guys did such a nice job,” he pointed out sadly.

“Eh, I can make another one later. That one’s not my best anyway. I need all my nice blankets and stuff mom is sending. So yeah, take it apart for me.” He paused. “Please?” It came as almost an afterthought, making Lance chuckle. His mate was adorable.

“Since you asked so nicely.” Lance began to take it apart, semi-folding the extra sheets and blankets while putting them back in the closet. “Did you have fun?”

“That movie was weird,” Keith replied honestly, putting the last of the dishes on the small drying rack they had unearthed from under the sink (Lance had no idea how long it had been there for). “That alien absolutely should have won. I don’t care how many guns and muscles that guy had.”

“Uh, no.” Lance shook his head quickly, crossing his arms in front of him. “The point was that the alien underestimated him.”

“He was just another posturing Alpha who got the Omega in the end.” Keith waved his hand off.

Lance tried to come up with a clever response to that, but he couldn’t. It was absolutely true. He sighed and shook his head as they walked the couple steps down the hall. “It’s still a good movie.”

“No the worst I’ve ever seen,” the Omega conceded as he leaned against his door frame, looking up at him.

An odd feeling overcame Lance. This part here, this almost felt like he was escorting a date home after a movie, even if other friends had tagged along because they were nervous and young.

He wet his lips slightly and said, “Try to sleep in tomorrow. We have nowhere super important to be.”

“No plans?”

“None I made without you.” He had kind of been taking the lead over the past two days, but he knew the area better and there was just so much to do. There was still a lot to do, but not really until Monday.
Lance just really, really hoped that his parents didn’t insist they come over in the next couple days. He wanted one weekend alone with Keith. Maybe they could go to the diner and meet Luis and Lisa. He didn’t know. He just wanted to spend time with him.

Keith nodded his head, and hesitated slightly at the door. He opened his mouth to say something, scent tinted with an uncertainty that he couldn’t quite place. Whatever he had been going to say though, he clearly changed his mind. Leaning up, Keith pecked his lips, barely just a soft, sweet gentle crush, and then retreated. “See you tomorrow?”

A flush took over his cheeks, a smile spreading across his lips. “Yeah. Again, sleep in.”

“I’ll try. Night.” Keith went into his room, gently closing the door behind him.

Lance sighed, an instinctive part of him very unhappy about being separated from his mate by the door. He wanted to gather him into his arms and curl up in bed with him. This was what they had agreed to though, and he knew it was for the best for now. It was important for both of them to have their own space as they got used to what it was like to constantly be around one another. Safe places where they could go if there was a misunderstanding they couldn’t handle at the moment, though he hoped that it would never come to that.

He went back to his room for a moment, listening carefully for Keith. Sure enough, a little while later, he heard him get up to go to the washroom for whatever nightly routine he had. It was only fair to let him go first, since Lance’s took a while. He waited patiently, looking down at his phone.

He hadn’t heard from Marco since they kicked him out earlier, which was probably a bad thing in the long run. Given that he and Rachel were twins, he probably went over to the house she was sharing with her long term partner, who was also a Beta woman. She hadn’t sent anything to him either.

His parents were curious though. They wanted him and Keith to come over, but Lance was selfish and didn’t want that yet. Instead, he insisted that they were getting settled in, that they still had things to do. He was avoiding them again.

Don’t get him wrong, Lance loved his family. He was proud of them too, because they were very open to all dynamics and all kind of people. The thing was, everyone had their downsides too.

Nearly everyone in his family, at least all his siblings and his parents, took courtship very seriously. It was important for everyone to truly know that you were dedicated to a person before becoming mates.

Luis and Lisa were high school sweethearts, and even then, they took things slow. His parents had broken up and came back together later on. Veronica was focusing on her career, and didn’t think it’d be fair on anyone to enter a relationship if she couldn’t give it some importance. Luis and Rachel both had a lot of partners in the past, but they were upfront, honest with them, and took courting and dating seriously with no accidentally bondings or anything.

Lance had taken it seriously too. It was important to him to properly court and woo his partner. To fall in love with them and reach that comfortable point where they could just exist with one another entirely.

He heard Keith go back into his room and got up, flouncing in to start by washing his face with water. Despite everything, he couldn’t bring himself to regret bonding with Keith. It wasn’t what he expected, but the feelings that he had were real. He was falling for him, and he was falling fast and hard.
He was worried about how his family would react, even more-so about how they were going to treat Keith at the beginning. He was sure that they’d all come to love him eventually, but at first little hurdle was the one he was most worried about.

Lance sighed as he finished putting on his facemask after brushing his teeth. He left the bathroom, nearly running into Keith, who was going back to his room with a glass of water.

The Omega stopped and stared at his facemask.

“Don’t judge! Not all of us can have perfectly smooth skin naturally, and I’ve been neglecting this!” Lance said, pointing at his face.

“Won’t say a word,” Keith muttered, the corners of his lips tilting up slightly, pure amusement crossing his eyes. It was so adorable that Lance had no choice but to swoop in and kiss his cheek. “Lance!” He rubbed at his face, where a little bit of the face mask got on him. He quickly scooted around him, going back into his room.

Lance chuckled and walked into his room to go to bed. He’d worry about everything else when it came. Tomorrow, he wanted to do something fun, something just for them. After all, Keith was the one that that started making him breakfast that morning as a courting gift of sorts, so he had to step up his game to woo his mate.

Yeah, tomorrow, he was going to try and sweep Keith off of his feet.

With that thought in mind, Lance curled up into his bed to get some sleep.

And if he slept on the pillow that still had Keith’s scent on it, well, he didn’t have to admit anything to anyone.

...

Lance had always loved the water. Ever since he was a young child, his Papá had always thought that he belonged to the ocean, that he was a mermaid without gills or a tale. Though he loved swimming in pools, there was something about the ocean itself that called to him. Lakes and rivers were fine too, since there were always things to find there too, but the ocean was another beast all together.

The beach had always been his happy place. There was nothing quite like listening to the rolling waves gently happing against the shore. Going out there at night under the stars was something else too.

He couldn’t imagine growing up without being near the ocean, after getting up Saturday morning and agreeing to explore the city (mostly just Lance showing Keith around so that he knew where things were), it was one of the first spots that he decided to go. Well, the first one he decided to go to, but the last one they actually got to.

Breathing in the salty air was like coming home. He closed his eyes as they stepped onto the hot sand, enjoying the way the light breeze ruffled his hair.

“Woah,” Keith breathed out in awe, stepping away from Lance and across the sand until his sneakers were at the edge of where the waves stopped, gently retreating into the ocean again.

“Careful,” Lance noted. “You can’t swim yet.” Not that he really had to worry, the water was fairly shallow here for a while. It made this a pretty popular spot to go to during the day. It was getting later though, so most people were retreating home. There were only a few other people dotting the beach.
“You’ll teach me, right?” Keith asked, glancing up towards him with wide eyes that seemed to light up. Lance’s breath caught in his throat as he watched the Omega’s inky hair swaying gently in the breeze, pale skin illuminated by the slowly setting sun.

He almost forgot to reply, but quickly nodded his head to break him out of whatever spell he was under before he did something stupid like propose again on the spot or something. “Of course. In a pool though.” Controlled environments for that kind of thing were pretty important for someone who hadn’t been around that much water.

Lance was about to ask why Keith had never learned to swim in a pool, because surely they had those back where he lived, but thought better of it. He already knew about the foster homes, about his family not having much money, and when he got older, being an Omega would have been a factor too (no Omega wanted to be half naked in front of Alphas and Betas).

Instead, he kicked off his sandals, leaving them on the sand. “Take your sneakers off. Don’t worry, no one will take them.” And if they did, the car wasn’t that far away. Not that it ever happened to Lance’s stuff on this beach.

Keith chose to follow his lead, leaving his sneakers and socks behind as they walked across the still-warm sand.

It hadn’t been Lance’s intention on getting to the beach at sunset that day, but there had been something incredibly fun and entertaining about exploring the familiar streets of his home with someone who had never seen any of it before.

Though Keith was a more stoic person than many, there was also this genuine curiosity he had to him, and he was filled to the brim with excitement and wonder over new things. It was incredibly endearing to see.

That same look was on his face as he first stepped into the shallow water, the waves rushing over his feet. He shuddered a bit, probably at the drop in temperature since the water was cool even there, and then carefully walked forward, watching where he was stepping until he was knee-deep.

A smile spread across Lance’s lips as he followed him. “You don’t have a fear of water, that’s good. Some people that can’t swim do.”

“You say you’re a good swimmer though,” Keith pointed out.

“I mean, not to brag, but I may have won a few swim meets,” Lance said, absolutely bragging. He actually had quite a few high school and university swimming trophies at home, even though he hadn’t been able to participate in his final year of undergrad. He was an amazing swimmer, and he was proud of that.

Keith tilted his head slightly and raised a challenging eyebrow. “Then why should I be afraid? If something happens, you’ll get me.”

Lance was completely taken aback by the confidence in that statement. It was absolutely true, but the sheer amount of trust Keith had in him was mind-blowing. It took him a moment to find his voice as he said, “Of course I will.”

With a sharp nod of his head, Keith turned back to the water, as if settling a huge debate. He moved slowly and carefully, as if not wanting to miss a moment of the water brushing against his skin, or his toes sinking into the soft, wet sand.

He paused for a moment, looking down at something before bending over and scooping something
out of the water.

It was a fairly large clam shell (well, half of one), still perfectly shaped and with an almost blue shine to it. It was really impressive.

“That’s a nice one,” Lance said encouragingly. So many of these often got crushed by the waves or under people’s feet.

Keith turned it over in his hands before holding it out to him. “You can keep it. You have a collection in your room, right? On your shelf?” He shifted a bit awkwardly. “Courting gift.”

The Alpha’s face felt like it was on fire. He wanted to scoop his mate up into his arms and kiss him senseless, because yes, he did collect shells, but he hadn’t brought that up or even pointed out his collection.

Instead, he slung an arm around his shoulder, tugging him close and simply resting his forehead against the top of Keith’s head. The other man leaned against him easily, a smile on his face as he closed his eyes and relaxed against him, the waves brushing against their legs.

He heard some giggling behind him, and looked around to see a small group of teenage girls looking at them with big smiles. Seeing that he was looking at them, one, no doubt an Alpha girl, simply smiled and waved at him. She turned to her friends, and he very clearly heard her say, “See, that’s what I want when I get older.”

Keith tilted his head up slightly, no doubt having heard the same thing. There was a small smile on his face as he breathed in the salty air, looking back down at the water.

“Wanna stay for a bit?” Lance asked, keeping his voice slow, as if talking in more than a whisper would destroy the moment. “The city lights make it a little hard to see stars here, but it’s not bad.”

Keith hummed in thought before nodding his head.

They started out that day pretty normally, and Lance was a bit excited to realize that two days could be a coincidence, but three days was the beginning of a pattern. Keith was the one up first, but he didn’t seem nearly as tired as the day before, and he had admitted to getting up later. He went about making breakfast, and then they would sit and eat together. Keith would then go get a quick shower first (assuring him that the quick showers were generally a choice and if he wanted a longer one, he would take one, thank you very much) while Lance cleaned the dishes, and then Lance would have his shower. It was amazingly domestic, and neither one of them had a problem with the pattern in the least.

That morning, when Keith admitted to not knowing what he wanted to do, Lance suggested they go around and explore. They found an Omega-Friendly gym that was between their apartment and Lance’s work, and Keith decided that he would go and check it out on Monday to see if he liked it or not while Lance was at work. He also made sure that the Omega knew how to get to the bank, post office, hospital, police station, and a few more places. They also just drove around for a while with the beat up car’s windows down. It had been nice.

It had also been nice to find the last remaining air conditioning unit in the store. Lance thought Keith was ready to throw down for it with another man, but surprisingly, the man had backed off quickly.

They both decided not to question that, leaving with their treasure.

Now that Lance thought about it, it was just spending time together, but as the day started to wane,
they went to a decent sit-down restaurant (where they didn’t need any kind of fancy clothes), and now they were cuddling on the beach, and it really felt like an actual date.

Lance sat in the dry sand, but stretched out his feet so that the waves would brush up against his ankles before retreating. He was a bit surprised, but also extremely pleased, when Keith easily slid down between his legs, resting so that his back was against Lance’s chest, long legs framing his body.

The Alpha’s heart felt like it was about to leap out of his chest. Of course Keith was forward and confident with what he wanted. It was nice, honestly. There were very few guessing games involved with him (though they were there too, since Keith could also lock down real quickly at times).

He wrapped his arms around Keith, leaning his chin on his shoulder, watching the orange sun slowly sink into the water, a dark sky replacing it bit by bit.

“It’s amazing, you know,” Keith admitted, and his voice sounded so awed that Lance had to glance sideways at him. “Cause like, the ocean connects all the continents. It’s how people first explored and found new places that couldn’t be crossed by foot or anything and – it’s so big and vast and we know so little about it and that’s amazing. A giant mystery that connects us all.”

Oh hell, this Omega was going to give him a heart attack. His indigo eyes were wide and excited as he stared at the ocean, and his subtle honey scent was just so relaxed an happy that it kind of made Lance want to cry.

A part of him wanted to interrupt the moment to give his poor heart a break, to sarcastically say that Keith just blew his own mind, but then he felt and heard a very distinctive sound.

Keith was purring. It was only light, but it was pretty steady. There was no way that Lance could purposely ruin the moment. In fact, he kind of felt like he could die happy now.

The Omega was the one that broke the comfortable silence, tilting his head back so that he could look up at Lance, a soft smile on his face. “You said you wanted to ‘woo’ me, right?”

“Mmmhmm,” Lance mumbled with a slight nod, a little drunk off of endorphins.

“It’s working.”

He smiled broadly, nuzzling his cheek against Keith’s head, earning a slightly louder purr in response.

It was working for him too.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact about this world: While Alphas and Omegas have a superior sense of smell, Betas in general have heightened eyesight and hearing instead (though they too can small basic things as well). This was developed so that Betas a. wouldn't be impacted by the smells from the other two groups, and b. would be able to hear or see danger when the others can't focus on that. It's why they were SUPER important to the evolution of humans in this world, because if they didn't exist, other predators would have been able to take 'distracted' Alphas and Omegas out much easier!
Every morning since he moved to Florida with Lance, Keith was the one who woke up first. Sometimes it was from nightmares, but most of the time it was because he was a naturally early riser.

Honestly, Keith didn’t mind getting up early and making breakfast for his family. Part of it stemmed from the fact that breakfast was fairly easy to cook. Some of it stemmed from those moments after his father had died and his mother was almost catatonic and he took care of himself and Acxa. Some from wanting to be useful in the couple foster houses that allowed him into the kitchen (which ended up being more often than not once he presented as an Omega).

A large part of it was just that he liked doing something for his family, which now consisted of him and Lance. Though he had done the same thing in that small period of time when he lived with his mother, Acxa, and Shiro.

Every other morning was peaceful, but that morning in particular, Lance practically exploded out of his room like a torpedo of nervousness. It was kind of interesting to see him stumble around, when he had been so calm and composed over the last few days.

Keith wasn’t terribly great at cooking lunch or fancy supper things, but when he saw how haggard Lance was when he went into the bathroom, he decided that he was going to be a nice husband and throw together a lunch for him too. He got the feeling Lance would forget his head if it wasn’t attached.

“Do I have everything?” Lance muttered after he stumbled out into the combined living room and kitchen. He looked put together, and despite the fact that his uniform was a simple polo shirt with black shorts and slip-proof sneakers, Keith still found that he looked quite handsome.

A quick glance at the clock told Keith that they had plenty of time to get Lance to his first day of work, even with traffic and Keith’s skepticism of the car’s ability to run for much longer. Being the freaking great person that he was, he put his hands on Lance’s shoulders, causing the Alpha to pause in his babbling and almost maniacal movements.

Keith guided him towards the couch and shoved him down onto it, dragging both the TV tables out. He then backtracked the couple steps to the kitchen counter and came back with two plates of food, flopping down beside him. “Chill. Eat.” Lance looked like he was about to protest, so Keith pointed his fork at him. “Eat. I put effort into this.”

Okay, that was a little bit manipulative of him. Keith knew that Lance was trying to make a point that he didn’t expect him to be some kind of househusband, always cooking, cleaning, and everything
else. It was why he always so genuinely thanked Keith for things and made sure to help.

Sure enough, Lance took a deep breath and worked on calming himself down. “Thanks. I’ve been there before, I know a lot of the people, I’m just nervous. This job…paid internship, whatever, is super important. It adds things for my classes and thesis. I’ll be able to actually work with animals, and do my own research, and go on research trips eventually and I just…I don’t want to mess it up.”

Keith pause, setting his own fork back down onto his plate before reaching out and putting his hand on Lance’s shoulder. “You’ll be okay. It’s just orientation stuff today, right?”

Lance nodded his head in agreement, seemingly pleased that Keith remembered that. “Yeah. And I’ll be done by two today. Then what’s first after that?”

“License,” Keith replied. Unlike Alphas and Betas, who could go wait in a DMV to update their driver’s license, Omegas had to make appointments to get things altered. This was to convenience their Alphas to sign the permission forms for them to drive. Lance was also going to sign the one saying Keith could drive alone (he was going to leave a signed note in the car just in case Keith got pulled over between dropping Lance off and picking him up later on).

“You wanna get your passport photos today too?” That was another thing he’d have to update. His mother insisted they all have them, just in case (which made sense now that he knew she used to be an FBI Secret Agent), and just to be difficult, it meant another renewal form with new pictures and everything. Plus, again, he’d basically have to get a stamp on it saying he belonged to Lance.

Life was great that way.

“Write me out a note in case I need it, and I’ll go after dropping you off,” Keith said to him, earning a nod in reply as Lance started eating again.

He didn’t really want to have to deal with his license and everything, but knew that the sooner he got his identification switched from Nevada to Florida, the better. It was annoying, but he’d deal with it.

Keith stomach twisted at the thought of what else they had to do today though. His hand trailed up to his cheek, ghosting a cross the stitches. If he was home, he’d just be getting his stitches out. This scenario was completely different.

Yes, his stitches would be coming out that day (which was good, because as his body wanted them out, they were becoming a bit itchy), but because he was now a mated Omega in a new place, the doctor would have to make sure that their records were completely up to date. Lance had to be there for all of that.

The eggs in front of him looked disgusting. He stopped eating, his hand twisting into a fist as he realized what was likely to happen. The doctor was going to tell Lance everything that was in his medical history, just so Lance knew. He’d probably also have to get some sort of test to prove that his uterus and everything was working fine, despite past complications.

He wasn’t ready for that. Not at all. Keith had told Lance about what that Alpha did to him, but he didn’t tell him about the consequences of it yet. There wasn’t time to sit down and talk about that right now, not with Lance having to go to work and already being anxious in his own right. Oh god, Keith was going to end up blindsiding him with this later.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Lance was frowning at him, blue eyes scanning his face.

“Just nervous about the doctor’s appointment,” Keith said. It wasn’t at all a lie, it just wasn’t going into detail. He knew Lance would think about it, and he didn’t want to distract him in any way.
“I don’t like doctor’s appointments either,” Lance agreed rather than digging into it. He paused for a moment, brow furrowing. “Do you want to…you know?” His cheeks flushed.

“I don’t know,” he replied, mildly amused and curious.

Lance made a sound like air leaving a balloon. “Not that I expect to be doing anything anytime soon, but I heard it was better to start things sooner rather than later and I just…I mean…pills and stuff, you know?”

It took Keith a moment before he realized that Lance was talking about birth control. He snorted, amusement and affection rushing through him. “Yeah. It is better to start early.” He didn’t mind talking about it. Keith wasn’t going to jump on him right away, but he wasn’t asexual or demisexual, and Lance was hot (and Keith was well aware that Lance found him attractive too), so sooner probably was better than later. His heat wasn’t going to come around until November, but it was always better to be safe.

Deciding to keep himself busy so that his mind wouldn’t go spiralling, Keith finished eating and got up to make sure that they both had everything they’d need. Lance apparently decided similarly that sitting around and worrying wasn’t going to do much good. Instead, he rummaged around for paper, writing out the notes that Keith would need that day.

“Just for the car and the gym, right?” Lance asked, glancing up at him briefly.

Keith thought about that before nodding. “Yeah. Anything else that might come up can wait.” Part of the reason it was important to get all of his ID and registration straightened out was so people could scan his ID and get a list of permissions – things Lance allowed him to do. It was so much more convenient than having to get a handwritten note every single time, like a little grade school child bringing a note to a teacher.

Eventually they managed to get themselves together enough to get out to the car and on the road.

This was the first time that Keith had driven instead of Lance, and the Omega very quickly found out something new about his mate.

“Hey, careful!” Lance put his hand on the dashboard. “She’s a delicate beauty. You can’t just try to swerve in and out of traffic.”

He was a horrible side-seat driver. Keith liked to think that he was a good driver, in fact, both Acxa and Shiro agreed that he was very good at it. He was really good at controlling vehicles, even going at ridiculously high speeds, probably because he never doubted he could control them.

“Delicate beauty?” Keith muttered under his breath. That was a nice way of saying that the car was likely to come apart if Keith handled it the wrong way.

“What? She is!” Lance protested. “She’s never let my family down. On purpose.”

On purpose? What the hell did that mean? Keith shrugged it off, focusing on the road instead. One day, he would tell Lance that no way in hell was any future child of his stepping foot inside this car. Actually, no way in hell he was stepping in this thing when one started growing in him. That was a future he wanted, so he wasn’t risking it because of a sketchy set of breaks (that probably needed to be replaced soon).

By the time they reached the aquarium, Keith was all too ready to kick his mate out of the car. He stopped in front of the building, put the car in park, turned on the signal light so that anyone would know to go around him, and twisted to face Lance with a scowl.
“What?”

“Backseat driver,” Keith muttered, making sure to shove Lance’s bags into his arms, lunch included.

“I am not, you just don’t know how to handle something like Blue.” He actually patted the car before looking at Keith, expression softening slightly. “Thanks for making lunch, I forgot about it. You didn’t have to. I don’t expect you too.”

Keith huffed out a sigh. “I know, but I wanted to.” He made a face. “Glad I did, because I’m not sure I could deal with you being hangry and a side-seat driver.”

Lance rolled his eyes and leaned over, pecking his lips gently before retreating and heading into the building. Keith waited a second before driving away.

An odd feeling passed over him as he got back onto the road, heading towards the gym first. Despite the fact that he needed a permission slip to drive the car on his own, he could basically do anything he wanted. There was no collar weighting down on his neck, that was reminding him that some random person could come along and permanently alter his life in terrible ways. Yes, he technically belonged to someone, but he was one of the good someones.

The gym was a nice little place with an accessible parking lot, which was absolutely a bonus for him, because Keith hated parallel parking.

He saw a couple Alphas drop their Omegas off at the front doors, and really, he couldn’t blame them. There were also a couple men (most likely Alphas themselves) over on a patio not far from the entrance, just watching it. The patio was clearly some kind of club, probably an Alphas-only one, because of course it would be there. It was pretty common to find places like that close to Omega-only places.

He tossed his bag over his shoulder, made sure all of the doors in the car were locked, and made his way towards the gym without any kind of fear or sign of weakness. Why should he? He was off the market, and he could kick anyone’s ass if he needed to, especially in a busy place in the middle of the day.

“Hey Baby! Why don’t you come over here and sit with us instead?” he heard someone call from the patio, and had little doubt that they were talking to him, since he was alone.

One of the Alphas that happened to be dropping off her partner and was about to retreat to her car scowled up at the ones on the patio. Instead of going back, she waited by the door, eyeing them suspiciously. It took Keith a second to realize what she was doing. She was making sure he got inside okay.

That was oddly nice of her. He hadn’t run into any Alphas that were nice to him just to be nice before.

“Ignore those assholes,” she said with a flip of her dark hair. “They do that to everyone.”

Keith nodded his head, offering her a quick thanks as he walked inside. The first thing he noticed was that the inside was simply a lobby and the actual gym itself was beyond security doors, which was really nice.

There was a man at the front desk, clearly a Beta, who smiled at him, “Hi, how can I help you?”

Keith wasn’t one for small talk or anything, but he braced himself, because he knew he was going to have to talk to a lot of different people that day. It was going to be exhausting.
Without question, Lance had a much better day than he expected to. Not that he expected his first day to be bad, but he had been so nervous.

Not that he’d admit it out loud, but when he got nervous, he tended to get a little clumsy. Case in point, that morning. He was surprised Keith was able to deal with his ridiculousness.

Now though, he felt excited and energized. He had his own locker, his own IDs, and the marine biologists that he was shadowing and helping out for the first little while were awesome. They were so nice and intelligent. Of course, he would have to do some grunt work too, what intern didn’t? At least he was paid where others weren’t. Still, it was a good day over all, and he couldn’t stop smiling as he clocked out.

He was heading towards the front door, phone held in front of him, when he spotted a familiar figure looking at one of the closest tanks, a ‘small’ one (that went up to the ceiling) with some tropical fish.

His smile grew as he watched Keith stare up at the fish inside with interest. He was wearing different clothes from earlier, and actually looked much more awake than he had earlier.

Slowly, Lance snuck towards him, feeling a bit playful, but also not wanting to freak him out in a bad way. He got close and watched Keith’s shoulders rise and fall as he inhaled. Then Omega froze for a moment before glancing over his shoulder at him.

“Hey,” Lance said, slipping up behind him and wrapping his arms around him. He nuzzled his nose into Keith’s hair, catching his relaxed scent. “When did you get here? I could have shown you around.”

“What, go on a date where you work?” Keith asked, turning to face him. His indigo eyes flashed with amusement. “I came here about an hour ago to look around.”

“Oh! Did you get a chance to see the penguin parade?” Lance asked excitedly.

“I saw one penguin walking around, apparently the others just wanted to play in their enclosure,” Keith replied, nuzzling his face into Lance’s neck, allowing the Alpha’s scent to get on him again.

“What else did you do today?” Lance’s hand slipped down, fingers intertwining with Keith’s as they slowly started to make their way towards the door.

“Went to that gym, it was nice. They have a weight room.” Keith glanced up at him. “Not all Omega gyms do. Most just have cardio stuff.”

“Hmm, I need to start going too.” Lance wiggled his eyebrows at him. “I want to be able to lift you up too.”

He snorted. “Well, I mean, whatever works for you?”

Lance was about to reply, when he heard someone call out to him. The two of them looked over behind them to see a tall, middle-aged woman with long, blond hair walking towards them. Keith hummed curiously as Lance straightened up.

“My boss,” Lance muttered before turning his attention back to her. “Hello, Dr. Queen.”

“Thank goodness I caught up to you. I forgot to give you this packet. I need you to fill it out and bring it back tomorrow.” She handed him a manila envelope, dark blue eyes glancing at Keith
curiously.

“Oh!” Lance motioned towards Keith. “Dr. Queen, this is my mate, Keith. Keith, this is my boss, Dr. Luxia Queen.”

“Thank goodness.” He was about to thank her for bringing the papers to him, but those words did not come from him. In fact, they came from his boss.

He exchanged a look with Keith, who seemed just as lost as him.

Her eyes went wide. “Excuse me, that was rather rude. In the past, I’ve had some problems with very talented Alphas such as yourself that haven’t been able to…handle the stress that can come with it.” She cleared her throat and looked at them with a matter of fact expression. “Research shows that unmated Alphas are much more aggressive. It’s why it’s just as pivotal for an Alpha to find a suitable Omega, and is it for an Omega to find an Alpha.”

Lance wasn’t quite sure how to respond to that. He had heard of those studies too, that as Alphas matured into adulthood, unmated ones tended to be a little more unstable, more prone to anger if they didn’t have an Omega to even their temperament. He didn’t necessarily believe that. His sister was a single Alpha in a very high-stress environment, and she was fine. Not to mention the Alphas with Beta partners.

Still, he wasn’t going to argue with his boss on his first day of work. He saw the odd look on Keith’s face, but before his mate could say something, Lance slipped his hand over his shoulders. “No need to worry about me.” As if to prove his point, he pressed his lips to the top of Keith’s head. “See you tomorrow!”

She smiled warmly as they walked away, Lance keeping his arm around Keith’s shoulders not just to steer him away, but also because he wanted to.

“Missed you,” he said as they walked outside.

“You did?” Keith glanced up at him curiously. He had managed to get a really good parking spot somehow. Lance wasn’t going to complain. It didn’t matter how long he lived there, the sun beating down on them was still hot.

They settled into the car, Lance in the driver’s seat, and he cheered when the AC actually started working on the first try for once. Good ol’ Blue coming through for him again.

“It was a really great day, but yeah, I missed you,” he answered Keith’s earlier question. It wasn’t like his mate had been on his mind the entire time. But when he had a bit of down time to think about it, he did miss him. Lance supposed that was a good thing, because he could function without needing his mate around him 24/7, but he also cared enough where he still wanted to be with him.

“Tell me about it?” Keith requested, leaning against the door and looking at Lance curiously.

He couldn’t stop himself from launching into his day, though a lot of it had been paperwork. He talked about the different animals excitedly, mentioning his favourite interesting facts about all of them. Keith listened the entire time, even though there were things that very clearly went over his head, judging by his confused expression.

What could Lance say? He had a great day, he liked to talk, and it wasn’t every day that someone genuinely listened to him without eventually blowing him off or interrupting.

Still, he decided to end his story before it did get to that point, finishing with a, “So, what else did
“You do today? Passport and gym? Did you like the gym?”

“Yeah, the people there are nice, and I filled out the replacement paperwork for my passport, but you need to fill out and sign a couple things too. Spent some time at home too.”

Warmth rushed through Lance at Keith referring to their apartment as home so easily. Instead of commenting on that, he gasped dramatically. “Don’t tell me you took a nap without me? That’s our time, Keith. Ours!”

It put a smile on the Omega’s face, and that was definitely a win. “I didn’t. We can have a nap when we go home. Probably need it at that point.”

“Ah yes, the DMV. This is going to be a fun battle.” He glanced at the clock to make sure that they were still on time. The one good thing about appointments for Omegas was that they didn’t have to wait in endless lines that barely seemed to move. “Good thing I can do the insurance stuff online, because I wouldn’t want to have to stop there too.”

Maybe bringing up insurance was the wrong thing to do, because Keith’s lips dipped into a frown, brow furrowing. “I really need to get a job. Or maybe I should just stay home and we don’t need to let me drive alone?”

Yeah, they were going to be tight on money, especially since there were extra fees both at the DMV and through insurance to allow Keith to drive on his own. Still, he didn’t like that frown on his face. “Nope. We’re getting that. We’ll be okay.”

“Yeah, but you’re still an intern, and that’s not fair,” he pointed out. “Plus it’ll give me something to do all day.” Keith paused in thought, brow furrowing. “But we can’t afford another car…”

An idea came to Lance’s mind as he remembered a sign he saw at the aquarium earlier that day. He bit his lip for a moment before slowly saying, “You know…I didn’t want to mention it or anything, cause I didn’t want you to think you had to do it, but the gift shop is looking for employees. Since you’re my mate, and I already work there, I’m sure it’d help. Or there are other places super close by so we could just drive together, park there?”

He genuinely did not care what Keith did as a job, as long as it wasn’t putting him in danger or anything.

“Maybe,” he replied thoughtfully. “Part-time’s all I’ll be able to get anyway.” It came out in a very matter-of-fact kind of way rather than bitterly, because it was mostly true.

Though Lance wondered if there was some way he could help Keith get something better. It couldn’t happen until he actually had his graduate degree and an actual position somewhere, but he had heard of Omegas being brought on and trained to be their Alpha’s assistants. Though he also wasn’t entirely sure how healthy that was to be around one another all day every day.

That was something for future-them to discuss. “Well, it’s up to you. If it helps, I’m nowhere near the gift shop at all so it’s not like I’d be checking in on you or anything, or you’d always be stuck around me. Or you could start there and figure something else out, or nothing at all. That’s up to you.”

Keith nodded his head, a small smile on his lips before he turned to look out the window. It didn’t feel like a dismissal, or like he was being ignored, just that he was satisfied with the conversation, end of story.

Lance winced at the main lobby of the DMV. It smelled like annoyance and agitation, and he could
tell that Keith didn’t like it much either from the way he grimaced and briefly turned his nose to Lance’s shirt, likely trying to block out the scent of annoyed Alphas. Betas were much better to be around since they didn’t smell like that.

Luckily, the waiting area they had to go to was separate, and much smaller. There were two other couples there waiting for their appointment.

Lance was relieved to see that neither Omega looked weary or distressed. In fact, both couples seemed happy and at ease with one another. When it came to Omegas, it was pretty much the flip of a coin whether you were going to come across an actual couple, or see an unhappy one being carted around by their Alpha.

Keith seemed to be more at ease because of this too.

That turned out to be a very good thing, because as soon as they got into office, Lance knew that this guy was going to be a straight-up, judgemental dick. His scent was intense and oppressive, and Lance could actually feel Keith shrinking down a bit beside him.

Sometimes Alphas like this tried to come across as charming despite their smell, but this guy looked like he had been trained for war, but got dishonourable discharge, and this was the only job he could get. Meaning he did not look happy at all.

They both sat and Lance quickly produced all the paper work, as well as the paper copy of their bonding certificate, just in case something went wrong with the digital files. He really just wanted to get this over with, and he doubted this guy was going to be nice.

The man looked everything over silently with his dark eyes. He scowled, turning his attention towards Lance and completely ignoring Keith. “You waited nearly two weeks to come in.”

“We were away,” Lance replied simply. He could go on about being in the hospital and moving Keith across the country, but got the feeling that this man wouldn’t care.

He typed a few things into the computer. “I need to be clear, you’re allowing your Omega to drive?”

“Yes,” he answered, reaching out to grab Keith’s hand when he saw it twitch.

“And your allowing him to drive alone? Omegas are covered under most basic plans, but that will spike your insurance up.” Lance blinked at that. Did this guy really think they were stupid? They had researched all of this before.

“Well, yeah,” he answered, trying to keep his ire down. He probably wasn’t doing a very good job, since Keith was the one that squeezed his hand now. “He needs to be able to leave during the day.”

The worker paused, and sighed. He turned and stared directly at him again. “I don’t normally do this, but son, you’re young, and everything is all new and shiny right now, so let me give you some advice. Routine and discipline are your friends when dealing with emotional creatures like Omegas. You think you’re doing the right thing by giving them more freedom, but it becomes too much for them. It’s our jobs as their Alphas to protect them, to care for them, and give them what they need.”

Honestly, Lance was shocked that Keith wasn’t spitting in this man’s face at the moment. He certainly wanted to. A quick glance at him though had Lance surprised, because he had his eyes averted, staring at the floor in almost a submissive way.

He narrowed his eyes at the man and said, “That’s exactly what I’m doing. Put it all through.”
The rest of the time actually went by pretty quickly, though Keith didn’t say a word or raise his eyes from the floor, and the man behind the desk clearly thought that Lance was an idiot.

By the time they left with Keith’s shiny new license in hand, Lance was livid. He didn’t turn the car on right away when they got into it, hands shaking on the wheel as he tried to compose himself. “How dare he?! That asshole! How are you not more angry?!”

Instead of rising to the challenge, Keith sighed and leaned across the console, his scent calming Lance’s nerves, the jittering in his hands stopping. He leaned back and said, “He was an asshole, yeah. But…why do you think I’m not ready to throw hands this time?”

Lance thought on that for a moment and grimaced. “Not the first time you’ve done this, huh?”

“I had a license in the first place, right?” Keith frowned. “Acxa had to fight even more.”

“Jesus. People need to screw off,” Lance grumbled, jamming the keys in and turning the ignition.

Keith smiled weakly. “It’s going to get worse at the doctor’s appointment.”

He was about to pull out of the parking spot, but stopped. There was something oddly strained about Keith’s voice. Lance personally had no love for hospitals or anything of the like, so he got it, but at the same time, Keith sounded, and now smelled, oddly stressed.

“Dr. Tsai is a really nice man. He’s been our family doctor since my parents moved here,” he assured him.

“That’s right.” Keith trailed off and shook his head. “You were having such a good day.”

That sent red flags flying. Lance turned towards him as best as he could, reaching out to take his hand. “Hey, it’s okay. Talk to me.”

“He’s going to go into my medical history with you, right?”

Lance blinked. That technically was the procedure with new mates, even if they had known one another for a while. “That’s right.”

Keith nodded his head and took a deep breath. He opened his mouth several times to say something, so Lance stayed silent, patiently waiting for him to find his words. “There’s something you need to know before we get there. I don’t want to talk about it right now, maybe later, but you need to know from me before you hear it in there…”

“Take your time,” Lance assured him, trying to portray as much calm as he could as he rubbed his thumb over Keith’s hand.

“You remember, when you were in the hospital, I—I told you what happened to me, right? What… that Alpha, not Lotor, a different one, what he did to me?” He shifted uncomfortably, almost sinking down into himself.

“Yes.” Lance very vividly remembered that conversation, his mind instantly going over a billion possible scenarios. Keith would have told him about any STIs or worse that he may have picked up from that before, so it wasn’t that. Knots could be very painful and harmful if a partner wasn’t ready for it. Forcing them in or out would result in tearing too, which was why even semi-decent people just didn’t do that.

Even many super controlling Alphas were careful with their mates in that sense, not wanting to do
anything that might result in losing pups or being unable to have any in the future.

His mind came screeching to a stop as Keith said, “About a month after that I found something else out and I—well—the file’s going to say I tried to kill myself, and in the process, I had a miscarriage.”

Lance felt like he had been punched in the gut. Some Alpha forced himself onto Keith – Keith who was strong and good, even if he was stubborn, withdrawn, and a little grumpy at times. He hurt him in such a terrible way, and the end result was a miscarriage. He felt like he was going to be sick at the thought.

He reached forward, tentatively hugging Keith, who shifted closer to him. Not catching any reluctant, Lance hugged him as tightly as he could in the front seat of the car.

“I’m sorry,” Keith muttered.

What? “You’re sorry? You have nothing to be sorry for.” He gently put a couple fingers under Keith’s chin, guiding his face up so that they were staring at one another. “Nothing.”

“Not even if that medical record isn’t accurate?” A flash of fear rushed through his eyes. “Not even if it was wrong, and I didn’t try to kill myself? Not even if I knew what was happening to me and…did what I had to do?” Once again, he almost looked like he was curling up into himself as best as he could while Lance’s arm was still around him.

He blinked, not quite understanding at first, until it sank in. “Oh.” Holy shit. He realized exactly what Keith was talking about. His breath caught in his throat. How could people do this to others? Force them into corners where they had to make decisions like this?

Keith would have lost everything. The Alpha that hurt him probably would have ended up biting him, since he would have the right to be around Keith. Omegas had few rights to their own bodies normally, and basically none when they were pregnant.

No wonder everyone believed he tried to kill himself.

“So, you didn’t try to purposely hurt yourself to – you know – end your life?” Why was he focusing on that? Oh well, he’d get to whatever point that his mind was trying to make.

Keith seemed startled by this, like he was expecting Lance to yell at him or be disgusted. He stared for a moment before shaking his head. “No. I was low but…no. I didn’t want to die. Not really.” He had the ability to do it, but he didn’t want to do it.

Lance nodded in understanding. “And you don’t feel that way now?”

“No,” he answered sincerely. “Not at all.”

The Alpha took a deep breath of relief. “Good. Good. If you ever feel that low, talk to me, okay? And if I get like that, I’ll talk to you. Okay?”

Keith nodded slowly, but he didn’t seem quite as hesitant as earlier, so whatever Lance’s brain had decided to do seemed to work. “And the other thing?”

“What? You think I’ll be disgusted with you or something? Some people might. But not me. I love you. God, I hate that you were put into a position where you had to make that choice. I hate that someone hurt you. I don’t blame you for any of it. I’m pro-choice, whether that means choosing to end a pregnancy because it just isn’t the time, or choosing to keep it because it’s important to your religious beliefs. That’s what makes it choice, right?” He placed a hand on Keith’s cheek. “If
anything, it shows me how strong you are.” Lance already knew that Keith did like kids, did want them, so to make that choice could not at all have been easy on him.

Keith was staring at him with wide, shocked eyes, his breath hitching slightly. Lance blinked at him, not sure what he said to garner that exact reaction. “What?”

He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it with a snap. He shook his head, and tugged Lance slightly, exhaling as his shoulders finally relaxed. “Thank you.”

Lance had no idea what he was being thanked for, but instead of arguing, he simply said, “You’re welcome.” Of course he returned the hug, how could he not?

Many people in the world would say what he had done was wrong, but not Lance. He was going to work as hard as he could to make sure that they had a good life together, and that he would never have to suffer like that again.

…

Dr. Tsui’s office was beautiful. Keith wasn’t entirely sure where the décor originated, though they were definitely east Asian. His father had been Japanese-American, born in the USA, but Keith didn’t actually know too much about that part of his culture. Contrasting that, it was very clear that Dr. Tsui embraced his culture.

The doctor didn’t ask Keith to sit on some kind of uncomfortable bed or anything like that. He simply got him to sit on a padded chair as he checked over Keith’s stitches, tutting slightly, but cutting them away painlessly. Lance hovered nearby almost nervously, which was actually kind of amusing. It wasn’t the first time Keith got stitches, and honestly, probably would be the last.

“I could have minimized your scarring even more,” Dr. Tsui said when they were both sitting down in front of his desk, where he had his computer on, no doubt staring at Keith’s files that would have been updated in Vegas, and sent over to him. That was one of the good things about having everything digital. It was easy for the information to be passed from one place to another, meaning he didn’t have to go through the same examinations again and again.

“The doctors in Vegas weren’t as awesome as you though,” Lance said easily, and Keith had to remind himself that this doctor knew Lance’s family, knew them and knew their stance on Omega issues. That had to mean something, right?

Dr. Tsui chuckled at Lance and nodded. “Well, I suppose we should get this over with, yes?” He looked at Keith with a smile. “Keith, it’s very nice to meet you. As mentioned before, I’ll be your family doctor now. That means if you have any problems, book some time with me and I’ll order labs, or send you to a specialist for whatever problem may occur.”

Keith nodded, and realized that he probably smelled a little anxious, because he was. He couldn’t take suppressants, but he wished that he had bought some suppressant strips that he could put over his scent gland. That actually wasn’t something that he needed Lance’s permission to get, since there were some situations where scents were too distracting.

“Now, Keith, it seems that you’re in very good health now. We’d like to schedule a couple tests though.”

His heart leapt nervously. After the Alpha hurt him, he had been tested for diseases, and after his miscarriage, he had been ‘cleaned out’ so to speak. To make sure that nothing remained behind that would cause any infections, and to make sure there was no permanent damage.
Those files should say all of that. There was absolutely no reason to do anything invasive until they were ready to try for babies.

Catching onto his distress, the doctor clarified what he was talking about. “They have to do with the different drugs that were introduced to your system. We’d like to make sure that there’s no permanent damage from them.”

Keith’s mouth fell open, his eyes widening. “I hadn’t thought of that.” He genuinely hadn’t considered that the cocktail of drugs he had been subjected to a couple weeks ago, including whatever Honerva gave him to counteract the ones Lotor pumped into him, might do actual damage.

Dr. Tsui scowled. “None of what was given to you was FDA approved. I don’t quite know what was going on there, I only know enough to treat you. Is it okay to go ahead and order the tests?”

It took Keith a second to realize that the doctor was asking him and not Lance. He nodded his head at that, because yes, if those drugs had screwed him up somehow, if they did something where he couldn’t have the children he wanted in the future, he was going to fly back to Vegas, break into whatever prison Lotor was in, and cut his entire dick off.

Lance’s hand rested on the back of Keith’s neck, thumb brushing gently against the mark that he left there the night they bonded. It relaxed him a little bit.

“Now, there is something here in your past as well,” Dr. Tsui said almost reluctantly.

Lance tensed slightly, no doubt ready to tell him they didn’t have to go over that, but Keith beat him to the punch. He met the doctor’s gaze, and bluntly said, “I was violently beaten and raped, tried to off myself, and had a miscarriage. They checked me afterwards several times. Lance is aware of that. Do we need to talk about it again?” He didn’t try to ‘off himself’, but that was not something he was going to admit to anyone else. The only ones who knew were him, Acxa, and now Lance.

Dr. Tsui glanced at Lance, who nodded his head, confirming Keith’s story. The doctor nodded in response. “Of course not. Though should you feel that you need to talk about your experiences, including recent ones, I can provide you with some names of therapists to talk to. That goes for both of you.”

Lance looked down at Keith curiously, before nodding his head. “Dunno yet, but if either of us need it, we’ll definitely get a hold of you.” He straightened up slightly. “There is one thing you could help us with. Birth control prescriptions for both of us.”

That caught the man’s interest. “For both of you? Are you sure?”

Keith nodded, but Lance was the one that explained. “See, we’re working on figuring each other out. If we clash on something, we want time to be able to work on it instead of making a toxic environment. After we have us figured out…well…” He trailed off and looked down at him.

For some reason, Keith’s past jumped to the forefront of his mind. The first boyfriend that was into very questionable things. The second one where things ended pretty well between them. The Alpha that hurt him in a way no one had before or since then. Lotor about to hurt him. Lance being considerate, always thinking of him. The happy times with his family. Bad, terrible things had happened to him, but why should he let that impact his future more than the good moments? Why wasn’t he allowed to believe that Omegas could be more than what they were said to be, but at the same time, still want to hold a child of his own in his arms in the future?

With a warm smile, Keith nodded and said, “Yeah, after that.”
Lance looked confused for a moment before smiling at him almost bashfully.

Dr. Tsui chuckled, drawing both of their attention. Right, now wasn’t the time to be having a moment. “That’s refreshing, seeing two people as young of yourself thinking things out logically. Of course I’ll write the prescriptions for you.”

Honestly, Keith expect scorn. He expected the doctor to tell him that they were being ridiculous, and of course he wanted children right now. At the very least, he was expecting him to question Lance as much as the man at the DMV had.

He expected to feel awful about himself after this doctor’s appointment, but as they left, prescriptions in hand, he felt oddly good. Maybe it was because now he really didn’t have any huge, major secrets from Lance. Maybe it was because the Alpha was proving over and over again that he was serious about Keith being his equal.

It just put him in a super good mood, despite the bad memories that threatened to overtake him earlier. Those could kindly fuck off.

His good mood must have been obvious, because by the time they got back into the car, Lance was smiling at him again.

“When we get home, you can sit back and relax, and I’m going to cook,” Lance said, carefully running a hand over Keith’s stitches-free cheek.

Keith’s eyes fluttered lightly at the touch. “You don’t have to. You had a long day too.” Plus he still had that paperwork to do, whatever it was.

“I know, but you’ve done a lot for me so far so I’m going to do it for you too!” Lance turned around to start the car, carefully inching it out of the parking spot.

“Hmm,” Keith said and narrowed his eyes almost playfully. “Are you buttering me up to talk about things?”

Lance chuckled a bit, keeping his eyes on the road. “I think we should at some point, but not if you don’t want to. I don’t…want to ruin your good mood.”

Keith thought about that for a moment. He was in a good mood now. Maybe, just maybe, part of that was actually because he was communicating with another person properly for what felt like the first time in forever. He was so tired of missing the mark with people since he did it so often.

“What do you want to know?” he asked.

Lance stared at the road, brow furrowed in thought as he navigated through the city and towards their apartment. “Do you have nightmares?”

Keith thought about that. “Back then when it…happened…” He trailed off, biting his lip. Lance was patient though, allowing him to gather his thoughts. “When he raped me, I had nightmares all the time.” Lance reached one hand out, placing it on top of Keith’s gently. He appreciated the fact that he was allowed to pull away if he wanted to, but right now, the bit of comfort was nice.

He hadn’t actually said that word in regards to what happened to him all that often before. It made something dark weight in his chest. At the same time though, it was almost like he was letting it go. That he could talk about it, not be judged critically as if it was his fault or like something that needed to be coddled. It was like he could eventually put the bad memories, the hurt and the pain from that, in the past where they belonged.
“The nightmares got better,” Keith continued. “They never completely went away though, and now…after Lotor…” How weak would it make him look if he admitted that curling up in Lance’s arms, surrounded by his scent, actually made him feel safe and secure? Maybe a little too much for right now.

Lance nodded in understanding. His thumb rubbed gently across Keith’s knuckles. “It’s not the same, but I know I get nightmares too for different reasons.” He wet his lips and hesitated. “Um, if things like this, me touching you, bothers you, let me know, okay? I’m not going to do it unless you want me to.”

Keith smiled, feeling that same warmth that he was starting to associate with Lance come back. Maybe he could tell him that. “It doesn’t bother me at all. Maybe it’s because we’re mates, I don’t know, but I don’t feel that same kind of…paranoia with you. You don’t treat me like I’ll break, but…you also don’t treat me like I’m unbreakable either.”

“That is some kind of metaphor there.”

“Shut up!” Keith pouted. “We were having a bonding moment.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Lance chuckled. “But you know, if you have nightmares, you can come to me. I don’t care. I used to call Hunk in the middle of the night when I was really sad over Nyma. So yeah, it’s fine.” He lifted his hand away from Keith’s to turn the corner. “And, uh, maybe I could do the same with you? And we can tell each other when it’s not okay? Mamá says communication is key.”

Good lord this Alpha was going to be the end of it. It was by sheer happenstance that Keith ran into him in that casino in Vegas. It was literally the best thing that ever happened to him. It felt like that happened both yesterday, and a lifetime ago.

“I’d like that.”

Lance’s smile seemed to light up everything around him, and he started rattling on about making his ‘famous’ spaghetti and garlic knots, just the way his Mamá taught him.

And if Keith ended up sleeping curled up against Lance in his room that night, well, who could blame him?

Chapter End Notes

This part of this story is more the ‘settling down’ arc. Sooner or later, we’re going to be going through much bigger skips in time. We’ll be going over holidays, birthdays, other important things, good moments, bad moments, etc. This story is designed to be more ‘episodic’ than Vegas was (eventually).

So if anyone has any suggestions, anything they’re really curious about, don’t hesitate to ask!

Also I’m sorry I didn’t get the chance to reply to anyone last time. I really do appreciate every little comment you leave, I just got so busy!
Keith had been living in Florida with his mate for an entire week at this point. Though he had interacted with Hunk and Pidge plenty of times, he had yet to meet the bulk of Lance’s family, and was starting to think that he wouldn’t get to.

Oh, not because they were avoiding them or anything (to his knowledge, though a part of him was starting to wonder). No, he wasn’t going to get to meet them because it probably wasn’t a good idea to meet your spouse’s family after you killed them. Well, maybe he could play the role of the grieving widow. Would it be that hard to make it look like an accident?

The apartment fell silent for a blissful second, and then it happened again. That unholy sound.

God, Keith hated this song with a fucking passion. He actually wasn’t picky with genres of music, and honestly, he tended to listen to what was on the radio or available streaming services quickly, so that tended to be more popular music. If it liked a song, it didn’t matter if it was death metal or a pop ballad, he liked the song. However, if he disliked a song, he actually really hated it.

And not only was the song blaring on a loop from the speakers beyond the locked bathroom door, but Lance was belting it out without abandon. When Lance said he needed a shower after work because he got some gross stuff on him earlier, Keith didn’t think it meant this.

There was a sudden, loud bang at the door that actually made Keith jump. He whirled around, glaring at the door heatedly as someone yelled, “Fuck off McClain!”

Okay, no. Keith could be an ass about the music, but some other random dude? Nope. That wasn’t happening.

He practically flew to the door, and opened it without checking through the peep hole (which he really needed to do more). The man standing on the other side practically towered over him, every aspect of him screaming Alpha, but Keith didn’t give two shits about that.

For his part, the man seemed genuinely startled at the sight of him. And okay, maybe Keith was wearing one of Lance’s long muscle shirts that showed off more than he would expose in public, but he didn’t think he warranted that full-body look.

“Oh,” the Alpha muttered, nose flaring slightly as he no doubt scented the air. “McClain got himself an Omega, huh?”

The statement wasn’t bad, but the way he said ‘McClain’ riled Keith up far too easily. He was already annoyed as hell, and oh look, here was someone he could take that out on without feeling guilty. He never claimed to be a great person. “Do you always go around screaming at people for listening to music when it’s the middle of the day?” He knew the apartment had noise restrictions after 10:00, but it wasn’t even 5:00 yet.
The Alpha snorted with sheer amusement. “He got a fiery one at that. Be a good Omega and tell him to turn the noise down or I’ll do it for him.” He winked at him. “And if you get tired of the string bean, I’m right next door.”

“You look like you have a second set of shoulders growing out of your shoulders, and that makes it look like you’ve got a little head.” Keith hadn’t even realized that the music had stopped, or that Lance had come out of the bathroom until he absolutely lost it, laughing hysterically. The other Alpha looked too stunned to say anything, so Keith simply said, “Leave us alone.” He slammed the door and locked it.

“Jesus Christ,” Lance breathed out, wheezing a bit. “Man, Norman’s harmless, but he’s still an asshole, so that was beautiful.”

Keith turned around to say something, most likely scowl at him about how it was his fault that ‘Norman’ had come to the door in the first place, but his words got caught up in his throat. Apparently Lance rushed out of the bathroom, probably at the sound the other Alpha yelling at him. That meant that he was wearing a towel and only a towel. He was wearing a towel, and he was naked and hadn’t dried off, so he was wet, and yeah he was a bit skinny but he definitely had some lean muscle.

His eyes met Lance’s, and there was teasing grin on his face, one eyebrow raised as he leaned forward slightly. “Like what you see?”

The garbled sound he made was humiliating, and Keith bolted, snatching his phone from the couch and barricading himself in his room as Lance’s loud laughter rang through the apartment.

He groaned and flopped onto his bed. Jesus Christ, he was too gay for this.

His phone rang with a silly, familiar tone. He didn’t even bother looking at it, swiping where he knew the button to answer was and bringing it to his face. “Shiro, Lance is going to kill me.”

There was a long pause instead of Shiro’s normal, exasperated sigh. Then, a woman’s voice said, “Well, that’s not good.”

Keith flushed a little bit at that. He had to admit, he was kind of wondering why Lance seemed to be stalling the inevitable so much. He knows things went bad with Marco, but Veronica seemed to like him enough. “It’s nice to actually talk to you too. I can go get Lance for you.” He started to get up to go to Lance’s room. Hopefully he was dressed now.

Panic hit him hard, because literally the first thing that he said to his father-in-law was that her son was going to kill him. Never mind, this was how he was going to die. “I’m sorry! I thought you were my brother! I didn’t mean literally! Lance isn’t going to hurt me! And I’m not doing anything to make him mad. I swear!” Oh my god, he sounded pathetic. Someone please off him now.

There was a tinkle of a laugh from the phone. “You must be Keith. It’s so nice to actually hear from you. Not just hear about you.”

Keith flushed a little bit at that. He had to admit, he was kind of wondering why Lance seemed to be stalling the inevitable so much. He knows things went bad with Marco, but Veronica seemed to like him enough. “It’s nice to actually talk to you too. I can go get Lance for you.” He started to get up to go to Lance’s room. Hopefully he was dressed now.

“Actually, I’d like to talk to you, since I have you,” she said, her voice no less pleasant, causing Keith to pause and sink back down to his bed. “Now, let me tell you, that son of mine has been quite
selfish. He’s been hording you to himself, telling us that you’re settling in and everything. Of course, that makes sense, but coming to dinner once wouldn’t hurt, would it?”

A very small smile appeared on Keith’s face. She sounded so sincere and kind, and he could already see where Lance got that from. “No, it wouldn’t hurt.”

“I’m so glad you agree!” she sounded beyond overjoyed. “Why don’t you and Lance come for dinner tomorrow?”

A bit of nervousness welled up within Keith at that. “I’ll check with Lance. He’s been trying to surprise me, and won’t even tell me ‘when’ the surprise is coming, just that it is.” Keith got up, padding out of the room and going to Lance’s room, knocking on the door. He wasn’t sure he could handle walking in on him changing or something at this point.

“That sounds like him,” she said with a laugh. “He’s always been like that, you know? My little drama boy.”

Lance opened up the door to his room, a flirty grin on his face, but whatever he was going to say died on his lips as his eyes landed on the phone Keith was using.

He smirked at him. “You should tell me some stories about little Lance.”

“Who are you talking to?” Lance asked quickly.

“Your dad wants us to go over for supper tomorrow.”

Lance squeaked, and tried to grab the phone, but Keith took off to the other room, putting the couch between him and his mate.

“Of course, I have many, many stories,” Lance’s Papá agreed.

“In that case, yes, we’d love to come over tomorrow,” Keith said, keeping his eyes on Lance. Whenever he would move towards one side of the couch, Keith would go to the other.

He didn’t even hear what she had to say to that, because Lance flung himself over the couch, latching onto him like some kind of lanky koala, causing Keith to fall back onto the couch. In the commotion, the Alpha successfully snatch the phone from him.


“You’re killing me, Keith. You’re killing your mate.”

“I thought it was Shiro when I answered the phone,” he admitted. “That was fun.”

Lance’s dramatically hurt look instantly vanished with a snort. He moved to get off of him, but grimace a bit, hand going to his side.

Keith pulled himself up so he was sitting, Lance still hovering over him, worry rushing through him. “You okay?” Lance’s wound was almost healed, but the stitches had to stay in just a little bit longer.

“Yeah, just a bit of an ache.” He Looked up at him, sighed, and then flopped down. Keith grunted from the added weight, leaning back down onto the couch. “Traitor. I can’t believe you betrayed me like that.”

At first, he wanted to comment on Lance forcing his hand due to his awful singing. Then he realized
something else and felt himself almost shrinking. “If you don’t want me to meet them, we don’t have
to go.” Keith knew he didn’t really look like the kind of person that someone wanted to bring to meet
their parents with his too-long dark hair, leather jackets, ripped jeans, and gloved hands. He also
wasn’t exactly the most open or friendly person in the world either.

Back in high school, someone told him and his sister that they both had identical resting bitch face.
They were probably right. Keith could get why Lance was still reluctant to bring him to meet his
parents, especially with how bad things had gone with Marco.

The thing about scents was that it was actually kind of hard to pick up on your own generic one, but
when they changed, that was usually a little bit easier to catch onto. So Keith could tell when his
scent soured, betraying his stoic expression. Damn, he really needed to get some of those suppressant
strips before they went to see Lance’s family. If they went.

The Alpha’s eyes widened not dramatically, but with obvious alarm. He quickly scooted off of him
so that he was sitting properly, allowing Keith to sit up straight again. He grabbed his hands,
squeezing them firmly but not painfully. “Of course not! I didn’t want them to overwhelm you,
cause, like, if there’s one thing my family’s good at, it’s being loud and overwhelming. I just wanted
to give you the chance to settle in, ya know? I didn’t— I didn’t mean for you to think I didn’t want
you to meet them! Of course I do!” He looked down and then back up. “I’m sorry I made you feel
that way. I swear, I’m not avoiding them because of you.” His shoulders slumped, and Keith could
almost see the self-depreciation going through his mind.

He sighed, Lance’s unhappy scent reaching him. He shifted forward, throwing one of his legs over
Lance, essentially straddling him, so that they were face to face. Keith rested his arms over Lance’s
shoulders, fingers playing with the small hairs on the back of his neck. Lance’s hands rested on his
hips, startled eyes staring up at him. “Thanks for thinking about me, but I do want to meet your
parents. That way if they hate me we can get this over with. For what it’s worth, I think settling in
first really did help some.” He certainly felt a lot better about his environment than he had when they
first got there.

Lance blinked several times and sighed, resting his forehead on the crook of Keith’s shoulder.
“We’re both disasters.”

“Probably,” Keith agreed, heading his head against Lance’s.

“We need to learn how to communicate right. What we need and want.”

“Yup.”

Lance leaned up, brushing his nose against Keith’s as he lips turned up into a smile. “Well, I really
want to kiss you right now.”

For a moment, Keith almost just gave in, but then something popped into his mind. “One condition.”
Lance’s eyebrow rose. “You never play that song you were singing in the shower again.”

“What?” Lance leaned back. “That’s a classic! No deal!”

“No kiss then.”

“That’s not fair!” Lance’s hands on his hips tightened a little bit. “We said we weren’t going to try to
change each other, Keith! It came up more than once!” He paused. “Compromise. Once a day.”

“Once a year,” he replied quickly.
“Once a week.”

“Once every six months.”

“Once every two weeks.”

“Once every three months.”

“Once a month and I’m not going any lower!” Lance cried out dramatically.

Keith was trying not to smile, and he thought that he was doing a pretty good job, but dammit if he didn’t feel the muscles in his face twitching just slightly, threatening to creep upwards. “Once a month.”

“Look at us,” the Alpha promptly preened. “Communication and compromise. We got this relationship stuff down.” He let go of Keith’s hip and held his hand up in front of him. The Omega snorted in amusement, but gave him the very awkward high-five he was looking for. They were too close to one another for it to be anything but.

Lance wrapped his arms around him, drawing Keith as close as possible, resting his forehead against his collar bone. Keith smiled, arms going around his shoulders, and running his fingers through his hair again as he hugged him, resting his head on the top of Lance’s once again as he closed his eyes.

…

**Keith > Pidge & Hunk**

**Keith:** Lance is at work and I need advice.

**Pidge:** it’s like 8am wtf

**Keith:** You don’t sleep anyway.

**Pidge:** tru but hunk does

**Hunk:** Hunk is awake. What’s up?

**Keith:** Theoretically, what does one bring when meeting their in-laws for the first time?

**Hunk:** AW, you’re finally going to meet the fam? That’s nice! Nothing! Just yourself.

**Pidge:** they don’t need that much salt

**Keith:** I hate you.

**Pidge:** no

**Hunk:** I’m sure you’ll be fine, don’t bring anything.

**Keith:** I have to! Marco already hates me. I don’t need his parents to hate me.

**Hunk:** Hmm…

**Hunk:** I’m not working today. I could help you cook Lance’s favourite dessert if you want.
**Hunk:** Tama has the car though so you’d have to come here.

**Hunk:** You know, if you want to. Don’t have to!

**Hunk:** And if you have the car! I know Lance said that he was going to leave it with you most days.

**Keith:** Really? You’d do that!

**Hunk:** You bet!

**Pidge:** !!!! Yo pick me up too! I have nothing to do and I’m always down for Hunk’s cooking!

**Keith:** You just called me salty.

**Pidge:** are you really going to deny that?

**Keith:** Give me half an hour. Send your addresses.

When Keith dropped Lance off at work that morning, he had been the picture of composed and calm. The second that he got back home though, the panic set in. He was horrible with people, and he was going to meet the most important people in his mate’s life. Keith was kind of stuck with Lance and vice versa, so it would be bad if they really ended up hating him. It wasn’t like they were actually just courting or anything. They were mates. That was entirely different.

Also, he really liked Lance and had no intentions of going anywhere. So he wanted, needed to make a good impression.

Hunk coincidentally having the day off was a up everything up with how nervous he was. This felt almost as bad as when he was in the airport waiting to leave Vegas for his new life in the first place!

That was how he ended up swinging around where Pidge lived, before heading over to Hunk’s place. He didn’t even have a chance to get out of the car before Pidge was sprinting towards him and jumping in the front seat, her mother waving from the door. Her house was in a suburb, but it was a nice place, and honestly, Keith was a bit jealous. That was going to be future-Keith’s problem to deal with.

Hunk’s house, on the other hand, was a little out of the way, a beautiful, one story home with trees, a garden, and from the looks of it, a pond not too far away.

“Hey guys!” Hunk said cheerfully, opening the front door before Keith could knock. He had a broad smile on his face. “Tamā’s at work, and Tinā went to go get groceries, so we got the house to ourselves. They both know you’re coming over though.”

Walking inside, Keith couldn’t help but stare in awe. It was a tasteful, gorgeous home, and he nearly ran into a wall when he saw the kitchen. It looked borderline like what someone would see in a Professional Chef’s home.

Pidge didn’t seem phased by the room at all, strolling inside and flopping down at one of the bar stools that was in front of a long, rectangular island. “So, finally meeting the in-laws, huh?” She hadn’t brought this up in the car, talking about some kind of robot she was building instead.

Clearly she just wanted to drag him with Hunk there too.

Crossing his arms in front of him, he shrugged, not quite sure if he should sit down or not. “Yeah.”
Now that he thought about it, this was really the first time he spent a long period of time with the two of them when Lance wasn’t around.

Catching onto his discomfort, Hunk smiled warmly and motioned to the stools. “Take a seat! I’ve got a ton of recipes here we can use. Do you know what Lance’s favourite things are?”

Keith slid onto the comfortable chair next to Pidge and looked at the Alpha curiously. A part of him almost felt like he was being tested. He thought for a moment before remembering. “Knots?” Pidge immediately burst into laughter, and horror rushed through Keith as he realized exactly what he had said. “I meant garlic knots! Shut up!” He kicked her chair lightly, not wanting to hurt his own foot.

Hunk laughed too, the sound booming merrily through the room. “That’s true, but we can’t make those for dessert.”

“Um…” Keith tried to remember exactly what it was Lance had said about the baked goods. He liked most things, but when it came to food in general, he especially liked the kinds that could be easily carried around. He was especially fond of stuff from food trucks and stalls. “He does like funnel cakes…oh!” He lit up. “Churros!” Keith paused in thought. “Are those Cuban?”

Hunk shook his head. “No. Well, I mean yes, you can get them there too and everything! It’s more that they have origins in Spain, Mexico, and a few other places.”

Keith flushed at the mistake. “Oh. Sorry.” Yeah, he didn’t even know anything about his own cultural background, let alone others. It was kind of shameful, honestly.

“Hey, it’s okay.” Hunk smiled at him. “You’re learning. Also Cuban food is kind of a mix of different things. Spanish, Caribbean, African. Lots and lots of different things all together! Lance does really like that kind of food for obvious reasons though.” He flipped through the recipe book, finally landing on a page that had churros and different ways to make homemade sauces to go with it. “You know, that might be a good topic to bring up – see if anyone wants to help you learn how to make some of that stuff.”

Keith nodded his head, but he couldn’t help but internally grimace. He didn’t really want that to be his entire life: stuck in a kitchen, cleaning a house. For now, it was fine, but already he could feel himself getting restless being home all day.

He was really starting to think about taking Lance up on his idea of looking into the part-time job in the aquarium gift shop. Or maybe they could go around on the weekend to look at other places. The problem Keith had was that positions that Omegas were generally accepted in weren’t exactly his strong suit. Simple customer service and such. It wasn’t hard to shrug off those thoughts for now. There were more important things to think about.

Keith thought that churros would be easy to make, but given that they were so easy to burn, it turned out to be little more difficult than he anticipated. A lot messier too.

The sauces were a complete disaster, so Hunk ended up handling them on his own. Pidge recorded the entire thing, commenting as they went. Of course, she was also their official taste tester, and that meant that she had to try even the bad ones.

“Listen,” Pidge said to him as she munched on a good batch of churros. “The McClains are actually super nice. Protective of one another, but nice. They’re gonna see just how gooey and icky you and Lance are together already and be on board. Especially his father.”

“She’s an amazing woman,” Hunk agreed eagerly. “His mother’s a bit more stern but he’ll come
around too. Just uh – maybe don’t bring knives with you or anything. Ya know?”

Keith stared at him blankly. “But I always have a knife on me.”

“Except for now right?” Hunk asked, his voice rising up slightly.

Keith raised an eyebrow at him, and Pidge snorted with amusement.

They didn’t stay that much longer after that. Hunk helped Keith back the churros into a special container that would keep them warm, and that also had a pouch so that sauces wouldn’t slosh everywhere. With that and his keys in hand, he headed towards the door, Pidge trailing after him.

“Thanks,” Keith said, glancing back at Hunk. “I owe you a lot.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Hunk said with a wave of his hand. He looked thoughtful for a moment. “Honestly, Lance and I have been friends for years, and even after he got over what Nyma did, he was still in a really bad spot. He’s like, really happy around you though.”

“Are you kidding me?” Pidge spoke up as she tugged her Burks on. “I have never seen Lance gush over someone like he gushes over Keith, and I thought it was bad before.” She made a face at him.

Hunk chuckled. “Not wrong. But like…seeing him so happy is enough for me, you know? Plus we got an awesome new friend out of all of this! Honestly, you’ve got nothing to worry about with his family. Not in the long run. Once they see how happy he is, they’ll be on board.”

Keith felt warmth creeping across his entire face, even up to his ears and down his neck. He ducked his head slightly and nodded with a small smile on his face, flattered and embarrassed at the same time.

Pidge snorted and nudge him. “Better go before we kill him and I need to find another drive home. Thank you for providing sustenance on your day off, Hunk!”

“Not a problem! We’ll all have to hang out together again soon!”

“Movie night?” Keith asked, more out of curiosity than anything else, because he was under the assumption that it happened every week unless something else came up.

Hunk lit up. “Right! You should pick something this week!”

“Maybe,” Keith wasn’t too sure about that, but he’d see. His taste his movies wasn’t exactly the same as the average movie goer.

Knowing that he had to get going, because there was still plenty left to do, they finished saying their goodbyes to Hunk, and Keith once again set out to take Pidge home.

The other Omega looked up at him with interest as they drove. “So, you settling in good? Getting used to it?”

“I think so,” Keith said with a nod. “I’m getting used to getting around on my own and everything. And home’s good.” His nose wrinkled. “Yesterday though Lance made a big deal about me putting toilet paper the wrong way in the morning? And he also listens to horrible music.”

She laughed at that and nodded her head. “He really, really does.” Looking out the window, Pidge frowned slightly then said, “You know, you’ll be fine.”

“I already pissed off one McClain,” Keith pointed out he turned a corner.
“Yeah, but the most important one seems to like you an awful lot.”

He couldn’t help but smile at that. He supposed that Pidge was right. The important thing was that Lance liked him, maybe even more than liked him at that point. His cheeks flushed as he thought back to Lance comforting him the other day.

“What’s that look for?”

Keith bit his lip. A part of him really did want to share this with someone. “It might not mean anything but, uh, he didn’t mean to, he was trying to comfort me, and he told me that he…loved me.” His cheeks positively burned. “I don’t even think he realized what he said.”

“The big sap,” Pidge said with a shake of her head. “I wouldn’t worry about it too much. Lance is head over heels for you, so even if he didn’t mean to say it now, it’s true.” She hummed thoughtfully. “Hey, next week when Lance is at work, why don’t you come over? I can catch you up on some of the local lore. Cryptids and stories and stuff.”

He perked up at that. “Sure. That sounds fun.” He paused in thought, a grin appearing on his lips. “Honestly, I kind of want to watch that Cryptozoology Files documentary on movie night.”

“Yes!” Pidge threw her arms up. “Let’s do it! If you want Lance on board, just say we can watch one about sharks after he’s done. Pretty sure he owns everything Shark Week, so he’ll be down for it.”

Keith nodded his head, glad for the switch in topic. This was easy to talk about, feelings and meeting Lance’s family? That was necessary, but difficult.

He could focus on that after he got Pidge home though.

…

“Keith!”

The Omega looked up, startled as the door flew open and practically bounced off the wall, the scent of angry Alpha almost immediately stinking up the room. It had him torn between instinctively growling at his mate, and shrinking down, tilting his head to expose his neck submissively.

This wasn’t like how Lance had been a bit pouty and put-off that Keith wouldn’t let him have the churros before they got to his parents’ house, this was genuinely, truly annoyed.

The two stared at one another, Keith waiting for him to continue before finally asking, “What?” His voice was wary, and he was honestly bracing himself for some kind of fight as Lance closed the door.

“What do you mean what? Look at me!” Lance threw his hands out.

Keith blinked, looking him up and down before realizing that Lance had layered a pink, button-up shirt over his blue one. He couldn’t remember the Alpha wearing that, but maybe it was left over in his mess from before. He didn’t get the anger though.

Clearly unimpressed, Lance said, “Keith, this shirt was white! It’s pink now!” He reached into the basket that he had dropped beside him, brandishing a bright red t-shirt. “Recognize this?” Keith did, his stomach sinking. That was his shirt. “I told you not to mix the colours with the whites!”

“I…” he trailed off, not sure how to respond. He hadn’t even noticed the shirt earlier when he took
the clothes down to start washing before he left to get Lance. Then again, he also hadn’t been paying
attention to what basket he was tossing his own decidedly non-white clothing into. A part of him was
ashamed of himself for making such a stupid mistake. The other part was starting to get pissed. There
had been three baskets of laundry just sitting there. Lance had even commented on it. “The laundry
was building up!”

“I said I’d do it,” Lance replied, his voice terse and stressed. “I’ve been working. You know, that
thing I have to do to make sure we can have food on the table? The thing I’m doing to get a better
education so that we can have a better life than this shit hole?” He motioned around him.

Okay no, he wasn’t just going to sit here and take this over nothing. “What’s your deal? It’s one
shirt!”

“Are you kidding me?” He picked up the basket and dumped everything onto the floor, the entire
pile various shades of splotchy pink. “Look at it all!”

Keith finally stood up, face twisting into a glare. Humiliation and pure anger rushed through him.
“You don’t get to flip out at me over the fucking laundry, Lance! Sorry for giving a shit and trying to
do what I can while you’re gone!” He turned and stormed away, reaching his room and slamming
the door before Lance could move at all. He twisted the lock shut and then flopped down onto his
bed.

God, he felt stupid. He did remember Lance mentioning separating the colours, it just slipped his
mind and then he hadn’t noticed. But also, Lance had no right to be the asshole he had been.

He wished he could go for a run or something to get rid of the antsy feeling that prickled at his skin.
He used to do that at home whenever someone got him angry. Well, he tended to have this reaction
to Alphas specifically.

It was the combination of that natural instinct to cringe away, to either hide from an Alpha’s angry or
try to soothe it, as well as his own fight, flight, freeze instincts that were almost always aligned with
fight.

Keith looked at his phone, feeling the urge to call his mother or Shiro, but no, he didn’t want to do
that. He couldn’t just run to them any time something bad happened. Couples fought, right? This just
happened to be their first fight.

Their first fight a mere hour before they were supposed to head over to see Lance’s family. That was
just fucking great, wasn’t it?

“Patience yields focus,” Keith muttered to himself as he stared up at the ceiling, inhaling through his
nose, holding it briefly, and exhaling through his mouth.

There was a soft knock on the door. “Keith?”

The Omega pursed his lips, tempted to ignore it, but he was an adult and he needed to act like it. He
pushed himself up and moved close to the door, but he didn’t open it. “What?”

Much to his relief, Lance didn’t try to open the door. “I’m sorry. I just…I’m stressed. I just want
supper to go well because I want them to see how amazing you are, but I know Marco’s been an ass,
though Veronica’s disagreeing with him and I just…I’m sorry. I shouldn’t take it out on you when
you’re just trying to help and keep yourself busy. I know you need to be doing things to be happy.”
He paused. “But that’s just excuses. I shouldn’t have snapped at you. I’m sorry.”

He took a deep breath and opened the door, startling Lance. “You shouldn’t have acted pissy.”
“I know.”

Keith crossed his arms in front of him again. “I didn’t mean to dye the stuff.”

“I know that too,” Lance said with a groan. “I really am sorry. It was a mistake.” His hand slowly rose, but then hesitated. “Can I hug you?”

There was a pause as Keith genuinely thought about what he would prefer. Finally, he nodded his head and stepped forward, allowing Lance to wrap his arms around him. Keith’s hands slid up Lance’s chest, playing with the pink shirt that he was still wearing. “For what it’s worth, this still looks good on you.”

Lance let out a bark of a laugh. “Thanks.” His hands brushed down Keith’s arms before twisting their fingers together, and holding his hands close. “I don’t want to fight with you over something so stupid. Especially not when you didn’t do anything purposely wrong. Shit happens. I’m sorry. And you know I care for you, right? So much?”

Keith couldn’t help but sigh a little bit. He shouldn’t let Lance off so easily, but he could smell the sincerity to his words. Bless being able to smell small changes in scents related to emotions. “If you don’t want me to meet your parents today, we don’t have to go. Not if you’re not ready. I should have asked you before I said yes.”

Lance shook his head. “No, it’s better this way. I want it to go well and the longer we put it off the more it’s like we’re hiding, but we’re not. You’re not going anywhere. I’m not shipping you away. They gotta get used to it.”

“I won’t do the laundry anymore,” Keith offered.

He laughed again. “I’ll try not to lose it over little things like this again.” He brought Keith’s hands up, pressing a gentle kiss to his knuckles. “I’m sorry.”

A part of him couldn’t help but melt at the gesture. Keith nodded his head, and stepped closer. He leaned close and tilted his head, exposing his neck. Lance smiled at him, leaning closer and nuzzling his scent gland. A slight shiver that changed into a purr as he nuzzled him in return.

His mind rushed back to Lance unknowingly telling him that he loves him. He felt a little ridiculous now at thinking that Lance was going to ditch him over a small blowout over laundry. He needed to keep that in mind. They weren’t going to get along all the time, and that was okay.

They would get through it together.

Chapter End Notes

No one caught on to the fact that Lance told Keith he loved him in the last chapter, huh? Keith definitely did.

It’s very important to note that almost all couples fight from time to time. Things will not always be perfect. In fact, experiencing this, learning how to cope, communicate, and compromise, is really important. However, there is a huge difference between getting into an argument, and an abusive situation. Always keep that in mind.

Next chapter is the one we’ve been waiting for!
Meet The McClains

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There was always something exciting and comforting about coming home. Something warm always overtook him as he turned down onto the familiar roads of his childhood house – the place he truly called home up until very recently. Every day, he started to see small things in his own little apartment that just made it more like home.

It was insane how a single person could change that for him.

Now, as he turned that familiar corner towards a very familiar house, he didn’t feel excited or comforted. Instead, he felt nervous. Lance couldn’t quite put his finger on just why he was so nervous. Yes, he knew that bringing home your new mate, who you happened to bond with after only a few hours of knowing them, was a big deal, but it wasn’t that. He wasn’t nervous about introducing them to Keith. He was also kind of excited about the thought of Keith getting to know his family.

Just before they got to the driveway that led to his parents’ house, Lance realized exactly where the dread was coming from. In the drive way there were three others cars he instantly recognized as Luis’, Veronica’s, and Rachel’s. Marco didn’t actually have a car at this point (he had borrowed Rachel’s when he got his stuff the other day), but he was probably there too.

A bit of anger rushed through him. He told his parents that Keith wasn’t necessarily good with crowds, and even two McClains could be considered a crowd by some people. He thought it was just going to be his parents and grandmother, but no, of course not. Everyone had to be there all at once.

“I knew this was going to happen,” Lance spat out, not even trying to hide his irritation as he pulled over on the side of the road, unable to get into the driveway. “It was supposed to just be my parents!” God, he really wanted to throw something, keeping his eyes on the house. He saw a curtain flutter as someone no doubt looked out to see who was there. “We can leave, if you want. Try again another day?”

Keith’s indigo eyes slid over the other cars before turning back to him. He wet his lips and then placed his left hand over Lance’s right one, which had been gripping the gear shift tightly. “It’s okay. Let’s go in.”

Keith’s indigo eyes slid over the other cars before turning back to him. He wet his lips and then placed his left hand over Lance’s right one, which had been gripping the gear shift tightly. “It’s okay. Let’s go in.”

Lance’s breath caught in his throat for a moment. He knew how nervous Keith had to be about this, but here he was, going to face it all with a fierce determination. The Omega’s nervousness vanished entirely, replaced by sheer stubbornness. Keith looked almost terrifyingly handsome and beautiful at the same time, dressed in a casual red polo shirt and dark blue jeans that had shocked Lance at first sight, because when did he wear things like that?

It was more than a little endearing that he was saving it to wear went to see Lance’s family.

Keith was ready to face them, so who was he to deny that?

Basically feeding off of Keith’s confidence, he leaned forward and gently kissed him. The Omega hummed slightly as he responded favorably, before backing away with a smile. They both got out of the car, Keith carrying the container of churros and sauces as they walked up towards the door.
Before Lance could knock though, the door flew open, revealing a short woman with curly, dark brown hair and laugh lines etched into her features.

Lance couldn’t help but melt into the hug that his Papá wrapped him in, even if he was much taller than she was now. He’d always been somewhat of a Papá’s boy, or so everyone said, and honestly, he had missed her a lot. His Papá was everything that he aspired to be as an Alpha: protective, kind, generous, and so much more.

The woman looked over his shoulder, her smile growing as she stepped around him. “You must be Keith! I’m so excited that we finally get to meet you! Lance has been telling me good things about you all week but selfishly keeping you to himself.”

Lance held his breath as he watched his Papá approach Keith, gently placing a hand on his cheek where his scar marred his skin, leaning a little closer to him. Keith tensed slightly, but didn’t pull away.

This was how things were done. The head Alpha of a family unit, who in this case was Lance’s Papá, would scent a new mate, no matter the dynamic, that someone brought into the family (that usually meant an Omega or a Beta, since Alphas tended to stay with their packs/families and bring their mates into them). This was commonly how things were done in packs as well.

He felt his breath leave him when his Papá continued to smile. “Come, come. It’s muggy out here.” She guided Keith inside, Lance snatching the container of churros away so that he could hold his hand, though he wasn’t sure who’s comfort it was for.

Going into the house was like going from a silent room into a scream-o concert. Okay, maybe not that bad, but it was definitely close! There were people talking in more than one language, a television blaring, and the excited screams of two children.

Said children suddenly came flying around the corner, and Lance couldn’t help but laugh as squeezed them both tightly. He loved his niece and nephew to pieces, and couldn’t wait for the rest of his siblings to give him more. Though, he supposed that he could contribute a bit to that, in a few years’ time, of course.

“Tio Lance, who’s that?” his niece asked curiously, blinking up at Keith.

He chuckled and stood up again, holding an arm out towards Keith, who stepped up closer to him.

“This is my mate. His name is Keith. Keith, these are my little niblings Sylvio and Nadia.”

Nadia looked at him with wide eyes. “Does that mean you’re our tio now too?”

“Uhh…” Keith trailed off, staring back at her with a confused look.

Both Lance and his Papá chuckled, though Lance came to his mate’s rescue. “You bet he is.”

The girl perked up excitedly. “You’re way prettier than any of my other tios. Oh! Are you an Omega like my mom? I wanna be an Omega like her, she smells real pretty, not like my dad, he’s kinda gross!”

“Nadia!” Lisa swept into the room, an amused smile on her lips. Lance’s Papá took the opportunity to slip out. “Don’t talk about your father that way.” Nadia just shrugged in response, causing her mother to sigh and shake her head before turning her attention to Keith. “Hi Keith. I’m Lisa.”

“Oh! You own the diner!” Keith blurted out, but then looked awkward again.
She laughed merrily. “That’s right. You’ll have to try our lunch or dinner, it’s the best around!”

“Lisa,” Lance said, slipping an arm around Keith’s shoulder, “is basically silent compared to everyone else here, so she’s a blessing.”

“A normal version of silent, or compared to you?” Keith shot back automatically, but then cringed a bit and looked around.

Luis, who had just come up behind his wife, snorted loudly. “Definitely compared to Lance. Though if you can handle him, you can handle the rest of us.”

“Rude,” Lance shot back at him, though he did smile.

Holding his hand out for Keith to shake, the taller Alpha said, “It’s nice to meet you, Keith. I’m Luis.”

Keith shook his hand, and then Sylvio puffed up his chest a bit, stepping forward and holding out his hand. “I’m Sylvio.”

The Omega tried to hide his amused smile as he shook the young boy’s hand, before turning his attention up to Lance. “Someone wants to be like their dad.”

“Probably,” Lance agreed as they finally took their shoes off and walked farther into the house. No one ever wore shoes inside the house.

“What’s that?” Nadia asked, pointing at the container Lance was carrying.

“Churros!” Lance replied excitedly, and both children responded just as eagerly.

“Not until after supper. Your grandparents all worked hard on it,” Lisa scolded them, shooing both kids off.

“Go wash your hands!” Luis called after them. “With soap! And warm water!”

While Lance was distracted by this, Veronica sauntered over, greeting Keith and then looking at the container with a raised eyebrow. “Did you make those?” Her eyes turned up to him suspiciously.

Lance bristled a bit at her jab at his baking abilities. He wasn’t Hunk, but he could get by! “Actually, Keith did.” She looked relieved at that. The jerk!

“Why would you bring churros to a family dinner?” They all looked up, and Lance felt his stomach dropping a bit as Rachel leaned against the doorway to the living room, Marco standing not far from her, watching with interest.

This is what he had been worried about. Rachel and Marco were close, so if Marco ranted about Keith, it was likely Rachel would believe him over anything else.

His sister didn’t stop there though. She ran her fingers through her thick, curly hair as she eyed Keith. “Were you expecting a carnival or something?”

Keith flushed, and Lance was kind of glad that he had put one of those scent-suppressant strips on his gland. He hadn’t understood why at first, but now he got it. The embarrassment would have made the air heavy and tense, and Lance couldn’t be sure that he wouldn’t do or say something in that scenario.

Narrowing his eyes, Lance stepped forward slightly, a very subtle way of putting more room
between his mate and his sister. “Keith made them for me, and it was so good that I insisted we bring them over to share with everyone. It was his first try and everything.” It was a lie, but that was fine. No one else needed to know that.

Jeez, maybe _he_ should have put on one of those scent strips too.

Rachel opened her mouth to say something, but his Papá came sweeping back into the room, shooting her a harsh glare before smiling at Keith. “I think that’s lovely! Especially since they’re Lance’s favourite thing!”

Keith blinked. “I thought garlic knots were?” He looked up towards Lance with confusion.

He knew _exactly_ what was going on though. Lance groaned loudly and dramatically. “Papá, stop trying to subtly quiz him!”

She winked at him, taking the dessert from his hands. “It’s okay. He’s passed everything with flying colours so far!”

It was a positive thing, but Lance wasn’t at all surprised when Keith shifted closer to him. In response, Lance stepped back so they were side-by-side again, resting his hand on his back, fingers brushing against the spot where the bondmark was beneath the scent strip (which really just felt like a giant bandaid). “So, what’s going on anyway? I thought it was just going to be Papá, Mamá, and Abuela?”

_“Someone,”_ Veronica stressed, _“apparently hid his mate for too long. So Mamá decided we all needed to be here.”_ Her words were teasing, but the way her eyes flickered towards the kitchen made Lance’s stomach sink a bit.

He tensed slightly. “Right. Oh! I forgot! Keith, you’ve met everyone else here so far, but this lovely Beta here is my sister, Rachel.” He glanced at her again. “Your girlfriend here?”

“She’s at work,” Rachel replied with a wave of her hand.

That was when a tall man appeared in the doorway. Lance’s mother was a male Omega who never had quite the prettiness to him that Keith and many other Omegas did, but that didn’t make him any different from the others. Still, he held himself tall and proud, as if he too was an Alpha.

Lance smiled warmly at him. “Mamá, there you are! I wanted to introduce you to Keith!”

The man eyed Keith for a moment before turning towards Lance. “You’re late. Supper is going to get cold.”

He was _completely_ taken back by the cold attitude, not expecting it at all. Well, he expected his mother to be a _bit_ unhappy, but not like this. He was normally so jovial! Shoulders slumping slightly, Lance said, “Yeah.” He felt Keith’s hand slip around his waist briefly, squeezing gently as a sign of comfort.

They didn’t dally around, going into the dining room that had an impressively big table in it. Of course it was necessary, both of his parents came from big families.

Going into the room also revealed the last person Keith had yet to meet. Lance’s heart beat rapidly as he slid his hand down to Keith’s hand, gently pulling him after him. “Keith, this is my Abuela.”

The old woman looked up at him over her round glasses. “Ah, you must be the Omega Lance met in Vegas.”
“Uh, yes ma’am?” Keith replied, unable to stop his voice from rising slightly in the presence of the old Omega.

She continued to eye him for a moment before looking at Lance. “Shame on you. He’s much more beautiful than you let on. You need to make sure your mate knows that, especially an Omega. Much more beautiful than those two hussies.”

“Abuela!” Lance cried out in horror.

“Okay, the high school one was fine. You were both just children,” she conceded. “The other one was a hussie.”

Lance groaned loudly, but he couldn’t be too embarrassed when Keith actually chuckled. “From what you said, she’s not wrong.”

“I like you,” his grandmother decided. “You may call me Abuela. I will not have any of this ‘Ms. McClain’ nonsense. You may call my daughter that, but not me.”

“Uh, yes ma’am?” Keith looked more than a little lost as he sat down beside Lance, clearly unsure of what had just happened.

Lance felt happy though, because that was yet another person that had simply accepted Keith’s presence in his life without being a complete ass. Yeah, there would be things to discuss, but Lance didn’t think that the outward hostility that radiated from his Mamá, Marco, and Rachel was warranted.

It made dinner painfully awkward.

Lance was desperately trying to think of a topic of conversation to bring up, since silence at the McClain house just didn’t happen, but right now, even the kids were quiet (and clearly thrown for a loop by this).

For a moment, Lance was thankful when Marco cleared his throat to catch everyone’s attention, but then a split second before his brother started talking, he wished that he wouldn’t. “So Lance, you wanna tell us what happened when you got shot?”

Sylvio and Nadia looked up at him with pure alarm.

(Lance wasn’t sure if it meant anything that he and Keith were seated closer to the little kids. He had noticed that his family tended to sit like that – oldest to youngest, but after being called out on actually being treated like the ‘baby’ of the family, it didn’t sit well with him.)

“Marco!” his Papá snapped, genuine anger flashing through her blue eyes. “That is not an appropriate dinner discussion!”

As stubborn as Lance could be, Rachel was almost notorious. “We’d just like to know why our baby brother, who was going to Vegas for a concert and some fun with his friends, ended up getting shot.” She looked directly at Keith, making eye contact with him. “Or got in the situation he did in the first place.”

Lance narrowed his eyes at her while Keith tensed. Before either one of them could say anything, Sylvio spoke up. “Tio Lance, you got shot?”

“Why would someone hurt you?” Nadia asked, big eyes full of unshed tears.
“Don’t worry guys, he’s fine,” Luis assured his children, but it didn’t help at all, resulting in him giving Marco the stink-eye.

Lance wanted to say something to reassure them, but he didn’t know what to say for once. He never thought he’d have to have a discussion with his niece and nephew about getting shot. Before he could though, Keith started talking. “You know how Spiderman sometimes gets hurt protecting his friends?”

What the hell? Lance glanced at Sylvio again, blinking when he realized that his nephew was wearing a Spiderman shirt, something Keith must have caught onto. The young boy eyed the Omega before nodding. “Yeah?”

Keith kept his attention on the kids and no one else, keeping his voice light and steady. “Well, the bad guy—“

“Like Doctor Octopus?” Sylvio interrupted.

“—like Dr. Octopus,” Keith agreed easily, “tried to hurt me, but your Tio Lance saved me, and got a little hurt doing that, but he’s okay now. Just has a little mark left that’ll be better in a day or two.”

Nadia blinked up at him in awe. “So he’s like a superhero?”

“Yeah,” he replied.

The two looked at one another before beaming at Lance. Sylvio practically bounced in his seat. “You’re really a superhero like Spiderman?”

Warmth rushed through Lance, and hell, if he hadn’t fallen for Keith before that moment, he was completely and utterly gone. Really, he was about to swoon, but he had to answer his nephew. He smirked at him playfully. “Of course not! I’m way better than Spiderman!”

That sent both of the kids into a fit of giggles.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lance saw Lisa whisper something to Luis, and then both of them looked at Keith warmly. A quick glance around let him catch the approval on both his Papá and Abuela’s faces just like that. Actions always spoke loudly to his family though. Not only that, but in his totally unbiased opinion, it was really sweet watching Keith interact with the kids so easily. Lance expected him to be a bit rough and awkward with them, like he was with most adults. Guess not.

Marco looked like he was about to say something else, but their Papá cut that off very quickly. “Let’s enjoy our meal and talk about other things for now.” She shot a meaningful look at the kids, almost daring her son to upset them again.

Marco wisely chose to keep his yap shut.

The rest of dinner wasn’t so bad. Luis and Lisa talked about the diner, Rachel told them all about her beauty salon, as well as her girlfriend. Marco admitted to staying with Rachel for now, but assured their parents that he was dating someone new now.

Of course, he had to get in a jab by saying, “We’re going to take it slow, hopefully do things properly.”

Keith shifted slightly beside Lance, but he was pretty much done with his brother at this point. Lance simply stared at him and said, “I know. Just like the last ten.” Seriously, Marco had another partner
every other week. Like Lance, Marco didn’t care about someone’s gender, though he did seem to skew heavily towards other Betas.

Veronica quickly jumped on the chance to change the topic, not wanting to start another fight, and for that, Lance was relieved.

They could get through this. They could survive.

…

Sylvio and Nadia were set loose to play, and Lance almost wished that he had an excuse to go with them. He wanted to be treated as an adult, but at the same time, he also didn’t want to be a part of whatever adult-talk they were going to have to do.

It was nice out, so they were all sitting out back, either on the stairs leading from the patio down to the back yard, or on the chairs that were set up.

Before anyone could start on Lance or Keith, Veronica had started regaling them with a new case that she was working on. She often interacted with abused Omegas, and Keith seemed rather interested by the entire process she went about to try and help them.

Though she said no names, she mentioned that the Omega was pregnant, but lost the baby due to the Alpha’s abuse. That kind of abuse to a pregnant Omega, as far as Lance knew, actually wasn’t common at all. It was more common for an Omega to be emotionally or mentally manipulated, as to keep the pup safe. The thought of someone who was able to fight against their natural protective instincts enough to do that frightened Lance.

“And now,” Veronica said, eyes flashing angrily, “the asshole is actually trying to sue this Omega. They’re not bonded, and they’re trying to force them into a bonding ceremony. He claims that the Omega owes him a pup.”

Keith shifted next to Lance, and he only realized then that the story must be hitting home for him. Keith didn’t shy away from it though, keeping his eyes on Veronica as she continued.

“Cases like this really help build up the bigger ones, but they make me sick. Hopefully we can build momentum, and get more people on board with the Omega Right Movement.”

“Let’s hope nobody does a background check on you and our family,” Rachel said after fluffing up another pillow for their grandmother, setting it behind her.

“What?” Veronica’s eyes narrowed at her in confusion.

Rachel shrugged, “Well, that’s something they’d do, right? Try to discredit you if you get enough people backing you?”

“Well, yes,” Veronica agreed after a moment of thought. “That already happens. There are so few people in power who agree with me right now, so some do try to bring me down. I have nothing to hide though.”

Lance felt his stomach sinking, he got a feeling that he knew where this was going.

Her eyes flashed. “So, wouldn’t it look bad on you for defending the rights of Omegas when your own brother claimed an Omega within hours of knowing him?”

Everyone froze and stared at her.
“Rachel!” Papá yelled at her, startling the kids.

“I’m not wrong? Am I?” Rachel eyes, turning her attention towards Keith and pushing forward. “You only knew Lance for a few hours, right?”

Instead of cowering away, Keith narrowed his eyes at her. His fight or flight instincts were clearly aligned to fight right now. Lovely. “Yes, but it wasn’t anything like those cases.”

“Really?” She shot back. “You’re telling me that another Alpha won’t say ‘look here, see, it’s fine. Everyone’s happy with it?’”

“Do you know what it’s like having someone force himself on you?” Keith all but snarled back. “Try to force you to bond with him against your will?” She said nothing in response, so he kept going. “No? I do. What happened with Lance was nothing like that. Don’t treat them like they’re the same as if you understand.”

Rachel looked completely taken aback by that, but then Marco came to her defense. “How do we know that though. We don’t know anything about you, or what happened out there.”

“Are you kidding me?” Lance burst out. “I told Mamá and Papá what happened! They’re the ones keeping it quiet like it’s a taboo!”

“Lance,” his Mamá spoke up, voice deeper than Lance’s could ever hope to be. “You were hurt badly. You came home with stranger for a mate that just happened to get you and your friends into a lot of trouble. What’s done is done, but we’re trying to protect you. Rachel is right. Something like this could harm your sister’s image a lot. Yes, the situation is permanent and we will adapt to it—“

Oh no, he was not dealing with this nonsense. Nope, Lance was done with all of this. “The situation? Here’s the situation: we both consented. We both agreed. Both of us. Maybe it was quick, but I don’t regret it at all.”

“You say that now,” his Mamá said firmly, “but that’ll change once the high of being newly mated wears off and you realize what you’ve done.”

His Papá suddenly stood up, glaring at her husband and children. “That is enough out of all of you!”

Lance breathed heavily and looked over at Keith, who was now looking down and clearly trying to hold it together. That comment must have hit the wrong way.

He wasn’t going to just sit here and let this happen. Instead, he stood up, pulling a startled Keith with him. “Come on.”

Keith hesitated for only a moment before following Lance back through the house to get their shoes on (having gone into the back yard in bare feet), then heading towards the front door.

“Where are you going?” his Papá asked as she followed them closely.

“Home!” Lance snapped, before calming himself down. “Sorry. I’ll talk to you later Papá, when the assholes aren’t around.” He didn’t care if he was insulting his mother at this point, that entire exchange had been unacceptable.

He pulled Keith towards the car, until the Omega said, “Lance, you’re hurting my hand.”

He quickly let go of him and face him. “Sorry. Sorry.”
“Your hands are shaking,” Keith noted. “Do you want me to drive?”

“No, I want to.” Lance shook his head, and they both got into the car. Keith fidgeted a bit beside him, taking off the scent suppressant strip and tossing it into the messy back seat. Lance figured out why a moment later when the sweet scent of calming honey hit him. He closed his eyes, leaning his forehead against the steering wheel as Keith rubbed his back. “I should be calming you down.”

“No, for now, you need it more,” Keith assured him without an ounce of doubt or hesitation.

God, this Omega was going to be the end of him in all the best ways. Lance sat up straight, putting on his seatbelt as he finally started driving away.

He needed to go someplace to calm down, and he wanted to do something to salvage the night with Keith.

That led him to only one place that he could think of.

…

The place Lance ended up stopping was actually on the side of the road a ways away from his parents’ house. He guided Keith out of the car (making sure to lock the doors), and down around the coarse perennials that lined the now cold sand of the beach.

It reminded him of the other day, when they came out to watch the sunset, except the sun was already gone by the time they got there, leaving only the bright moon and the calm waves.

“I’m so sorry about that,” Lance repeated, flopping down onto the sand, having insisted they not talk about it on the way there. Instead, they spend the time playfully fighting over the radio and singing the songs they knew as a distraction.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Keith replied with a slight shake of his head as he sat beside him. “They’re just trying to protect you.”

“By being like that? I thought Mamá would be protective, but not like that though. And Rachel can be opinionated but she’s normally not a—a bitch! I just…” He groaned threw his hands over his face. He was so embarrassed. Keith’s family kind of just accepted him. He hadn’t dealt with this kind of reaction from them.

“I’m sorry your family doesn’t like me,” Keith said after a moment. “I know it was important to you and…you know…you can drop me off and go back if you want?”

“No,” Lance replied instantly, because hell no he wasn’t doing that. He grabbed Keith’s hand and squeezed tightly. “You are my mate. You are my husband. Yeah, the beginning of this is wild and weird, but I don’t regret it because I got you out of it. If they would even bother to just give us a chance and listen…” He groaned and then glanced at him with accusing eyes. “Why don’t you seem more upset?”

Keith shrugged, an air of indifference around him. “I’m used to people not liking me.”

That was not at all okay. Lance huffed out angrily, scooting impossibly close to him and resting his head on Keith’s shoulder, lacing his fingers through his. “Those people are idiots, and so is my family. Except for the good ones.”

“Give them time. Even if they don’t like me, they’ll learn to respect you enough.”
“Maybe,” Lance grumbled. “Doubt it though. No one respects me at all.”

“I do,” Keith replied quickly and honestly. “You’ve given me every reason to trust and respect you. If they don’t see it, they’re wrong. I think they do though. Your father. Your grandmother. The little kids.”

Lance couldn’t help but chuckle at that, warmth rising up in him as he remembered Keith reassuring the kids during supper. “You were great with them, you know?”

Keith smiled slightly at that, glancing over at him. “Expecting me to be a train wreck?”

“No! Well, yes,” Lance admitted with a slight shrug. “Not a train wreck, I just…for some reason you seem like someone who would be awkward around tiny humans?” He was reluctant to even say that.

The Omega laughed at the description. “It’s fine. You’re not the first to say it.” His smile widened as he shifted so they were staring at one another, which meant Lance’s head was removed from his shoulder, but hey, Keith looked excited, so it was a good trade-off. “I mean, I told you what I did before when that Alpha…” He trailed off but then focused again before Lance could say anything. “I actually love kids. They’re pretty much everything good in the world, and they can make it so much better if we let them. I don’t really talk about it, but I do want a family. More than one kid. I can’t imagine growing up without Acxa, and it’s so weird to think that Shiro wasn’t there for a part of my life, because I can’t see it without him now. So yeah, more than one.”

Lance tried to imagine growing up without his siblings, but he couldn’t, not even Rachel and Marco. He nodded his head. “I want that too someday.”

Keith hummed in acknowledgement, looking up at the sky thoughtfully. “A year.”

“What?”

“We see what happens in a year,” Keith clarified. “After that, if everything goes right, we can talk about having kids.”

The Alpha’s heart swelled at the thought. He eagerly nodded his head, tugging Keith close. “A year,” he agreed.

They sat quietly on the dark beach, and Lance knew that he had made the right decision coming out there. Supper had been a train wreck, but this? This was good.

Completely relaxed now, Lance nuzzled Keith’s neck gently. “Do you think you can sleep with me tonight?” He paused, panic erupting in him. “As in snooze! Nap! Actual sleep! God.”

Keith snorted in amusement. “Yeah. I think I need that too.” He looked at him with a grin. “You can be little spoon.”

“That’s the goal.” Keith flirty smile turned into a serious one. “Lance, I just…you saved me. I know I said it before but…you really did. If I wouldn’t have run into you, I would…” He took a deep breath. “Lotor would have forced me to bond with him. I would either be dead, or restrained in some kind of fancy room as a prison because I would have killed myself that time. Better that than give him what he wanted. You saved me from that. And yeah, it’s selfish of me, because you got hurt, but I’m so glad you were there. I’m glad I ran into you.”

The realization hit Lance hard. When Omegas conceived, it tended to happen fairly quickly.
Sometimes it could take a day, but more often it was within hours, and unlike Betas, their pregnancies could be detected very early on (usually within the week, as opposed to two or more for Betas). For many Omegas, it was usually detectable almost as soon as they came out of their heats, since conception usually happened during the very first day. If Lance wouldn’t have met Keith, wouldn’t have bonded with him, he’d already be bonded to Lotor, most likely pregnant. Not sitting on a wide, open beach, talking about having that discussion in a year’s time.

He screwed his face up sternly. “Pidge proved to the FBI that she was worth it. I’m pretty sure that she’s secretly doing things for them now. Hunk keeps texting that Shay girl. All those Omegas that we saved are free now. All that happened because we ran into one another. Most importantly, I got you. I don’t regret a goddamn thing.” It was entirely true. Some things sucked, but in the end, it had all been worth it to him.

Keith stared at him with wide eyes before swinging his leg over Lance’s hip, sitting on his lap as he pulled him into a kiss. Lance hummed into his lips, hands trailing around his back. He was a little unhappy when Keith pulled away, pouting just a little bit.

The Omega smiled at him. “They think you’re stupid. They probably think I’m using you. Let’s prove them wrong about both of us.”

Lance smiled brightly. “I like that idea.” He pulled Keith close again, sealing their lips together.

As he tumbled back onto the sand, Keith’s weight coming down on top of him, he couldn’t help but feel a renewed confidence.

Yeah, they were going to prove everyone who doubted them wrong.

Chapter End Notes

So, that was a mess. For the record, more people in Lance’s family like Keith than dislike him. And yeah, his mother, Rachel, and Marco seem like complete dicks, but it’s not really that black and white. They’re absolutely being unfair, but they’re not unforgivable or anything.

This is actually the end of the first arc of this story. Then we have another little arc that’s shorter (though it does blend pretty seamlessly with this one), and after that we're going to start moving around to lots of different things like holidays, birthdays, other important events. There'll be a lot more time-hopping at that point.
It was supposed to be a lazy day. Not that Keith regularly did anything super strenuous on a day-to-day basis, as sad as that was. It was actually a good thing at first, allowing him to establish a clear routine. It was crazy how easily he and Lance adjusted to constantly being in each other’s lives.

There were more hiccups, of course. The toilet paper debacle came up more than once by this point (“How the fuck can you put toilet paper on the wrong way?” “It’s just wrong Keith!”). Keith had once panicked because he couldn’t find the keys anywhere, and Lance was almost late to work (turns out they were in the fridge for some reason).

That morning had been an adventure in and of itself. Keith had been more than a little confused when he couldn’t find half of their plates, which, what? They had just bought an entire set! Lance was in the shower, so he set off looking for them. Only to find a stack of dirty dishes in Lance’s room by his desk, where he had been working late into the night on something. Keith groaned loudly at the mess, heaving it out of the room to clean, because they needed them.

Good god, his mate could be a slob in his own personal space when he was stressed (never on a good day though). Even worse, Lance hadn’t even noticed the pile of dishes that had vanished from his room and reappeared in the sink. Not even when Keith dropped him off. He simply kissed him and hurried out of the car.

It was such a small thing, but for some reason, it was really weighing on Keith’s mind to the point where he left the gym early that day. What was wrong with him? It was just some dishes, and it wasn’t like he hadn’t done stupid stuff either.

That was the situation he had put forward to Shiro via video call a little bit later.

Shiro was doing a valiant job of trying to hide his amusement, but in the end, Keith could still easily pick up on it.

“Not everything is going to be perfect, Keith,” Shiro reminded him gently. “This sounds to me like there’s something else bothering you.”

Keith thought about that. He hadn’t told anyone else about the disastrous meeting with Lance’s family last week. He knew Lance hadn’t talked to his mother, Marco, or Rachel since then, and just thinking about that made his stomach twist.

He shrugged in response to his brother.

Shiro frowned a little, clearly not liking the fact that he wasn’t there to try and help. “I don’t know what’s going on, but just remember, everything is about communication and compromise. That’s the key to making any relationship work.” His brow furrowed slightly. “It’s why Adam and I didn’t work out.”

The name almost startled Keith. He hadn’t heard it in a very long time. High school sweethearts who everyone, Keith included, thought were going to become mates, only for it to horribly fall apart a few years before Shiro and Allura became a thing. Keith’s stomach twisted at the thought of that too.
“Do you think that’s going to happen with me?” he didn’t mean for his voice to come out sounding so meek. Of course, it wouldn’t be the same, he was already mated to Lance and that was permanent.

He knew that a small part of the reason he was so attached to Lance was due to the bond mark that permanently marred his scent gland. There was some kind of science behind it involving chemical reactions and changing scents and pheromones, but Keith couldn’t remember anything like that.

He also knew that Lance wasn’t that kind of person that would go off and have an affair. He knew that. Yet, at the same time, Keith couldn’t help but think he was going to fuck this up somehow.

Shiro smiled at him warmly. “No Keith, I don’t think it’s going to happen to you. I know how hard it can be for you to get your thoughts across the right way, but from what I’ve seen, you’ve been doing an amazing job. I’m really proud of you.”

Keith ducked down a little bit at the praise, feeling his ears heat up.

Perhaps his brother could tell that he was having a hard time accepting the positivity, so Shiro added, “Besides, you’ll always have minor, silly things that irk you about your partner. You’ll always have little squabbles or fights, sometimes even bigger ones. It’s how you deal with it that matters most. One thing Allura and I agreed to was never going to bed angry. Also, no storming out of the house angry with one another. Going to different places in the house to cool down can be a good thing. I mean, you think Allura’s perfect? Far, far from it. I could list off all the things she does that bothers me, and that was before the hormones.”

“Shiro,” Keith said, lips quirking up a bit as he saw movement behind him.

The man’s face suddenly looked nervous. “She’s right behind me, isn’t she?” He nodded, watching in amusement as he swung around. “Allura! You’re back early!”

Allura swiped the phone from him, smiling warmly at Keith. “Hello Keith. I know I said I’d help you with your problem today, but I think I need to…talk to your brother for a bit.”

He snickered at that. “Alright. I’ll be home, so call me back later.”

She nodded her head and hung up. Keith looked back at the clock, realizing that it was around lunch time now. He could make something, or he could just have a nap until Allura called back in a couple minutes.

Honestly, after his needlessly stressful morning, the nap sounded beyond good. The thing about naps though was that they had to be timed in the right increments. There were certain time limits that would be refreshing, but going just over or under them did very little in the long run.

For Keith, a fifteen-minute power nap did wonders. Not only that, but Allura’s uncanny ability to be punctual for everything reigned supreme, since she ended up calling him back only a couple minutes after he woke up feeling so much better.

He had always admired Allura. Back in high school, there had been a buddy system of sorts set up between seniors and freshmen. Young Omegas coming into the school were primarily paired with older Omegas, but if the numbers didn’t work out, they were paired with Betas. That was how Shiro and Allura first met. He had been her buddy, and even if he was older, she had harboured a crush on him for a while (not that it mattered, they didn’t get together until long after she graduated and healed from her incident with Lotor). Not only that, but Allura had been Keith’s buddy.

It was strange how things ended up working out that way.
Even before she and Shiro had gotten together, both of the half-brothers had kept in contact with her. Keith could still remember the confusion and the suspicion he held when she started pulling away from them thanks to Lotor, though it had ultimately been Shiro and Coran that reached out to help her.

Keith’s mind went back to the aftermath of that, how he had been the one she curled up to, sobbing over the entire incident. Maybe if he hadn’t seen her after that, like Acxa, he would have been a bit skeptical over her claims of how vicious and controlling Lotor was. The Alpha certainly exuded a certain charm upon meeting him. He had though, and any chance to use him to get back at Shiro and Allura was fruitless due to that.

The end result was that Keith was close to his sister-in-law too, and if there was one thing he truly trusted her with, it was helping him sort out exactly what he needed to wear for his upcoming date.

Lance insisted that he wanted to go somewhere nicer – that he had even made a reservation for it already. Given that a suit was not one of the things Keith had brought with him from Vegas, nor was it in the boxes that had arrived from his mother, that meant he had to go out and buy something.

Keith liked his simple, practical fashion sense. A t-shirt and jeans was practical in nearly every situation. He wasn’t an idiot though. He knew next to nothing about formal wear, and he was pretty sure that Pidge wouldn’t be able to help him either.

Maybe one of Lance’s siblings might have been able to help, but given everything that happened, it wasn’t like he could reach out to any of them. That meant getting Allura’s help from afar.

It was apparently something that she was taking very seriously.

“Allura,” he sighed, both exasperated and amused. “It’s just a date. Not even a super fancy one. It’s not like we’re getting married.”

She shot him a look at that, pausing in her discussion of what he needed to get and what stores he should go to. “No, because you wore jeans and a t-shirt to your wedding!”

Keith opened his mouth to argue with her, but quickly closed it. She was absolutely right in that regard.

Allura perked up slightly, her blue eyes going wide as her silver locks fell around her face. He could see the roots of her dark brown hair peeking through, but knew that she would have stopped dying it due to her pregnancy. “You and Lance should do a vow renewal at the one-year mark so we can actually celebrate! I’ll be able to bring the baby too!”

That was actually something that Lance had mentioned off-hand once, but to Keith, it honestly sounded like a waste of money. He had finally gotten his hands on all the bills, as well as information on any income they had. He was good with math, and quickly decided that, yeah, he was going to have to get some kind of part-time job, so no, they didn’t have any kind of money for that type of thing.

Instead of bringing up his money problems to his insanely wealthy sister, he said, “I already told you, I’m coming to see them when they’re born! I will literally hitchhike across the country if someone tries to tell me no.”

Allura laughed. “Not that Lance will tell you no. You’ve got him wrapped around your pinky finger.” Keith wasn’t sure if he liked that assessment or not. “But anyway, once won’t be enough! They’re going to be the most beautiful baby in the world!”
Given that both Shiro and Allura were ridiculously attractive, Keith understood where she was coming from. However, he disagreed. “Until Lance and I have kids.” Move over Shallura baby, their Laith one was going to be the most adorable one ever. Not that they were going to pit cousins against one another or anything.

Much.

Her eyes flashed competitively. “We’ll see.” She cleared her throat. “Back to the situation at hand. I’ve put together some choices for you to get at the store, the one I mentioned earlier! I’m expecting you to call me back when you get there so that we can get someone else to hold up the phone so I can inspect you!”

He made a face at that. “Maybe I should have called mom or Acxa.”

Allura stared at him. He stared back. They both burst into laughter at the thought. His mother and sister both approached things the same way he did, with an air of practicality.

A knock at the door startled Keith. He wasn’t expecting anyone, and the landlord normally left some sort of note before he showed up for something. He shot Allura a confused look and set his phone down. “Be right back.” He left it propped up against the toaster and headed towards the door.

A quick glance through the peephole startled him, and he opened the door cautiously, peering at the person on the other side. “Mr. McClain! Uh, what are you doing here?” Smooth, Keith. Real smooth. He moved aside to let the man in.

The other Omega raised an eyebrow as he came in. “I need a reason to visit my son?”

Keith winced. “No, of course not. Uh – but Lance is at work tight now.”

“I know,” he answered evenly. “I’m here to talk to you.”

A little bit of panic welled up within him. “Oh. Uh… can I get you anything? Coffee?” Oh god he sounded so awkward. That was what he was supposed to do, right? Offer a drink? Why did school never teach him what to do in social situations with your mother-in-law that already didn’t like you?

“One cream, two sugar please.”

It took Keith a split second to realize what he meant before he was going to the coffee pot, walking right by his phone and completely forgetting that Allura was on it, watching the entire exchange silently.

Mr. McClain looked around the room as Keith mixed the coffee together (bless the fact that he had made more to have some himself). “This apartment looks much nicer.” For a moment, Keith felt a little bit of hope that this was going to go okay. That quickly came crashing down though as he added, “It’s not very conducive to a family though.”

“I know,” he replied evenly, because how else could he respond to that? He handed the man the drink. “That’s not…it won’t happen for a while. We decided that in a year we’d talk about trying – depending on things.”

“Things,” the man said, staring at him as he drank his coffee. Well, at least he was drinking it and not spitting it out. “What do you want with my son?”

What the fuck? “What?”
Mr. McClain sighed. “Perhaps we can come back to that. For now, I want you to see this situation from an outside view looking in. Veronica is actually making headway for Omega rights, but she is getting so much opposition. You understand just how vicious Alphas could be – how much they’d love to keep people like us down. They’ll jump on any opportunity, and you must realize this. How you and Lance became bonded will be used against her to make it seem like she’s a hypocrite on the matter.”

Keith crossed his arms in front of him. Do not glare. Do not glare! He was glaring. “It’s not the same thing.”

“Perhaps not, but it looks like that from the outside.” He paused. “You implied that you had troubles with Alphas before.”

From the outside. Everything was from the outside. Was that the big, dark secret of the McClains? That they wanted to look like a group that were very pro-Omega rights, but the only thing that mattered was outside perception? Keith didn’t get that impression from Lance, but here they were.

Might as well be honest. “I’ve had problems with pretty much every one I’ve met, even my sister at one point. Not until Lance.” Immediately, Keith realized that he had fallen into some kind of trap. Shit.

“So, my son was the first decent Alpha you met. Siblings included.”

“That’s not—“

“It was a factor, wasn’t it?” Great. Apparently the man wasn’t going to let him get a word in.

Keith’s temper simmered under the surface. “I liked him, he liked me!”

“Did you know Lance had dreams of romance and slowly courting someone and falling in love? He used to talk about it all the time, saying how important it was for him. He still thought that way before going to Vegas. Alphas may take what Omegas want from them, but you took what my son wanted from him,” the man accused.

Keith squeezed his crossed arms a little bit tighter. “Why don’t you talk to Lance then? Why bother coming to talk to me if you’re just going to accuse me of stuff and not listen? Why not treat at least your son like he’s an adult, that he can make decisions on his own, can change his mind about things? Why not listen to him instead of treating him like a newborn pup?” Ah, there his temper was.

Mr. McClain stared at him. “Excuse me?”

“You know, Lance went on and on about how great your family was. How open you were. But you, Marco, Rachel? Right now, you’re setting Lance up to have to pick between you and me. You’re his mother. How can you do that?” Keith snapped.

“Apprently I do,” Keith immediately snapped. “So what’s your excuse?”

There was a long, heavy silence, before Mr. McClain moved towards the counter, pausing for a moment, setting the cup down and facing Keith with a scowl. “I love all my children, and I understand that you are now a part of Lance’s life, whether I like it or not. You do owe him whatever he wants for this mess, so I hope you will be able to provide that.”

“Omega rights, right?” Keith replied sarcastically. He didn’t move as the man left, the door closing
almost silently. He crossed the room to lock the door, as if making sure that the man wouldn’t come back in. He then flopped down onto the couch, putting his face in his hands.

Everything was silent for a moment but then, “Keith? Keith!”

His head snapped up and he looked around, eyes falling onto the phone that was sitting on the counter, Allura’s face on the screen.

Humiliation rushed through Keith as he got up to get his phone. “I forgot you were there.”

“Are you okay?” she asked, brow furrowed with concern.

“I’m fine,” Keith replied automatically. “Why wouldn’t I be?” That sounded dead and dull even to him.

“What was that?” Allura demanded, concern fading out to anger. “Was that Lance’s mother? I have never wanted to jump through a screen and strangle someone I don’t know more in my life!” She scowled. “Does Lance know?”

“That his mother hates me? Yes,” Keith replied dryly. “That he was going to come over and bitch at me? I doubt it.” He smiled humourlessly. “Don’t matter really. I’m just the desperate Omega that jumped Lance to get away from the bad Alphas in my life. The problem that’s going to screw up his sister’s career.” He knew that wasn’t true, and he knew that only a few people in Lance’s family thought that, but it still hurt. Just because Keith could keep a passive face at times didn’t mean that he was immune from the sharp words others fired at him.

“That’s not true!” Allura sounded completely scandalized. “Does his entire family treat you that way?”

“No,” Keith admitted. A wave of exhaustion suddenly rolled over him, and he just wanted to hide somewhere. “It’s just his mom, one brother, and one sister. Everyone else seems fine but…”

“But it’s his mother,” Allura finished for him. The bond between a mother and their pup (if there was a bond to begin with), no matter how old said pup got, was strong in most cases. Though, to be fair, Lance himself seemed to be closer to his father. She sighed. “I know you get lost in your head sometimes, but promise me you’ll try not to this time. That miserable old bat is just assuming things. Don’t let it ruin your night.” She paused. “And tell Lance what happened.”

“I don’t want to cause problems with his family,” Keith insisted softly.

Allura must have heard something in his voice, or saw something on his face. She frowned and said, “Go rest for a bit, okay? We can figure out your suit later.”

“I already had a nap,” he insisted. “I can’t just sleep the way away.” Despite that, they both agreed to hang up and leave everything for a bit. Keith really did appreciate it.

There wasn’t really much of a thought process as Keith headed back towards his room. He came to a stop outside of Lance’s room, eyeing the open doorway for a moment. Keith knew what it was he wanted to do, and though his initial reaction was to fight against the urge, he quickly gave into it.

He went to his room, gathering up his sheets and blankets (thankfully they had arrived from his mother the day before), as well as some of the extra ones, and went into Lance’s room.

His nests for heats were grand things that looked more like a personal blanket fort around a bed. Already, he had figured out how he would string up the blankets around him. That wasn’t what he
was going for right now though. Instead, he just built up the area around him so that he felt secure, almost melting into Lance’s scent that mingled with his own from the use of both their blankets.

Keith eyed Lance’s desk and chair, where he had left the button-up t-shirt he had been wearing the night before over a tank top. He snatched that, bringing it back with him into his nest so he could hold it. The smell comforted him. It made him feel safe from everything, even the feelings that threatened to take him over.

Though he had taken his power nap earlier, Keith still found himself dozing off.

…”

“Come on, answer the phone,” Lance muttered, knowing full-well that it was just going to go to voicemail again. At first, he assumed Keith got stuck in traffic and was simply a little late in picking him up. It happened. It was fine. When half an hour passed though, and there was no sign of his must-be-on-time mate (apparently Keith really hated to be late for things), he had begun to worry. Half an hour still could be explained by traffic, but Keith knew the traffic patterns well enough to show up on time anyway.

When it hit the hour mark, and he hadn’t answered any texts, not to mention any call went straight to voicemail, Lance became almost frantic.

Not wanting the stench of agitated Alpha to stink up the aquarium, Luxia got one of Lance’s co-workers, another graduate student named Florona, to drive him home. He almost felt bad for her, because he could tell that his scent had her on edge a bit too, but thankfully a Beta’s sense of smell wasn’t nearly as strong as that of an Alpha or Omega, so they weren’t impacted by it in the same way.

God, Lance was almost sick with worry, and it made him realize that, despite his large family and the pack-bonds he shared with Hunk and Pidge, he and Keith really were fairly isolated. Hunk was at work, Pidge didn’t have a car, and it wasn’t like he could call his parents to go and check on Keith. His father was working, and though his mother usually had Thursdays off, it wasn’t like Lance could ask him to go. It was the same with his siblings.

They pulled up to the apartment building, and Lance couldn’t even be bothered to feel a bit of shame about how sketchy his accommodations were. He spied his car, and was relieved, because it hopefully meant that Keith was there.

“Do you want me to wait?” Florona asked him.

“No, the car’s here,” he replied as he hoped out.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” He didn’t mean to snap, but he knew that if something was wrong, bringing a stranger along would be the worst thing he could do. She recoiled a bit, no doubt truly able to pick up the agitation in his words. “Sorry. Thanks for the drive.” He hurried into the apartment building, using his long legs to his advantage and taking the stairs two or three at a time.

It didn’t even matter that his legs were burning by the time he got to his apartment, fumbling with the keys until he managed to get the door open. He didn’t even bother locking the door behind him as he hurried in.

Everything seemed normal. There was no sign of a struggle or anything like that. He scented the air, pausing when he caught not only Keith’s lingering scent, but also another familiar sweet one that
took him a second to place.

When he did, his eyes went wide. Oh no. His mother had been there.

He locked the door, not wanting anyone else to intrude as he headed towards Keith’s room, pausing, and then backtracking the step or two to his own. He hovered in the doorway, staring at Keith’s form curled up inside of an obvious nest. Everything smelled like distressed Omega to the point where he felt a slight rumble of a growl rolling in his chest.

What had his mother done?

He made his way into the room carefully. “Keith?”

The Omega shifted, glancing over his shoulder and regarding him with tired confusion. “Lance?” He stared for a second before his eyes went wide and he shot up into a sitting position. “What? Why are you—how? What?” He rolled over and grabbed his phone, pressing the home button, but the only thing that showed up was the outline of a battery with a little red bar at the end. Lance was a bit relieved to see that the phone was dead, not that he had been ignored. Keith seemed even more frantic now. “What time is it?”

Lance came forward, keeping his voice and scent as calm as he could. “You didn’t show up, so I got Florona to bring me home.”

Keith’s eyes widened, guilt flashing through them. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to.”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay,” Lance assured him with a smile. “I’m just glad that you’re okay. I was worried.”

He almost shrunk at that, flopping back down. “I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about! Shit happens!” He made his way around the bed, plugging Keith’s phone back in. He glanced down at his made, reaching forward and running a hand through his hair. “You’re okay, that’s what matters.” He paused and nodded towards the nest. “Can I…?”

Perking up slightly, Keith nodded a little more eagerly than the situation called for. Lance moved around to the other side of the bed, climbing into the nest so that he was another barrier between Keith and the door. Keith seemed to appreciate that, curling up with him, his scent showing how pleased that he was at the moment.

They laid in silence, Lance’s hand gently stroking up and down his back. “Mamá was here, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Keith answered after a moment.

“What did he do?”

The Omega tensed but then sighed, “I don’t want to cause more trouble with your family.”

“You won’t,” he assured him, nuzzling him gently. Whatever damage was done with his family wasn’t coming from his mate.

“I just…we fought again. He…” Keith trailed off unsurely. “I know you wanted to fall in love, take courting seriously, but I…we talked about it before and no one will listen to you or to me. I got mad at him and accused him of not knowing you and I just…I’m sorry.”
Lance held him closer. “No. I’m sorry. Things didn’t work out the way I pictured, but you know, that’s fine. Things don’t work out that way and I’m happy so that should be the point. I like to think you are too.” Keith certain smelled happy.

“I am,” the Omega assured him confidently.

“Tell me what else happened?” It came out more as a suggestion than anything else. Once again, Keith hesitated before recounting the events of that morning, somehow even managing to rant about how annoyed he had been over the stupid plates, and how sorry he was for not going to get him.

Lance stewed over all of that. He felt beyond exhausted with his family, well, no, with three people in his family. They needed to just stop and listen to him. Just thinking that his own mother would corner Keith and tell him that he owed Lance. It went against everything that the man taught him growing up.

“I’m going to change our reservation,” Lance decided.

Keith tilted his head to look back at him over his shoulder. “You don’t have to. It was important to you.”

“It’s just a date,” Lance said with a shake of his head. “I mean, yeah, I wanna take you on a super romantic date where I can sweep you off of your feet, but, like, on a not-shitty day.” He looked at him. “Wouldn’t it be nice to stay here, eat, cuddle, maybe watch that creepy Netflix show you’ve been wanting to show me?”

A small smile appeared on Keith’s lips. “I’d like that, a lot.”

“Good! That’s what we’re going to do!” Lance leaned forward, nuzzling Keith’s scent gland. The Omega made an appreciative, low, keening sound.

Their sleep schedules may be a bit shot after that, but Lance couldn’t regret it. Despite the circumstance, he liked this. He liked being in a nest with Keith, his trusting scent surrounding him. They’d have to get up in a bit, but just for now, he wanted to wait where he was.

…

They needed more spaghetti sauce. Since Keith was already in the process of making the food at home, Lance was the one that went to get it. Of course, if he happened to take the super long, out-of-the-way route that went in front of his parents’ house, who could blame him for stopping by?

The thing was, the more he thought about it, the angrier he got. He probably just should have gone home, but instead, he found himself pulling up in front of the house, walking up the steps, and going through the door without knocking. Not that he ever did.

His grandmother was the first one to notice him. She smiled warmly at first, but that smile quickly fell as she scented the air. “Lance, what’s wrong?”

“Sorry, Abuela,” he replied to her before zeroing in on his mother. His eyes narrowed at the man. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Lance?” his father asked, her brow furrowing in confusion. Huh, it looked like she had no idea what happened earlier,

“Keith told you I visited then,” his Mamá noted.
“Of course he did. Was he supposed to keep it a secret from me? I bet you wish he had!” The floodgates had opened, and all he could feel was anger. From the way his grandmother grimaced, it was no doubt rolling off of him in a putrid smell. At least he had gotten the spaghetti sauce earlier so he wouldn’t have to go into a store smelling like this. He took a step towards his parents, hands curling into fists. “Listen to me right now, madre. Don’t you ever come to my home to verbally assault my mate again. Or any kind of assault.”

“Lance!” his Papá exclaimed. “Don’t talk to your mother that way!”

“He’s the one telling Keith that he owes me. That he should do what I want. Aren’t you the ones who raised me to think that it was wrong to treat Omegas that way?” He let out a deep breath.

“Ernesto!” His father now looked towards his mother, and Lance couldn’t help but feel a little vindication at the look on her face. “You didn’t!”

“Claudia, do you not understand the stress this is going to put Veronica under when it all comes out?” His mother didn’t at all seem sorry. “I’m just trying to protect all of my children as best as I can.”

“And what about me?” Lance demanded.

“What?” the man looked taken back at that.

“You’re so focused on how this could impact Veronica that you’re not even listening to me! I get it, you think I’m an idiot! If you even listened to me at all, you’d see how—how happy I feel! I don’t remember the last time I was this happy! It doesn’t matter though, does it?” He was shaking now, wasn’t he? “I’m just your idiot, baby of a son who brings shame on the family name, right?” A heavy silence fell over them as he moved away from them, his grandmother’s eyes wide and glassy with tears. “I love you guys so much, but if this is how things are going to go, I’m not sure how often you’ll be seeing me around.”

“You’d pick him over your family?” his Mamá asked, his voice rising with genuine distress.

Lance couldn’t meet his eyes. “He is my family and I—I love him.” God, that was really true, wasn’t it? He had never fallen in love with someone so quickly, but here he was, sure that was what he was feeling. The thought made him feel warm and happy. “He doesn’t want me to have to pick, but I’d pick him. I don’t want to lose you guys, but this…this can’t be a thing. I would never be okay bringing him over to a place where half the people treat him like shit.”

He could smell the spicy, intense scent that came from his father, telling him that she was very unhappy. His grandmother’s tears were actually falling down her cheeks now. He didn’t mean to upset them. They weren’t the problem here. He just couldn’t let this keep going on. Not only for Keith, but for himself too. They needed to see him for the adult he was, not the stupid child they seemed to think he was. “And I will never ever bring any of our kids to a place where people belittle their mother so much.” He straightened his shoulders. He had to be strong for this part, even if he wanted to cry. “So no, I’m not making a choice between him and you. You’re going to make a choice about what you want. You know where I am when you make up your mind.”

Spinning around on his heel, Lance quickly left the house, not wanting to see his grandmother’s distressed face, nor hear the way his father was angrily talking to his mother.

It wasn’t until he was in the car and driving back home that Lance realized exactly what it was that he had done. He had just threatened to not only cut himself out of his parents’ lives, but his future children as well.
He kept it together the entire way home, up the stairs, and even into the apartment. The spaghetti was waiting, having been strained already, the smell of cooked garlic knots wafting through the room.

Keith came out of the other room, frowning as he met Lance’s eyes. That was when he crumbled. Lance wasn’t even sure if he was laughing or crying, but the sound coming out of his mouth as his shoulders shook and tears fell down his cheeks was horrible.

Warm arms wrapped around him, guiding him to the couch, where Lance curled up on Keith’s lap, burying his face into his shoulder.

He was actually really glad that Keith didn’t say anything. He didn’t whisper false promises of how everything would be okay, because he didn’t know that. He just hugged Lance close, and let him get it all out.

Alphas were the one that were supposed to protect their Omegas, but in that moment, Lance himself felt safe and protected, like nothing in the world could hurt or judge him.

He felt like he was home.

Chapter End Notes

SEASON 8 TRAILER AHHH! I loved it! If you're interested, I did a trailer breakdown/interpretation on my tumblr, which you can find (in chronological order) here.

As for the one scene in it that have people worrying about klance? Let's say it doesn't worry me in the least. I'm feeling good about this!

Anyway, I hoped you like this chapter despite the angst!
Despite the fact that it was September, or maybe because of it, the humidity was heavy in the hot air. It rained for a little while almost every day, heavy drops of water sending unsuspecting tourists running while the locals kept going.

Keith could deal with the warm temperatures, he grew up in the desert, but the humidity was going to murder him. It was why Lance found him face down on the floor in front of their AC unit when he got home (having taken the car himself that day, since he needed to do a bit of traveling to and from the university).

The Alpha paused, before asking, “Uh, are you okay?”

“I’m dead,” Keith replied. He recoiled when he felt Lance reach down to lift him up. “Ew, no! You’re too warm!” He didn’t necessarily fight, but he definitely let himself be complete dead weight.

“Oh my god, you’re heavy,” Lance grunted, letting go of him. Keith flopped onto the floor again with a grunt, but didn’t protest the fact that Lance dropped him.

“You calling me fat?” Keith muttered.

Lance laughed loudly. “Baby, no. I’m pretty sure you’re mostly muscle.” He sat down next to him. “So, I got a text from Pidge. Apparently someone wasn’t answering his phone, and now I see why.” There was a distinct digital snapping sound.

“Did you just take a picture of me?” Keith demanded, though he still didn’t move, because honestly, movement was exhausting right now. Maybe it was just because he hadn’t been able to get away from the house today.

“Gotta show Pidge why you weren’t answering.” Lance patted the back of his thigh. “I told her that you’re dying of heat. As in temperature heat. Not Omega heat.”

“This almost feels like my heat. Almost,” Keith said, and honestly, it was kind of true. This heat was outside of his body, but it felt like this inside his body every three months. Of course, he didn’t feel the anxiety of being in such an open space, nor the general weakness in his limbs, and he definitely wasn’t experiencing the extreme arousal that came with it either. But the temperature part was pretty on-point.

“Well, if you would have checked your phone, you’d know that Pidge invited us over to her house,” Lance said, drawing patterns on the exposed part of his back from where his tank top had ridden up.

“Too hot.”

“She has a pool.”

Keith instantly perked up at that. He twisted around, looking up at his mate with wide eyes. “Drown me in it.”

Lance snorted. “I’m going to have to reject that request. However, I could start teaching you how to swim. But you gotta get up.”
That worked too. Keith groaned and pushed himself up, staring directly at Lance. “You have too many clothes on, you’re making me hot.”

A smirk spread across Lance’s lips. “Really now?” He leaned in close, eyes narrowing slightly. “You asking me to lose the clothes?”

Keith’s heart hammered in his chest, because damn, he kind of walked into this one, didn’t he? Good god. Instead of retreating though, he rose to the challenge, raising an eyebrow at him. “What if I am?”

They stared at one another, and Keith felt something well within him that had nothing to do with the scalding temperature that plagued them. He was suddenly very aware of Lance’s thumb brushing back and forth on his hip, and the way the Alpha was staring at him, almost like he was searching for something.

Keith opened his mouth to speak, but the only sound that came out was a startled chirp as they heard a loud bang from outside of their apartment. There was a curse, and then the sound of footsteps going down the hall. It was only a brief moment, but enough to shatter the intensity.

Lance cleared his throat. “Come on, the sooner we find our swimming trunks.”

“I’m throwing myself in the shower for a minute first,” Keith muttered. “I feel like sweat and grime.”

“You were laying on the floor.”

“Our floor is fucking spotless,” Keith insisted, because god, he had been board lately. He really needed to find some kind of part-time job, or at least some other hobbies, before he started going shack-wacky or something.

He went to his room and gathered up his swimming trunks and another tank top to throw on over it rather than the dirty one he had been wearing all day, even during his earlier work out. Bless Lance for insisting that he get more of those and more shorts, because dry heat and humidity were two very different beasts and required very different outfits.

He wasn’t in the shower long, just enough so that the cool water wash away a bit of the sweat and grime. By the time he got out, Lance actually had a bag with towels and extra clothes for both of them ready to go.

Keith grabbed the bottle of sunscreen and read the label. He wasn’t entirely sure it was strong enough to stop him from becoming a lobster, but it was better than nothing. He also knew it was actually better to let it set before getting in the sun or the pool.

“What are you doing?” Lance asked as he pulled his tank top back over his head. Keith’s lips tilted up into a smirk as he heard the hitch in his voice.

He glanced over at him and waved the sunscreen around. “I’ll burn like crazy if I don’t put it everywhere.” He eyed him. “I could use your help.”

“My help?” Lance asked.

Keith shook the bottle. “Get my back for me?” Okay, maybe he was teasing Lance a bit, but he really did want help getting it on his back so he didn’t end up with weirdly shaped burns. It happened to him once before, and Shiro laughed at him every time he saw him.

Feeling Lance’s hands on his back made his eyes flutter and his shoulders relax, because holy shit he
was good at this. A grunt escaped his lips when the Alpha pressed on a sore spot, and he instinctively moved away, but Lance followed him, pressing a little more, and the pain quickly faded away. “Huh?”

“You’re so knotted up.”

“Am I?” He knew what Lance meant, but he couldn’t keep the amused, teasing tone out of his voice, and he couldn’t stop himself from laughing when Lance spluttered and tried to correct himself. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Why do I deal with you?” Lance groaned.

“Well, as far as I can tell, you seem to like me,” Keith replied.

Lance’s arms slipped around him, holding him close, pressing his lips against the back of his neck. “Yeah, for some reason, I really do.” He stepped away. “That’s why I don’t want you to turn into a lobster, and why we need to go so I can help you swim. That and I’ve been dying to swim.”

Keith chuckled and looked back at him. “Yeah.”

Lance absolutely loved the Holts’ pool. It wasn’t anything extravagant or overly huge, but it did have a shallow end and a deep end, and it was great for swimming and cooling off in. He had come over several times both on his own, and dragging Nyma with him when she was in his life. There had always been something a bit awkward with her there, but he didn’t feel that same awkwardness with dragging Keith there.

Then again, that might have to do with the fact that his friends actually liked Keith.

“Lance!” He jumped as Pidge yelled his name. She was dressed in swim shorts, a tankini top, and a hilariously wide-brimmed hat as she rushed towards them. “You have an older brother!”

“Uh, I actually have two,” Lance noted, staring at her with confusion. “What about it?”

“What would you do if you found out your older brother, who shares everything with you, is dating someone without telling you?” Pidge demanded. “Matt seems to think that me trying to look her up is inappropriate.”

Lance’s eyebrows rose up as he looked towards Matt. It had been a while since he had seen him. “You have a girlfriend? And you didn’t tell us?”

Matt huffed a bit. “The last time I had a girlfriend, you guys all scared her off.” He side-eyed his sister. “I’d like this one to stick around.”

“Pidge looked me up and I’m still here,” Keith noted. Pidge pointed at him. “Also I’m pretty sure my mom looked up all of you.”

“To be fair, your mom used to be FBI,” Matt replied with a shrug. “Besides, she’s just a normal girl. Everyone else should be more interested in Hunk.”

It was only then that Lance noticed his best friend lounging by the pool, his phone in hand. He hadn’t even noticed Matt was talking about him, too engrossed with what was on his screen.

He didn’t actually look at the conversation, that would be rude. Instead, he looked at the name of the
person Hunk was talking to, and grinned broadly. “Is that Shay from Vegas? With hearts around her name?”

Hunk yelped and jumped, clutching his phone to his chest as he stared at him with wide eyes. “Lance!”

“He’s been texting her for a while,” Pidge noted. “He always gets this sappy look on his face, like when you talk about Keith.” She groaned dramatically, flopping into a lounge chair. “Everyone’s shaking up!”

“Shay’s not my girlfriend,” Hunk argued. “She’s just an Omega that I admire very much.”

“What a coincidence!” Lance said with a dramatic gasp, because he would always be a theatre kid at heart. “Keith! You’re an Omega that I admire very much too!”

“I tolerate you,” Keith replied dryly from where he was sitting down beside Pidge. His eyes were positively sparkling with amusement though.

Still, Lance put his hands over the left side of his chest. “You wound me. I bet Shay doesn’t treat Hunk this way! Right?”

Hunk flushed. “I—well—it doesn’t matter. Can we just swim?” He tucked his phone away from the water safely. A bit of worry hit Lance, because his friend seemed genuinely worried about something.

He’d let it go for now though, both out of respect for him, and because it looked like Pidge was about to push Keith into the deep end of the pool. He loved Hunk, but stopping the accidental drowning of his mate was kind of a more immediate priority.

“So, Keith!” he said loudly. “Ready to learn to swim?”

Pidge immediately paused. “You don’t know how to swim?” There was a bit of guilt on her face as she backed up slightly.

“I thought I mentioned that?” Keith eyebrows furrowed, no doubt trying to remember if this was something that came up before or not. “Everyone else knows how to swim, right?” Everyone confirmed that, and the next thing they knew, Keith lifted Pidge off of the ground and tossed her into the pool.

Lance started laughing so hard that he almost cried. Pidge spluttered as she surfaced and glared at him. “I’m going to end you! You’re doing to rue the day you crossed me!” Matt jumped into the pool beside her, dunking her under water again, turning her rage towards him.

“Come on,” Lance said to Keith, taking his hand. “We’ll go into the shallow end. Work on floating, getting used to having your head below water, things like that, okay?”

“Sounds good,” Keith replied, still side-eyeing Pidge, who was now participating in a water fight with both Matt and Hunk.

“She’s going to end you,” Lance noted, slipping down into the shallow end of the pool. He smiled as Keith sat down, and then slid into the pool after him. For someone that didn’t know how to swim, he showed absolutely no fear around water.

All because he knew that Lance would help him if something went wrong.
Maybe Lance hadn’t thought this out as much as he should have though. It was easy to teach someone who wanted to learn; easy to go through exercises like floating, dunking his head, letting go of his air underwater and coming back up. Just getting used to being in and under the water. That wasn’t the problem at all.

The problem was that Keith was gorgeous, half naked, wet, and Lance had to be very handsy to help him out.

Yeah, he didn’t think this out too well at all. It didn’t help that Keith took the opportunity to be a huge flirt. Good god. Lance thought that he was the flirt between the two of them, but no. Keith was a huge flirt, he was just much more subtle about it. It was in the glint of his eyes, the slant of his eyebrows, the way his voice deepened, and the sly grin the spread across his face.

He was going to be the end of him.

“You guys are gross,” Pidge complained. They were half way between the shallow and deep ends of the pool. Their feet were just barely brushing the bottom, so Lance was keeping a hold of Keith, just in case.

“I’m his life preserver,” Lance pointed out to her.

“Excuses.” She looked towards Keith. “You, I need to have a talk with you. Come with me now, and maybe I’ll consider it repayment for pushing me in the pool.”

“I’ll take it,” Keith said quickly. Lance chuckled, and helped him to the side of the pool where he pulled himself up onto the deck. Keith followed Pidge back over to where their bag was to get a towel.

Lance, of course, took the opportunity to lay back and float in the pool, and maybe he stared at Keith as he walked away.

“Jesus Lance,” Matt said with a snort. “Stare a little harder, would you?”

“Well, I mean, if you want me to,” he replied.

“Things are going good then, I take it?” Matt was lounging in a large, inflatable tube, and it already looked like he was starting to burn. Someone clearly hadn’t put on enough sunscreen.

“With us? Yeah. With my family? Eh.” Lance frowned. “Mamá, Marco, and Rachel are being assholes. Thinking Keith is using me. Thinking how we got together will hurt Veronica’s career. Stuff like that. Basically treating me like a little pup that can’t make good decisions.”

“They just care about you,” Hunk added from where he was lounging against the side of the pool. “I mean, it doesn’t excuse them or anything.”

“I know,” Lance replied with a sigh, because he certainly did. “Doesn’t mean they have to be assholes though.” He let his legs sink under the water again. “Doesn’t matter though. Let’s just swim and have fun.” Before anyone could answer, Lance dunked himself under water to do a few laps.

There was something to be said about being underwater. It was like being in an entirely different world, especially out in the ocean. Most of the sounds were cut out from above, and everything was different. Lance loved it. It made all of his stress melt away, even if just for a moment.

Just as Keith wanted a moment to be cool and away from the heat, Lance just wanted a small moment to just be Lance, with no one or nothing else to bother him.
Keith hated the rain. Or at least, this version of it that poured down from the sky like someone was tilting a giant bucket down on them. Lance said he just wanted to complain about all kinds of weather, but he thought that his point was still completely valid.

Okay, maybe he just hated *driving* in it specifically.

He pulled into the driveway at the Holt house and turned off the car. Tugging his hood up over his head, he grabbed his bag and hurried towards the door, knocking on it.

“Well hello,” Matt said as he threw open the front door and flourished his arm out dramatically. “Welcome to Chez Holt. Kindly leave your shoes at the door, or the wrath of hurricane Colleen will befall us all.”

“Matthew,” Mrs. Holt’s voice called from the other room, a clear warning tone to her voice. Still, Keith carefully pealed his shoes off, leaving them on the mat by the door.

“Come on, I have to show you the Gremlin’s Lair.”

Keith followed Matt down a set of stairs, coming out to a room that kind of looked like a small workroom with all kinds of wires, metal panels, screens, and so much more. It kind of looked like a mad scientist’s lab.

“Careful,” Matt said as he led him across the wasteland of wires. “This is how she weeds out the weak. Fall down and you’re likely to be ensnared and starve to death before someone finds out.”

“Square up!” Pidge yelled from behind the door they were heading towards.

“I come with a sacrifice!” Matt yelled back even though he had already entered the room.

This one was big and set up almost like a newsroom of sorts. There was an elaborate camera setup pointed at a table with two chairs and microphones set up in front of them. The walls were lined with shelves that had some strange, most likely carefully chosen decorations and trinkets.

“Woah.” He instantly gravitated towards some of the things that were there. Fake plasters of bigfoot prints, glass beakers filled with a strange fluid that he wasn’t going to touch, microscopes, sketches, a very impressive celestial globe, and so much more was carefully laid out. It was an interior designer’s nightmare, but he liked it.

“Impressive, right?” Pidge said with a grin from where she was hovering behind the camera. “This is where all the magic happens.”

When she pulled him aside the other day to propose her idea, he hadn’t been sure what to expect. Pidge claimed that she had a decently popular youtube channel where she discussed different conspiracies, scientific theories, myths, legends, cryptid talk and so much more. She claimed that she wanted to shake things up though, and asked if he’d like to help with that. Apparently, it was normally just her talking in front of the camera with some clever editing to keep it interesting, but sometimes Matt or someone else would join her for a discussion.

He had actually watched some of the videos, and they actually were entertaining.

The offer was for Keith to be her co-host of sorts, and maybe they’d even start going ‘out in the field’ at times, which was really interesting to him.
"I actually don’t get much revenue from my videos alone,” Pidge admitted. “I do have a few people sponsoring, and I offer some merchandise. What do you think?” She passed one of her tablets to him.

The first thing that Keith noticed was a mark that seemed to be on every single one of the things offered. “Is that your logo?”

“Yeah! Isn’t it great?”

“Uh…” Was there a nice way to say that it was ugly? Probably not. Luckily, Pidge didn’t catch onto his hesitation this time, going off and discussing the camera setup and how it worked. It actually was pretty interesting to listen to.

“Okay, so what I’m really hoping is that you’ll be willing to be my co-host of sorts. I’ve been looking to shake things up, maybe going on a few cryptid hunts, or checking out haunted houses. Plus, it’d be fun to have a second person guaranteed to always play off of. Discuss things with. You know?”

“So, what exactly would I have to do?” he asked curiously.

“What I was hoping was that you could watch Matt and I today. Get a feel for it to see if it’s something you might want to do at all?” Pidge suddenly glanced at where her brother was doing something with a computer, not paying attention to them. She lowered her voice and admitted, “I just…you like this stuff too, and I’ve never…really hung out with other Omegas before. My parents tried to get me to go to those centers where Omegas hang out and stuff – help each other out, but I didn’t like it much.”

Keith knew what she meant. In his head, he had always referred to those types of groups or centers as ‘Omegas Anonymous’ or ‘help groups’, but he knew that they were also good things. They were completely acceptable places to go, even encouraged, so it could stop an Omega from becoming isolated. They were also places to pick up different ‘Omega friendly’ skills, like cooking, childcare, things like that. They weren’t exactly what Keith would call fun, but he could appreciate it in a sense.

He could absolutely see why Pidge wouldn’t like that though. “I did things like that too. It wasn’t horrible, but this seems way more up my alley already.”

She positively lit up. “Really? That’s awesome!” She motioned towards the side where here was a small couch set up with a lap-desk that had some papers on it, and a few pens and pencils on the side table. “That’s sort of the script I made. We kind of go off of it, but it still keeps us on track too. Thought you could have one to look over, so if you want to throw a comment in from the side, you totally can. If not, you can just watch us do what we do? Normally I rotate between different ‘Omega friendly’ skills, like cooking, childcare, things like that. They weren’t exactly what Keith would call fun, but he could appreciate it in a sense.

Keith sank down onto the couch (which was way more comfortable than his and Lance’s, what the hell), picking up the papers and skimming over it quickly. He raised an eyebrow and looked at her, unable to hide his amusement. “Why do I get the feeling this is coming from your rant about what people are allowed to wear at the beach?”

Matt groaned, having tuned back in to what they were talking about.

“Listen, even an Alpha male can produce milk, which is what they’re for, so why is it considered inappropriate for women of all dynamics to wear tops when men of all dynamics don’t. I mean, Omega men have literally all the same functions as Omega women! They just look different!”
“Save it for the camera!” Matt called out to her as he sat in one of the chairs. “Come on, let’s get this show on the road. The rain’s only getting worse and I do need to do a few more things today.”

“This is why you’re being replaced,” Pidge responded with a sigh. She sank down in the chair that was positioned so that she could either look at the camera, or at her brother, but still generally be facing the camera too. Oval tables were good like that.

“I thought it was because Keith’s pretty, and more eye-candy might make other people tune-in.”

“Matt!” Pidge glanced at him nervously.

Keith snorted and shook his head, but still smiled at her. He really didn’t think he was overly cocky or anything, but he knew he was attractive. People had always told him that, plus Lance was pretty vocal about it too, which was always a huge esteem booster. “We’ll talk details.”

She laughed and looked at the camera. “Alright, let’s get this show on the road! Rover, turn on camera!”

He watched in awe as a little hovering robot that kind of reminded him a floating Roomba went to the camera, and nudged the big, red ‘record’ button that Keith assume Pidge had set up just for it.

It was wild to think that the only thing stopping any government agency from snapping her up to be one of their own was the fact that she was an Omega.

She spun in her chair a bit and smiled at the camera. “Hey guys! Welcome back to The Pidgeon Files! By popular request, Matt has joined me today!”

“The one and only,” he said while winking at the camera.

“Thank god.”

“Rude.”

“Right, so before we get to today’s talk, which is going to be a fun one, I just wanted to let you know that you guys are going to notice some changes around here soon! I’m doing my best to bring you the best of everything scientific and strange!”

For some reason, Keith expected Pidge to be a bit awkward. Yeah, she was rambling a little bit, and sometimes would stop and laugh at her own little jokes or things that amused her, but it was both endearing and entertaining.

He wondered if her viewers knew that she was an Omega or not. She wore a sweater with a high neck, obscuring her collar completely. If it was him, he wouldn’t say anything about it. Let people wonder. Of course, he had the advantage of not having to wear a collar anymore.

“Also, you may hear another voice pipe-up from off camera today. You won’t really be able to hear it, because he’s not set up with a mic, but that’s fine. Hopefully, you’ll be seeing him in front of the camera soon. Here’s a teaser: his name is Keith McClain, and he’s an emo, knife-loving, pretty boy.”

Keith glared at her, though there was really no heat behind it, because he was distracted by the little jolt that went through his body. He had been married to Lance for almost a month at this point, but it was still so weird to hear that name, since no one ever really mentioned his surname.

Pidge would probably make fun of him if he mentioned the little meltdown he had when he realized the name was on his new license instead of Keith Kogane. It wasn’t a bad thing, just super strange.
Looking down at the script, Keith pulled out a pencil, doodling on the sides of it. He usually had to be moving somehow to actually focus, so he hoped Pidge didn’t mind. This actually sounded really interesting, so he wanted to pay attention.

“She means one of the theories of it, since we lost a turd-ton of our history in the second Dark Ages – though we do have enough to know that there was a second one to begin with, but you know what we mean,” Matt supplied easily.

“Of course it’s just a theory. Since records are gone, scientists can really only use fossil and archaeological evidence, as well as logical reasoning,” Pidge said. She cleared her throat. “Okay, let’s be blunt here. Do you ever wonder why things like a penis are considered ‘male’ sex organs while a uterus is ‘female’, even though you’d think they’d be more specific to Alpha and Omega?”

Dear sweet Jesus, that was blunt and already off from the much more thought-out version on the script. Was Keith allowed to adopt Pidge? He kind of wanted to. Even if she was an adult.

“I’ve genuinely wondered that before,” Matt agreed with a quick nod. “Like, plenty of dudes have all the parts to carry kids too. It’s why male Omegas exist at all. Same for female Alphas.”

“Exactly!” Pidge threw her hands up in the air excitedly, accidentally knocking off the cup that she had set down beside her. “Fuck.”

“Well, that’s going to the cutting room floor.” Matt laughed and scooted back as she glared at him. Keith snorted, and she shot a look his way too. He turned his eyes back to the paper and the images he was doodling on the side. He wondered if he could make a cleaner version of Pidge’s logo without insulting her?

“Okay, starting over.” She was silent for a moment before throwing her hands up again. “Exactly! Here’s the deal: there’s a theory out there that says, originally, humans didn’t have dynamics at all. That there were women who could bear children, and men that could impregnate them. Well, they probably weren’t even human, they were our ancestors.”

“So if we evolved into what we are now, something must have changed right?” Matt paused and grinned. “It was the aliens.”

“You make fun but they’re out there!”

“I know they are!” Matt suddenly looked over at Keith. “You believe in aliens, right?”

“Yes?” Keith asked. He was pretty sure that they had that conversation all the way back in Vegas.

“That was Keith,” Pidge said to the camera. “Anyway, this theory postulates that there was some event that prompted humans to evolve the dynamics, most likely over a period of time unless the aliens were involved. Possibly it stemmed from one group or one individual – kind of like how all people with blue eyes likely have one common ancestor. Even then though, Alphas were all male, Omegas were all female, and Betas evolved as a sort of control group – they’re probably most similar to our earlier ancestors.”

“Hey, lemme interrupt with a rant for a second!” Matt said while slamming his palms on the table, startling both Keith and Pidge. “A lot of people give Betas shit for being useless, but that’s not true at all! Both Alphas and Omegas can be unpredictable at times – that’s right, both of them. Without Betas, humans probably would have been taken out by predators when we were still in caves! Think about it – being all rut and heat-brained would have been a great time for some prehistoric beast to
shank them while they did the do.” Keith was trying as hard as he could not to lose his shit at this point. “That’s where Betas saved the day. Sure, their sense of smell isn’t as developed, but that means that it takes a lot for them to succumb to Alpha or Omega scents. And to make up for this, they have superior sight and hearing in general. You know – able to pick up or see when an Omega was in genuine distress and they needed to get an Alpha to screw off – or there were predators or danger in general coming. All kinds of things! Betas are amazing and you guys are just mean!” He slumped down. “I’m done.”

There was a long pause as Pidge just stared at her brother. Keith too was staring at Matt and said, “Holy shit.” It came out a little louder than he meant for it too, startling Pidge out of her shock and prompting her to laugh.

“That was beautiful, and I’m keeping every moment of that in the video,” Pidge said gleefully. “Wow, yes, all that is true about Betas. They’re amazing. So let’s talk about the other two then. Since we’re trying to figure out exactly where they came from.”

“Hey, did intersex people not exist in the past?” Keith asked suddenly, raising his voice a bit. Pidge looked his way before looking back at the camera. “Keith asked if intersex people existed in the past. Yes, they did. It’s hard to tell if it they were as common as they are today, since the population is nearly split up one third male, one third female, one third intersex in a purely biological sense. Of course, in that intersex group, most are either male Omegas or female Alphas. There are very few intersex people who turn out to be Betas – but they do exist, of course, so let’s talk about those two groups.”

Matt looked down at his script. “Deceptive adaptation?”

“Deceptive adaptation is what this theory is all about – basically meaning that people evolved to trick others. We know Alphas can be…a bit handsy with Omegas. Some to the point where it hurts them. It’s believed that there was a trigger event that may have made Alphas even more aggressive towards Omegas. So, as a way to combat this, many Omegas started developing reproductive organs that mimic traditional Alpha ones, though outside of the occasional rare case, we know that male Omegas can’t impregnate anyone. It’s all just from a façade. From far away it can be impossible to tell if a man is an Alpha, Beta, or Omega, despite what stereotypes say.”

“That is really helpful if you think about it,” Matt added. “They’d have to get up closer to smell them, and odds are, they’d have to deal with a pack at that point. What about female Alphas then? What is the advantage of having a vagina if the uterus that may or may not be attached to it doesn’t work?”

Pidge looked at the camera before looking back at Matt. “It seems like male Omegas developed first, female Alphas developing in response to that after. There are two hypotheses to this. The first one is that it was an additional layer of protection for Omegas. It’s great that they could be confused by the ones that look like them, but the women were still clearly Omega. This way, there was the possibility that they were going to go head-to-head with another Alpha without realizing it.”

“And the second?”

“The second is that it was an adaptation to deceive in a similar way that male Omegas do. It was to get closer to the Omegas, because they looked like them.”

“So really, it’s all about fucking.”

“We can’t put that in the video, Matthew.”
Keith watched them with interest as they played off of one another with ease. It actually seemed kind of fun, and wasn’t nearly as bad as he thought. They rarely ever looked directly at the camera, though still kept their body language angled towards it, as if inviting in the audience to the discussion. It was smart.

He kind of wanted to do this, though he was sure that he’d be awkward as sin for a while. Also, cryptid or ghost hunts sounded like a lot of fun too.

Finally, after doing a few reshoots and adding a few more things in, Pidge turned off the camera and flopped next to him. “So, what do you think?”

“I like it,” Keith admitted with a nod. “Maybe a bit wordy for me. Bit preachy and expositional, but I can try.”

Pidge laughed. “We edit it some. It’s easier to start out with a lot and cut things out. Add videos, pictures, and the like to keep everyone entertained so they’re not just staring at us talking the entire time.” She tilted her head a bit as she looked down at his page. “What’s that?”

“I focus better when I doodle,” Keith admitted with a shrug.

“Oh my god!” Pidge snatched the paper from his hand, nearly giving him a papercut (those little fuckers hurt like a bitch). Her eyes were wide with excitement. “This that my logo? It looks so much better! And look at this over here! I didn’t know you could draw?”

“Uh, yeah, I always have.” Keith shrugged. Also, art was an easy elective to get into when you were a temperamental Omega that calmed down a lot when drawing. Art was open to all dynamics, of course, but his school found it to be a good fit for him specifically. He’d always personally been a little fonder of astronomy though.

“Can you make this for me? But bigger? I’ll pay you!” Pidge asked excitedly. “Oh! Oh that’s a great idea! Why don’t I commission you to draw the graphics for the channel?! I mean—if you want to?”

Keith looked down at his doodles. “Uh, I can just make you something if you want? I’m not that good.”

“Not that good? Are you crazy!” She pointed to the bottom of a page where he had been sketching a lion. “Look at that! That’s amazing! I am not taking anything from you for free! You could probably get all kinds of people requesting things from you if you tried!”

“You think so?” Keith felt his cheeks burning a bit at the compliment. He hadn’t really thought about that before. Would people actually be interested in the things he could make?

“Well, you’d probably have to get some things like a tablet and everything, but you can borrow mine for now to test it out. It’s just getting dusty here anyway. What do you say? Wanna give it a try? Hosting with me and being my awesome artist? The second one being paid, of course! I’ve been saving. I can afford it!”

Really, what did Keith have to lose by saying yes? At the very least, he was helping out Pidge and entertaining himself at the same time.

“Okay.”
So we ended up getting a little very obviously expositional in this chapter. It was kind of a way to give more background on WHY dynamics might exist at all, as well as showing Pidge and Matt doing their thing, which Keith is also going to do.

A few people were wondering if Keith was going to do anything. He's going the online route for now. Any artist or youtuber can tell you this doesn't exactly make a ton of money, but that's alright. It gives him a lot to do.

I know I've been focusing more on Keith than Lance this story, as opposed to how it was pretty evenly split last time. It's just that Lance is experiencing his normal, everyday life. It's Keith that everything is new for. Don't worry though, we're going to keep diving into Lance too!

Thank you for all the wonderful comments! You guys are amazing!
Before The Storm

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One would think that, after living by the Atlantic Ocean his entire life, Lance would be used to hurricane season. He would be used to basically having to pick up his life for a few days to go somewhere else for the really bad ones.

As he drove back to his apartment, Lance couldn’t help but glance up at the sky from time to time. It was completely clear and cloudless, but he knew that didn’t mean anything. This was quite literally the calm before the storm.

He was still so jittery about bad storms. It was hard to know what was going to happen during them, especially when they were predicted to be bad enough to require mandatory evacuations. There were few people in his family left in Cuba, but he was always worried about that in general. Plus there was the fact that things might be perfectly fine, but so much could also be ruined by the time they got back home.

Lance was a little selfishly glad that he wasn’t part of the crew that would be staying at the aquarium to make sure that everything was okay. Yeah, they’d most likely be safe there, and he was worried for the animals (who would also most likely be safe), but they should be okay, and he also couldn’t leave Keith alone with his family.

Actually, Keith would probably be a little bitch, say he went, and then stay in their apartment, if Lance stayed behind.

His entire family was leaving and heading farther north that day. The goal was to get everyone to the same pre-determined spot, just so they wouldn’t be worried about one another. Plenty of people had already left, Pidge and Hunk’s families both took off the day before, but Lance agreed to stay to help with some preparations at the aquarium before leaving.

Keith said that he’d have everything ready to go by the time Lance got back. So when he pulled in by the apartment building, he made sure to lock the car doors, and took the steps up two by two, wanting to get there as quickly as possible.

Rushing into the apartment, Lance almost tripped over a neat pile of things, practically leaping over it to stop from knocking it all over.

“Watch it!” Keith called out, glaring up at him as he unplugged all their electronics. “I’ve got everything organized and ready to go. Don’t mess it up.”

Lance looked at the pile of stuff, including two suitcases that he knew had clothes in them, blankets, pillows, food, water, and a bunch of other things to go along with all of that. Seriously, they could probably camp out on the side of the road somewhere and be perfectly fine.

Bless Keith and his survivalist skills and knowledge.

The two of them moved all of their stuff down into Blue, putting some things in the trunk (“Is that two extra things of gas?” “You can never be too prepared.”), and some in the backseat for easy access.

“So we’re going to your aunt’s place?” Keith asked as they locked up the house and made their way
back to the car with the last few things (it took a couple trips up and down).

“Yeah, my Auntie Edelira,” Lance said. “She lives up in South Carolina and is completely out of the way of the worst parts of this storm. Probably still get some rain and wind there though.” He looked around as they both got into the car. “Ready to go?”

“As ready as ever.” With that, Lance pulled away from their apartment to start their long journey north. In theory, it would take them roughly eight hours, which would put them there just in time to go to sleep, or a bit later. The plan was to switch on and off with driving every few hours or so.

“You know, with all the stuff you packed, it looks like you’re ready to fight the hurricane. Literally.”

Keith looked up at him as they stopped at the traffic lights, meeting his gaze. “I’m going to fight the fucking hurricane.”

Lance laughed loudly at that as the light changed and they continued on their way. “You got a hold of your mom, right?”

“Yeah, she knows where we’ll be. More importantly though, I got a hold of Shiro.” Keith shook his head. “You’d think he would be less paranoid than my own mother, but no.”

“Krolia’s so chill though,” Lance noted. She really was. They had a deal going on right now where for every picture of Keith he would text her, she would send him a baby one. It was a very profitable arrangement for both of them, much to Keith’s chagrin.

Whatever, he knew Veronica was slipping Keith pictures and blackmail. It was only fair.

It took a while for them to get out of the city, because traffic was insane. There were going to be plenty of places with long lines though, given the evacuation and the looming storm.

“So your aunt’s place is big enough for everyone?”

“Uh, yes and no? She flips houses for a living with her husband. You know – they buy them, renovate them, sell them, rinse and repeat. They usually do pretty big ones now, even though they started out small. Or, well, they used to. My uncle passed away earlier this year, so from what I understand, she wants to keep this house because he called their renovations of it perfect. I’m not entirely sure what this one looks like, I just have the address and know it’s out of the way of the stop. From the pictures I’ve seen though, I swear it was one of those old timey manors or something that was just wasting away and is probably haunted.”

“Pidge is going to be jealous,” Keith noted. He paused in thought. “Do you mind me asking why you call her Auntie instead of Tia like the others?”

“Yes.” Lance flawless executed a lane change, because he was an excellent driver and anyone else who said otherwise could screw off. “She’s actually my great-aunt and has been in the US longer than the rest of my family. See, she met her husband when he was on vacation in Cuba. They knew each other for two weeks before she ran off with him. Pretty big scandal back then.”

“Are you serious?” Keith asked, raising an eyebrow.

Lance nodded. “Yeah. But I guess because she came here alone with him she just…ended up leaving behind her Cuban heritage to fit in with everyone else.” That made him frown, because yeah, there were a lot of things he didn’t know himself, and he was used to his American life, but it wasn’t like he was completely cut off from his family’s culture. “From what she says though, it was her own choice. She’s an Omega, but she says she made her own choices.”
“And the government let her keep the house?” Keith was a startled by that.

“Technically, I think her daughter, who’s a Beta, owns it, but signed permission for her to live there or something? I’m not entirely sure.” He shook his head.

Keith fell silent for a little while, but Lance could tell that he was thinking. He could see it very clearly on the Omega’s face.

Eventually though, he said, “I don’t really know much about where my family comes from. My dad was Japanese-American, and my mom…I actually have no idea.”

“Does that bother you?” Lance asked curiously.

He shrugged. “I dunno. It is what it is. Maybe I’m a bit curious though.”

Humming in response, Lance stared at the road in front of him thoughtfully. “Kroliia sounds European, but she kind of has some Asian features too. What was her old surname?”

Silent hung over the car. “Uh…” Keith shifted awkwardly, “…I don’t…actually know.”

Lance didn’t mean to snort so loudly, he really, truly didn’t. The Omega shot him a nasty look at that. “Sorry, sorry. It’s just kind of funny. Maybe you can look into it sometime? They have those ancestry kits and everything using DNA?”

“Maybe,” Keith agreed after staring at him for a moment. “I’d rather focus on the future instead of the past though.”

That, Lance supposed, was entirely fair too. Embracing the past was very important, but forgetting about the future in the process was a dangerous thing to do. This was something that they could let go for now though. They needed to tackle one battle at a time.

...

Lance sang along with the radio instead of his own device, so that they could get regular updates on road conditions that the GPS didn’t pick up on. He was stretched out in the passenger seat, legs up on the dashboard as Keith zoomed down the highway a little faster than he probably should have. That was fine though. Lance realized very quickly that Keith was a very good driver.

“Hey, so, I have a question,” Keith spoke up after a while of silence. “Well, not a question, more just wanting to know what you think?”

“Lay it on me,” Lance insisted, looking over at him with interest.

“You know the youtube thing I mentioned before? Well, Pidge is paying me to redo her logo and all kinds of art for her channel, and she keeps saying that she wants me to fix her merchandise too. Seems to think that I’m good enough to do commissions or something.”

“Is that something you think you’d like to do?” Lance tilted his head. He had seen Keith doodling before, and they were good, but he hadn’t seen anything else.

“Well, I draw a lot. I have a sketchbook in my bag if you wanna look?” His voice rose in question.

Eagerly, Lance twisted around, digging through the bag in question until he found a thick book filled with paper. He turned back in his seat, flipping open the book to look at the pictures that were there.
There were a lot of animals, some he recognized, some that were definitely imaginary. There were a few landscapes as well. “Keith…buddy, babe, my man…”

“Yeah?” There was a little bit of tension in his voice.

“These are fucking awesome! Hell yeah you should do that if you want to!” Holy shit, they were actually amazing, what the hell? How had he hid this from him?

Keith’s face flushed, a smile spreading across his lips.

“Time for the most hated question for artists: think you can draw me? As one of your French girls?” Lance wiggled his eyebrows at him.

Snorting loudly at that, Keith purposely ignored his eyebrows. “I did draw you. Last page before a blank one.”

“Really?” Lance squeaked. He quickly flipped through the other pictures until he finally got to the last page. His breath left him as his eyes traced the lines and shading Keith put on the paper. “What the hell? No way I’m that beautiful! I thought you said you couldn’t draw!”

“When did I tell you that?” Keith’s brow furrowed.

“In Vegas?”

“No I didn’t.”

“You did you little liar. This is amazing! What the fuck?” That came out way more emotionally than he meant for it to.

“What?”

“Do you actually see me this way?” Lance breathed out. Jesus, he knew he was attractive, but there was no way that he was that beautiful.

Keith risked a glance at him, an expression so soft that it made the Alpha flush a bit on his features. “Yeah, of course I do.” He spoke with such certainty, as if there was no question about it in the least.

Heart beating loudly in his ears, Lance honestly felt like he was going to cry a little. This Omega was doing things to him that no one had ever done before, and he was pretty sure that he was going to end up spontaneously combusting or turning into a pile of mush. “If we weren’t already married, I would ask you again right here and now.”

Keith laughed, oud and clear. It was a beautiful sound. “You know what?”

“Hmm?”

He stared at the road, a smile on his face. “I’d probably say yes.”

Yes, Lance was going to die, and he’d probably end up thanking Keith for it.

…

When Keith was younger, and Acxa had just gotten her license (since she got it a year before he had), the two of them had taken off on a small road trip. The car ended up breaking down on the side of the road and they had to get Shiro to come and get them. That was about it for Keith’s experience in road trips.
He wasn’t sure how he was going to handle such a long trip without moving around, especially since he slept through most of the flight from Nevada to Florida. Luckily for Keith, Lance seemed to consider this, and they stopped every few hours for a very quick break.

They were heading to a gas station that wasn’t one of their planned stops, but Luis had gotten a hold of them to ask if they had anything to help with nausea, since apparently the gas station they were at was out of anything useful.

Keith guessed that it was lucky that they brought some ginger ale with them for that exact reason. It was something that calmed both of their stomachs when they were sick, and it was better to be prepared during a long trip.

When they got to the little gas station, Keith wasn’t at all surprised that there wasn’t really anything in there. The place was small, a little sketchy, and when they got inside later, was almost sold out.

Lance groaned, stretching out and wincing as his limbs cracked. They headed towards were Luis was leaning against his car, looking back and forth between Sylvio and Nadia, who were playing in the grass nearby, and the closed bathroom door that was on the outside of the building.

“Thanks for stopping,” Luis said with a relieved sigh as they approached.

“How’s Lisa doing?” Lance asked, clearly worried about his sister-in-law.

“Not very good,” Luis admitted, motioning towards the door to the Omega washroom. It was pretty common for Omegas to have a separate washroom, while Betas and Alphas were lumped together.

“Want me to go in and check on her?” Keith asked. It was funny how they never really got over the idea that they had to listen to signs on doors, even when unsupervised.

“Could you?” Luis asked. “She said she’s fine, but…”

Keith nodded his head, taking the bottle of ginger ale with him as he went to the door. It was a small bathroom with a sink and two stalls, one which was empty, and the other where he could see someone, no doubt Lisa, kneeling down. The room was surprisingly clean, or at least, seemed to be.

He walked forward, carefully knocking on the door of the stall. “Um, Lisa? It’s Keith. Luis asked me to check on you.”

There was a sigh and then she shifted. The toilet flushed, and she shifted onto her feet, the door clicking open.

Good god, she looked terrible.

“Are you okay?”

“I’ve been better,” she admitted with a groan, wobbling a little bit to the point where he reached up just to keep her steady. “But I’m not terrible. Sorry Luis called you out here.”

Keith wasn’t entirely sure that was true. If she was this unsteady on her feet, it was probably bad. “He’s just worried.”

She waved her hand. “He’s always worried, and never gets that morning sickness doesn’t just happen in the morning, especially if it’s this bad.”

His eyes widened as he words settled in his mind. “You’re pregnant?”
That seemed to snap the other Omega out of her daze, and her scent shifted into a slightly alarmed one. “Oh! I didn’t mean… I just…” She sighed. “Yes, I am. We weren’t going to tell anyone though.”

“Won’t say a word,” he assured her, watching as she washed out her mouth with water before washing her hands. He held the bottle of ginger ale out to her. “That should help a bit?” Nearly every Omega was told things that would help with nausea and other issues in a pregnancy, so he was a bit surprised that she didn’t have anything with her. “Do you need any help, or do you want me to leave?”

“Thank you, that’s sweet of you.” She took it from him gratefully. “And you can stay, I don’t mind. I just… need a few minutes before going out. Still feel a bit nauseated.” She frowned. “We really don’t want Sylvio or Nadia to know yet and they’ve been so worried about me not feeling good. I don’t want to go out feeling so sick.”

Keith nodded his head, but didn’t pressure her into talking about it. He got the distinct feeling that there was something more to this story, but for the life of him, he couldn’t figure out what it was. Though Keith clashed with Lance’s mother, Marco, and Rachel, he knew that no one in the family would force someone into the kind of situation Lisa was in, and she didn’t seem put-off on the concept of being pregnant, just being sick.

Worrying about her kids worrying probably didn’t help her any.

An idea came to him, but it wasn’t one that he wanted to just offer on his own. Instead, he stayed with her until she was by Luis, and then shifted close to Lance, leaning up to whisper something to him.

He waited rather nervously, watching his Alpha to see what his reaction would be.

Lance stared at him for a moment before his lips tipped up into a smile. His arm draped across Keith’s shoulder and he turned towards his brother. “How are you feeling, Lisa?”

“This helps a bit,” she replied, raising the ginger ale into the air.

“Well, Keith had an idea, if you guys are down for it,” he said, looking down at Keith with an adoration that warmed his cheeks. “Since we’re going to the same place anyway, why don’t we take Sylvio and Nadia with us the rest of the way?”

“In your car?” Luis immediately asked, which, that was fair. Keith did say that when they had kids, he wasn’t going to let them anywhere near the car that Lance so proudly named Blue.

“She’s a road warrior and you know it!” Lance argued with him.

Lisa glanced up at Keith while the two brothers argued about the car. He smiled at him warmly, clearly understanding what he was trying to do. She leaned up to her husband and whispered something to him.

Luis frowned. “You sure?”

“Yeah.” She nodded.

“Alright, it’s up to you.”

Lisa smiled and looked towards Lance. “I’m going to tell you something and you need to hold it together okay? Not tell anyone else.”
“Okay?” Lance quirked an eyebrow at her.

“I don’t want the kids or anything else to know right now, but I’m pregnant again.”

Keith watched Lance’s eyes widen as he processed what Lisa said. His mouth fell open and he said, “Holy—really? That’s amazing!” He paused as it truly settled in. “Wait…”

“There it is,” Luis said with sigh.

Lance wasn’t focused on him though, his eyes on his sister-in-law. “Are you okay? Nadia…”

She nodded her head, turning her attention to Keith. “After Sylvio was born, it was discovered that I had I had an abnormality in my uterine lining. I almost lost Nadia, and ever since, I’ve had miscarriages. We used to tell the kids but…”

Keith nodded because while he didn’t understand, he imagined that explaining to their children that they weren’t going to have another brother or sister over and over again would be emotionally exhausting for everyone.

No wonder she didn’t want them to realize that she wasn’t feeling good.

“If the kids want to go with you, and you really don’t mind, that’d be great,” Luis spoke up, sounding more than a little relieved at the offer.

Keith had to admit, he was a bit nervous as the kids rushed over to them, though he still smiled as they practically glomped Lance, causing him to stumble back and actually fall to the ground. They eagerly agreed to go with them for the rest of the trip, so while Lance played with them, Keith helped move some things over to the car.

He really just hoped that everything was going to go well for both of them.

…

Lance grinned broadly and looked in the rear view mirror of his car at his niece and nephew in the back. “Alright kiddos! Welcome to the Blue line transport. I will be your pilot today!”

Beside him, Keith turned slightly to look back at them. “Don’t worry, if he gets too bad I’ll kick him out.”

“Can we listen to my music?” Nadia asked, waving her pink iPod in the air. It was an older model, but they could still hook it up.

“Sure, why not?” Keith pulled the cord back and handed it to her, letting her plug it in.

Lance grinned broadly at that. “You do realize that you’ve agreed to a slew of Disney songs.”

Keith made a face at him, and looked like he was about to sass him back, when Sylvio asked, “Tio Keith, how did you meet Tio Lance?”

Keith looked a little startled at this, and Lance almost choked up at hearing them call him ‘tio’. It was amazing how easily kids just accepted things. Out of the corner of his eye, Lance watched Keith almost melt a little bit as he said, “He saved me from the bag guy, remember?”

“That’s right!” Sylvio perked up. “What happened to the bad guy? Did he go to jail?”

Lance bristled a little bit at the thought of Lotor, who probably wasn’t sitting in a jail cell awaiting
trial. He probably got bail and was sitting back in whatever fancy house he had being waited on hand and foot. Still, he didn’t want to tell his little niece and nephew that. “

Keith apparently agreed with that. “He did.”

“Good,” Sylvio said sternly, and it was actually really funny. Lance coughed a little bit at that. The older he got, the more the boy seemed to be showing more Alpha characteristics. That didn’t necessarily mean anything though.

“Tio Lance, will our homes still be there after the hurricane? Susie said they were going to blow away,” Nadia piped up.

The genuine worry and fear in her voice made him scowl. “Susie’s wrong. Of course it’ll be there.” Then, under his breath, he muttered, “Susie’s a little bitch.”

“Lance,” Keith hissed at him warningly.

He simply shot him a bright grin. “How about we play I-Spy?”

The kids cheered, and Keith rolled him eyes, but still looked amused all the same.

Lance would take that as an absolute win.

...

When it came to long trips, Keith already decided that he preferred long, open roads opposed to anything else. Going through yet another place, they ended up in another long lane of traffic that was moving so slowly, that, right now, it really wasn’t moving at all. Apparently there was some kind of accident farther ahead causing it. He could hear some people loudly complaining about the traffic.

He cast a glance towards the back seat, where Sylvio and Nadia were both in the process of nodding off. He couldn’t blame them, he was bored as all sin too.

“What the fuck?” Lance suddenly breathed out, concern permeating his scent. His brows furrowed, his shoulders going tense.

“Wha—“ Keith didn’t even get his entire question out of his mouth before a hand slammed down on the windshield. He jumped, and both of the kids screamed in surprise. Outside of the car was a skinny man with wide eyes that was screaming and yelling.

It took him a moment to realize what it was the man was screaming about. Something about Alphas destroying the world, and God sending storms to rid of the world of them? It didn’t particularly matter to him. What mattered was that there were too incredibly frightened children in the back seat.

Nadia screamed as the man suddenly tried to open her door. She unbuckled her own seatbelt and positively launched herself to her brother’s side of the car.

“Oh fuck this,” Lance snarled, not caring if the kids heard him. He glanced at Keith. “Stay with them.”

Keith almost felt like a weight was pushed down on him at Lance’s words, and he realized that the Alpha had never quite used that specific tone of voice before, the one that instantly made him listen and bare his neck just slightly.

Lance got out of the car, shoving the man away from Nadia’s door. A woman from the car behind
them got out too to help.

His heart was pounding so rapidly that he could hear it in his ears, could feel it in his neck without actually looking for a pulse. It only got worse when he heard little, frightened whimpers from the back.

Keith moved without really thinking about it. He locked his own door before somehow managing to climb over the console between the front seats.

Sylvio and Nadia were pressed up closely to one door, staring at him with wide eyes.

“It’ll be okay,” Keith assured them, though the angry yelling outside of the car only got worse. He pulled down one of the back seats, giving him access to the trunk, where he tugged out more sheets and blankets that he had packed with him, just in case. Huh, a lot of the random stuff that Lance teased him about – ginger ale for car sickness, and now so many extra blankets – really were coming in handy.

He made sure that both of the back doors were locked and then used the sheets to block off the windows all around them. It would mean that Lance could only rely on his rear-view mirrors for a while, but honestly, it would be worth it.

Once they couldn’t see outside anymore, Keith quickly got to work essentially making the back seat into a strange nest. It seemed like both Sylvio and Nadia caught on to what he was doing, carefully moving out of his way or helping him tuck things into corners. By the end of it, the entire back seat was shielded and padded, like a little den of safety from the outside world.

“You guys need to bucket up again,” Keith said, motioning to the seats. “Don’t worry, you’re safe.”

“Can you stay back here with us?” Sylvio blurted out, and then looked a bit embarrassed. “You know, to help Nadia?”

Deciding to not call him out on that, the Omega nodded, sitting down in between them. He wasn’t biologically related to them, but he technically their uncle. They at least knew that he meant safety. He allowed himself to relax, exuding a scent that caused both children to calm and slowly lean against him on either side.

He heard the sound of a siren that seemed to almost be coming from the side of the road – hopefully one of the cops that had been working the accident up ahead had been called back to deal with the nut ball.

Okay, that wasn’t very nice of him. That man was clearly in need of help, but Keith was allowed to be a little peeved off.

He looked up, eyes locking onto the driver’s side door as someone appeared in front of it. He relaxed when he saw it was Lance, glad that he wasn’t going to have to fight someone in front of these two little pups. He absolutely would to protect them, but that wasn’t something he wanted them to see.

Lance slid back into the car, locking the door behind him. His angry scent disrupted the calm in the car, and Keith instinctively chirped in protest. Lance blinked and looked around at them, confusion clouding his eyes as he took in the back seat.

Then a smile slipped across his lips and his eyes softened a lot as he regarded his niece and nephew cuddling up to Keith in their make-shift nest.

“The police came and got him,” he said, keeping his voice low. “Hopefully he’ll be able to get the
“Hope... help he needs.”

“Hopefully,” Keith agreed in barely more than a whisper. Lance’s scent seemed to respond to his own, allowing the Alpha to calm down as well.

Keith made no movement to go back up to the front, but Lance didn’t seem to mind it, all things considered.

The entire car was quiet for a while, at least until they got moving again. Keith was fine with this though. It let all of them calm down and relax.

“Tio,” Sylvio spoke up eventually, nudging Keith a bit. “I’m hungry.”

The Omega nodded his head and went to the lunch bags that their parents had left with them. He fished out the sandwiches and juice packs for them, before grabbing some of the food that he had packed while Lance was helping at the aquarium.

He undid his seatbelt to lean forward and hand some of it to Lance. “You can pull over if you want to eat. Or switch with me.”

“Nah, I’m good. Could you just unwrap that for me?” Keith would do him one better. He would open it and his drink, because he was just so thoughtful that way. He may or may not have pressed a quick kiss to the back of Lance’s neck while passing the sandwich to him.

“Tio Keith,” Nadia said, tugging at Keith’s arm. “You need to buckle up!”

He chuckled and leaned back. “You’re right. I’m sorry.” He made sure that she saw him do it back up.

“And Tio Lance needs to keep his eyes on the road, not stare at pretty Omegas, even if they’re mates,” Sylvio sassed.

Keith tried to hide his smile as Lance glanced back at them in the rear-view mirror. The Alpha had a twinkle of mischief in his eyes. “Sylvio, you think that Keith is pretty?”

Sylvio spluttered a little bit at that, reminding Keith so much of Lance that it was almost painful.

“Keith is the second prettiest Omega around,” Nadia insisted, sounding almost scandalized by her brother’s reaction. “After Mami.”

Okay, that was fair. Keith smiled at her. “What about your Abuela?”

She made a face. “He’s old. And hairy.”

That made Lance laugh so loudly that he actually had to pull over to the side of the road until he got himself under control again. It took a little while, which meant that by the time they were back on the road, the kids had eaten, and as kids do, they were suddenly very bored.

“Do you guys like to draw?” Keith asked, after they burned through nearly every road game that Lance could think of. No wonder Lisa and Luis were happy to pass them off to them.

He almost cried with happiness when both of them excitedly exclaimed, “Yeah!”

Digging out his sketchbook, Keith tore a piece out for each of them, and gave them a pencil, apologizing for the fact that he didn’t have anything to colour with there. Neither one seemed to mind though, pressing their papers to the solid backs of books and getting to work.
An idea popped into his mind, and he flipped his own book to another page. “What’s your favourite animals?”

“Cats!” Sylvio called out excitedly, kicking his legs into the back of Lance’s seat.

“I like sharks,” Nadia answered, not lifting her eyes from her paper. That wasn’t at all what Keith expected, but hey, he could work with that.

He pressed his foot against the console of the car so that his knee was propped up, and started sketching in his book. Keith became so focused on that, that he didn’t notice the two kids stop and watch him.

“Oh wow!” Nadia cried out when Keith finished off the last of the shark. “It’s so pretty! Can I have it?”

He chuckled. “You bet you can.” He tore the paper and handed it to her, before setting to work to make Sylvio’s cat. Now that the little boy knew what he was doing, he was watching with wide eager eyes.

Keith had always liked kids, but at the same time, he could be super awkward around anyone, and small humans were no expectation to the rule. The difference was that kids were very easy to not just forgive, but to reach out and meet someone half way. He really liked that about him.

Since coming to Florida, Keith had been hoping to make a good impression on Lance’s family, figuring that the most important ones to get in the good graces of were his parents. He was starting to think that he was wrong about that though. He was starting to think that these young pups were the ones that really mattered.

Judging from the soft, adoring looks Lance kept giving him, and the way the two children curled up to him as they started to nod off after a while, Keith figured that he was doing a pretty good job.

…

Lance pulled up in front of his aunt’s house, and he was a bit flabbergasted. It was bigger than he thought it’d be. On one hand, he could really get used to a place like that, but on the other, if she was alone, wouldn’t a place like this be creepy?

His parents were already there, as were a few of his aunts, uncles, and cousins, but he was the first of his siblings to arrive. That was probably a good thing. He really didn’t want to have to deal with Marco or Rachel’s snark right off the bat.

“Hola mijo,” his Papá said, approaching him almost timidly. Right, outside of general preparations to get up there, he hadn’t really spoken to either of his parents, nor his abuela, since he blew up at them.

“Hola Papá,” he replied to her as he stretched out his legs. He crackled his shoulder blades and then looked to the back seat, a smile blooming on his face as he saw that Nadia and Sylvio were still cuddled up to Keith, his arms resting around both of them. The sight of them in a make-shift nest made his heart absolutely melt.

Jesus, he wasn’t going to be able to handle actually seeing Keith curled up with their own pup in the future. Just the mental picture of it right now was making him have palpitations. Oh well, that was a problem for future-Lance to deal with.

Though, present-Lance did have to do the dirty work of waking Keith up, and that just wasn’t fair. Oh well, that was the trade-off, he guessed.
Even his father cooed a little bit at the sight of them. Instead of leaning over one of the kids, Lance knelt down in the driver’s seat and reached back, pressing a hand against Keith’s thigh and giving it a slight shake. “Keith?”

He groaned and slowly blinked open his eyes. Given how light of a sleeper Keith was, that actually proved to him how safe the Omega had felt in the car. That was nice to know. “We here?”

“Yeah. I’ll get Sylvio, then you can get out,” Lance said, slipping out of the door again and moving to the back. Instead of waiting for him though, Keith undid Nadia’s seatbelt, shifting her into his arms as he got out the other door.

“Did you have a good drive?” his Papá asked Keith. “I can take her.”

“Mostly,” he replied, shifting as Nadia groaned and nuzzled her face into his neck. “It’s okay, I can carry her. Are we just taking them to bed?”

“It’s too late to wake them up.” Lance watched his father nod her head before turning towards the house. “Let’s get them up into bed, then we’ll come and get your stuff. Please try to be quiet, a few of the other pups are already asleep too.”

Since the two were already wearing comfortable clothes as it was, it was decided to just leave them as-is. Once they were in their beds, the group of adults made their way down to the car again.

“You look like you’re about to drop,” Lance said to Keith, keeping an arm around his waist to steady him.

“I’m still tired,” he admitted almost sheepishly, almost like he was a bit embarrassed by it. Sure, Lance had been driving for a few hours straight by that point, and he was tired too, but that didn’t mean that Keith couldn’t be too. It had been a very long day.

“Want me to carry you?” Lance asked.

Keith snickered a little bit at that. “You’d drop me. I could probably carry you up the stairs though. If that’s where we’re going.”

“You are,” his Papá broke in. She was coming to help them move their stuff upstairs (that was basically just their suitcases though, since everything else was Keith being wildly over-prepared. Though to be fair, some of it had come in handy so far.

As they carted the stuff back up to the house, Lance couldn’t help but wonder something. “Do you…uh…do you think I should start hitting up the gym?”

“What?” Keith stared at him oddly. “I mean, if you want to, go for it? It’s always good to blow off steam, and good for health, but it’s not like you have to or anything.” He raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t mean anything behind the not being able to carry me thing. You know that, right?”

“I do,” he agreed, because he did. He knew that Keith didn’t care that Lance wasn’t as strong as he was. It was silly, but he wanted to be able to scoop up his mate when he was tired and carry him up to bed. He wanted to have a little bit more of a refined form to scare off a few other Alphas that would come sniffing around Keith even though he was claimed. Hell, he especially wanted to look a bit imposing to whoever their future children were courting (even if that one was very, very far into the future). “Maybe I do want to start going for myself though.”

“That’s up to you.”
His Papá must have overheard them, because she sent Lance a concerned look after showing them to the room that they were going to be staying in. He smiled at her and shook his head. He didn’t want to talk about it, especially not with how tired he suddenly was.

The room was pretty small and bare for such a big house – just a simple made-up bed and dresser, with blinds covering the window. It would do for now though.

Lance didn’t even bother pulling out his pyjamas. He simply shrugged off his clothes until he was down to his boxers and flopped on the bed. “I suddenly want to sleep for a week.”

Keith chuckled, leaving his jeans on the floor as he climbed in beside Lance. He left his t-shirt on, but that might have been for the best. Alphas sometimes got weird around male Omegas without a shirt on, even though they all technically looked the same, and there were going to be quite a few unmated cousins around their age there, a few of which were Alphas.

Just the thought of it made Lance want future-Lance to fight them. Thank god it was future-Lance’s problem to deal with.

“C’mere,” Lance muttered when Keith shifted a little too far away from him.

“We gotta brush our teeth, and I don’t know about you, but I really need to use the bathroom.”

Lance groaned, knowing that he was right, but that meant putting clothes back on. Why hadn’t he thought about that before? God, past-Lance made terrible choices sometimes. What a douche, leaving everything for future-Lance (who was now present-Lance) to deal with.

Luckily, though he could hear voices downstairs, they didn’t run into any of Lance’s other family members, able to get in and out of the bathroom quickly. Feeling a little more clean, a lot more tired, and completely relaxed thanks to Keith’s calm, sweet scent as he curled up next to him, Lance found himself very quickly drifting off to sleep.

Tomorrow was surely going to be another wild day.

Chapter End Notes

THIS IS IT EVERYONE. Less than 12 hours and we know how it all ends!

I am SO excited! Seriously! I won't get the chance to watch until tomorrow afternoon, so please, if you watch it, don't send any spoilers my way? I've got someone whose going to tell me what ships (if any) are canon at the very end, but that's so I can prep myself from the beginning to deal with whatever fandom nonsense ends up happening.

I have faith that klance will be canon, and I DID accidentally predict a lot of random details while writing Ignite the Stars? Here's hoping! And if it doesn't, you are allowed to be disappointed, but please, PLEASE don't bother or harass anyone else. Actually, if it does become canon, please don't bother or harass anyone. If I see more of the 'sis we've been knew' stuff, I'm going to lose every last shit I have.

And if it doesn't become canon, well...I'll still see you guys next week for the next update!
Acceptance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lance awoke to the sound of laughter and the pitter-patter of rain hitting the window. He absolutely loved mornings like this, when a lot of his family was together and the kids were excited and playing despite the dreary weather. It made everything so much better.

Never before though had he experienced the combination of that kind of morning, along with the sweet honey scent that surrounded Keith when he was relaxed. It was honestly one of the most surreal, yet best ways to wake up.

Glancing down, Lance smiled when he saw Keith curled up to his side, head resting against his collar bone, arm resting across his stomach. Slowly, he realized that his mate was actually awake first, like he normally was, but instead of getting up and starting his day, he was simply lounging. It was really, really nice.

He shifted his arm so that he could gently brush his fingers against Keith’s shoulder, leaning down and pressing his lips against his forehead, because dammit, everything about this moment was soft and he loved it.

“Don’t wanna get up,” Keith muttered, his voice low and rough with sleep, likely just having woke up.

“I think we can stay here for a little while longer. We had a long drive yesterday,” Lance said while stroking his back. He thought back to the day before, and how Keith interacted with his niece and nephew. A smile crossed his face. “You were amazing with Sylvio and Nadia yesterday.”

Keith hid his face against Lance’s skin for a moment before muttering, “I like kids. They’re just…usually so…good. You know? Sometimes I don’t know how to deal with them but…yeah…”

“What?” Lance encouraged.

“Luis and Lisa wanted a lot of kids, right?”

“Yeah?” He was really wondering where Keith was going with this.

“So why didn’t they just adopt kids? There are so many out there who need or want homes. I—Acxa and I were in a group home for a bit between places, when we were in foster care when the doctors said mom was too sick to take care of us, and there were just so many kids…I tried to protect the little ones, to help take care of them.” He frowned. “I was kind of expected to after I presented. Foster families would just lump the kids on me.”

Lance blinked with surprise at that. He honestly hadn’t thought about that before. “You know, I’m not sure. The only thing I can think is that adoption is expensive. Then again, so are babies. I dunno.” He gently squeezed Keith’s arm. “You know, if you don’t want to actually, you know, have a kid, we don’t have to.”

The Omega chuckled and looked up at him with warm eyes. “What if I want to do both?”

“I like kids, and I always wanted a big family. I wouldn’t mind a bunch of little adopted hellions
running around.” That wasn’t a lie at all. Maybe it was because he was in a big house right now, hearing the laughter of playing children, but he really, really could picture having a bunch of kids, most whom didn’t look a thing like him or Keith.

It really did make him wonder why his oldest brother hadn’t done that. He knew they loved children too and had a whole lot of love to give. He wasn’t going to ask that though.

Keith suddenly snorted. “So much for talking about all of this in a year.” He didn’t seem angry or offended, but rather, amused.

“Well, it’s a big thing, right? Keep each other updated on our thoughts, then talk about it seriously in a year.”

He nodded his head before leaning up and giving him a gentle peck on the lips. Lance followed him as he started to pull away. Lance didn’t care about morning breath, because he wanted more warm, soft kisses to make their peaceful morning perfect.

... By some string of luck, Lance was able to get both of them in and out of the bathroom without alerting everyone else that they were up and about, giving them a little extra time to prepare themselves, and yes, they needed to prepare for the rest of his family.

He had no idea what anyone else heard about how he and Keith got together, but he was honestly ready for anything at this point. He could tell that Keith was thinking similarly simply by the way he regarded the hallway with caution as they walked towards the kitchen.

“Auntie!” Lance cried out in surprise when the woman appeared in front of him. People tended to have kids younger, so despite the fact that she was his great aunt, she still looked rather young. Though time was definitely starting to catch up to her after her mate’s death.

“Hey!” he cried out again. Good god, she shouldn’t say that too loud. “The only thing I ‘got a hold of’ what his heart.”

Keith snorted but still smiled. “Sap.”

“I try.” He looked back at his aunt, who was grinned at them.

“You remind me of my husband and I,” she said with a happy sigh. “We only knew each other for a short period of time before we just knew.”

Warmth bubbled up in Lance. If his Auntie was being encouraging, that was a great, because this was her house, so it was less likely that anyone else would get in their faces in a bad way. You just didn’t start drama in someone else’s home when they were housing you during a mandatory evacuation.

They followed his aunt down the stairs towards the kitchen, where the nose seemed to explode around them along with the scent of breakfast.
“Tio!” Lance looked up as Nadia ran at him, and then completely bypassed him, throwing her arms around a stunned Keith. He couldn’t even feel disappointed, because she looked so happy to see him.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Lance caught sight of Rachel watching them with a raised eyebrow, especially as Keith pulled Nadia up into his arms like she didn’t weigh a thing, and the girl latched onto him.

“Lance.” Luis appeared at his side, clapping a hand on his shoulder.

“How are you guys? Good drive?” His eyes flickered to where Lisa moved over to Keith, speaking to him quietly.

“Yeah.” He squeezed his shoulder. “I wanted to thank you. Taking the kids really did help. And they’ve been going on about Keith. I think they want to keep him.”

“That’s the idea,” Lance agreed, warmth rushing through him. He frowned a bit, “Did they tell you what else happened?”

“The crazy guy banging on the car? Yeah.” Luis sighed. “What happened, exactly? The kids just said that Keith made a nest in the back seat and stayed with them, while you sent the ‘bad guy’ away. They’re impressed with both of you.” He paused and looked at something else thoughtfully before lowering his voice. “And so was Mamá.”

That startled Lance a little bit. He felt like he couldn’t breathe for a moment, but managed to choke out, “Really?”

“Yeah.” Luis nodded. “Look, Mamá was a jerk, but you know it came from a protective place. The more he sees just how much you guys actually work, the more open he’ll be. The quickest way is through the pups.”

That much was very true. Their Mamá absolutely adored his grandchildren, always kind of hinting towards the fact that he’d like more, especially since he had five adult children. Of course, Luis and Lisa were facing their own difficulties, Rachel didn’t have a mate yet, Marco couldn’t seem to hold down a boyfriend or girlfriend to save his life, and Lance…well…

His eyes turned to Keith, who set Nadia down again. For him, it was a reality that was so much closer than ever before. Neither of them were ready for that just yet though, something he was very glad that they were on the same page about, even if it kept coming up over and over again.

(To be fair, it was a huge thing that deserved to be discussed a thoroughly before implemented.)

Despite the worsening weather outside, Lance couldn’t help but feel like his day was shaping up to be an amazing one.

…

Lance had a very big family. Yes, Keith knew that, and he thought he could handle it after being introduced to his direct family, but as it turned out, both of his parents came from fairly big families themselves, and there were a lot of them there.

God, he couldn’t imagine seeing absolutely everyone at the same time. Keith actually wasn’t a shy person, he just didn’t bother with people that he didn’t care about, but a sudden influx of a lot of people actually paying attention to him directly? He didn’t think he could handle that.
Already, he could feel eyes on him. Aunts, uncles, and cousins staring at him with interest, probably because he was the newest addition to the family, which was still odd in and of itself. For the most part though, it was no big deal.

There was one of Lance’s aunts that were there though that was starting to really unsettle him. She was staring at him with this incredibly odd look, her eyes always following him in the room. She never said anything, never even introduced himself. She just watched.

Lance’s extended family consisted of so many different kinds of people. There was a frat-boy Alpha who had been so polite and respectful. A Beta girl who seemed super shy and spoke in very low tones. An Omega girl that was all sweetness and smiles. Seriously, there were some amazing people there, and he hadn’t run into anyone that he would say was the ‘bad seed’ of the family. Not in this group.

That was probably another reason why the woman that kept watching him unnerved him so much. He was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

It didn’t happen during lunch or the afternoon, so as the winds and rain picked up a little bit outside and everyone started chipping in for supper, Keith honestly forgot about her.

He had been included almost immediately in the preparations for feeding the small army of people that were there. Not because he was an Omega, but rather, because he wouldn’t burn down the kitchen.

Besides, he wasn’t doing anything complex, just helping make a salad and moving it into the long table in the living room that would act as a buffet of sorts.

Keith was heading back to the kitchen when the woman stepped in front of him. He instantly tensed as she looked around almost nervously before her intense, dark eyes met his. She didn’t seem malicious or anything though, she seemed almost worried.

“You don’t have to act happy if you’re not,” she insisted, grabbing his hands and squeezing them tightly. “My brother, told me what happened. You’re safe here.”

Confusion rushed through him as she squeezed his hands again almost painfully. It took him a moment to realize that this was very likely Lance’s aunt on his mother’s side, and that made his stomach swoop with nausea. “What did he tell you?”

She looked like she was about to cry. “That Lance bit you only hours after meeting you. That your family is back in Nevada. They’re so far away. Alphas can be horrid. So, so horrid. I didn’t think someone in my family could be that way. Not after what happened to my baby.”

Keith stared at her with wide eyes as it clicked. This was the aunt whose son was forced to bond with an Alpha against his will. He could tell that she was a Beta, and that was probably her only child. Even if it wouldn’t have been, that would still be devastating for anyone.

Jesus, he didn’t want to trigger this woman or anything. He wasn’t exactly the sensitive type, but he needed to be careful. “Oh. No ma’am. It wasn’t like that.” He saw Veronica out of the corner of his eyes stopping in the doorframe down the hall and staring at them with alarm before vanishing again.

Her nails were actually biting into his skin, and he was sure that she was drawing blood. “Lance was always so sweet. I never expected this. It’s alright. You don’t need to defend him. I know you think you have to, but you don’t.”

“She didn’t,” Keith assured her quickly. “We both agreed, and he’s been nothing but amazing.”
“That’s how they lure you in, sweetheart. They snag you, and then they act sweet to draw you in until it’s too late.”

Okay, this was actually started to hurt now. Keith pulled his hands back, grimacing as her nails left long welts on his skin. A split second later, he was tugged back Lance’s familiar, comforting scent wrapping around him.

“Jesus,” Lance whispered, taking his hand into his own to look at the welts. He looked towards his aunt with narrowed eyes. “What do you think you’re doing, Ella?” Lance was always respectful towards his family members, so the fact that he dropped the ‘tia’ before her name showed just how angry he actually was. That, and he smelled ready to throw down.

That was definitely a bad thing, because it instantly set Ella off.

“You awful, awful man,” Ella snarled at him, clearly ready to fight. “I expected more from you.”

“Mamá is being an asshole and won’t listen to the whole story, so there’s no way in hell that you know it,” Lance snarled at her.

“Just like an abusive, manipulative Alpha to say!” Her voice rose up. “You all twist things around to make everyone else look like they’re in the wrong.” She got right up into Lance’s space. “I can’t believe you!”

“He didn’t do anything wrong!” Keith snapped at her.

“You’re just an Omega brainwashed by a knot like all the others!”

Oh fuck no. The most they had done since they mated was making out, and more recently, getting a little handsy with one another. That wasn’t even the point though. He was so sick of everyone assuming things about him and then claiming to be so open-minded.

He was well aware that a lot of Lance’s family was listening from either end of the hall. A small part of his mind really hoped that they were going to get the kids out of hearing range, because he was not going to take this laying down.

“Fuck off!” Lance spat at her before he could say anything. “What happened to Elian was horrible, but you don’t get to attack Keith or me since you don’t know what happened? What’s wrong with this family? You’re all just assuming shit and not listening to us!”

Keith saw the twitch of her hand, and acted before he could stop himself, pulling the Alpha backwards so quickly that he honestly didn’t remember moving. The next thing he knew, a loud smack almost echoed in the hall, there was an explosion of pain on his scarred cheek as an open palm hit him so hard that he stumbled, and then there was a lot of noise.

Lance was yelling at his Tia Ella, Luis and Veronica both holding him back since he looked like he wanted to pounce on her.

Warm hands gently rested on his arm, and he flinched, looking over to see Lance’s Papá staring at him with worry. “Let me see, Keith.”

“It’s okay,” he said quickly, even though his face stung horribly. His indigo eyes snapped back towards Ella, and he suddenly felt the urge to strike her back because she had been aiming to hit Lance. Lance, who had been nothing but super supportive, sweet, and kind, even if at times he annoyed Keith to the ends of the Earth. Lance, who didn’t deserved those Alpha stereotypes she was trying to push on him.
“Let’s get you some ice,” Lance’s Papá said, gently placing a hand between his shoulders and guiding him away, probably able to smell the growing aggression on him. Yeah, it probably was better to get him away from there, because unlike Lance, he actually was armed (and dangerous).

She sat him at the table, but before she could go and fetch some ice, a still-frozen bag of peas appeared in front of him. Keith blinked, following the hand that was holding them out up to the face of Lance’s Mamá.

A bolt of resentment rushed through him, but he took the offered peas and pressed them against his cheek, hissing a bit, but not pulling them away.

“My sister got you good,” the man noted, dark eyes looking at the welt on his wrists and what was probably a reddening mark on his face.

“Are you all this close-minded and ignorant, or is it just because I’m special?” Keith spat at him bitterly. He was so overly done with everything. “Lance loves all of you, but you won’t listen. You just assume things – just like all those people that think Omegas are weak.” He took a deep breath, not realizing that the chaos in the hall had quieted. “Do you know what it’s like having an Alpha try to force you to bond to them? I do. Twice. The first time, he raped me and the only thing that saved me was my collar. The second time, he was going to, but I saved myself from him, and then Lance saved me from his mother. So no, the situation with Lance and me isn’t the fucking same and if anyone with half a brain would just shut up and listen, they’d see that!”

Keith wanted to get up and fight. He was so pissed off right now, so willing to attack anything and everything.

“My baby did nothing wrong!” Ella suddenly yelled, startling all of them. “There was no warning! None!” Why did someone bring her there? Keith looked up to see someone else pulling the hysterical woman away. If he was calmer, Keith probably would have felt a pang of sympathy for her, because she was clearly not okay and needed help, but now he just wanted her to shut up. Was it acceptable to shove an entire bag of peas down her throat? “You though? You have two after you and escape, then mate with a willing stranger? Why did a slut like you who deserves it get away when my son couldn’t?” Her eyes teared up as she was pulled away, but he could still hear her cries down the hall. “I want my baby back. It’s not fair! I haven’t seen him or his children!”

A tense silence fell over the air, broken only by Lance stumbling into the room and making a beeline for Keith. He leaned down in front of him, looking at his face with worried eyes.

“I’m okay,” Keith muttered. “Just a little slap. She doesn’t have much arm muscle.”

Lance snorted at that, but he didn’t look very happy about the situation. Keith’s eyes flitted, looking towards Lance’s mother, who was regarding them curiously instead of with pure hostility.

Now that things had settled though, his wrists were burning, as was his cheek. He could feel eyes boring into him, and it was making his breath hitch and his heart beat so rapidly that he could hear it.

Keith stood abruptly, the bag of peas falling to the table. Lance immediately took a step back from him, allowing him to pass without trying to stop him, something that he really appreciated.

His hand went to the phone in his pocket, squeezing it tightly. He wanted to get away from everyone so that they couldn’t overhear him, but with so many people in one place, it was like the walls had ears.

His eyes flickered to the window. Though not hurricane weather by any means, it was still rainy and
windy. Despite that, he still went for his boots, and took off out the door without any hesitation.

The rain instantly plastered his hair to his head, the wind forcing his wet bangs into his eyes. In the whole two seconds it took to get to the car, he was already cold and wet, but he didn’t care. He was safe and most importantly, alone in the car.

He brought up a number on his phone, pressing the call button, and waited.

“Keith?”

Warmth rushed through him at the sound of a voice he hadn’t heard in quite a while, even if they had texted. “Hey Acxa.” He didn’t want to burden his mother or Shiro with this, but Acxa was his twin sister. She had been with him through every low in his life.

“What’s wrong?” Straight to the point, just like she always was. It was something she had in common with Krolia.

“Just... a lot of family drama,” Keith admitted. He blinked his eyes rapidly, trying not to break down, because this was what he expected, wasn’t it? He came here expecting people to dislike him, and it was just a bonus that quite a few people did.

The difference was, of course, that the people that seemed to dislike him were almost vicious about it.

“Do I need to shank someone?”

He snorted. “No, I could do that.”

“Then you’d have plausible deniability.”

A laugh escaped his lips, though it did make his face sting a bit. Despite everything that Acxa had done in regards to Lotor, he realized that he really did miss his sister.

“Tell me about what’s going on,” she suggested, and he could hear her doing something in the background.

“Sure you got time? Not going to do anything with Ezor? It’s a long story.”

She paused, and then said, “I’ve got loads of time.”

There was something odd about her voice, but Keith didn’t push it. She would come around and talk about whatever was bothering her in her own time.

And so Keith vented to his sister. He vented about Rachel and Marco. He vented about Lance’s mother. He vented about Lance’s crazy aunt Ella, even if he understood where her trauma was coming from.

He could actually feel himself spiralling, and knew that he should be talking to Lance about this, but he really wanted someone who was a little more outside of the situation (but would also be on his side).

For the first time, a part of him was truly wanting to go back home.

A knock at the window startled Keith out of his thoughts. He had hung up with Acxa a while ago,
but he couldn’t find it in himself to get up and go inside. A part of him felt so defeated. Even after
talking to his sister, he didn’t know what to do about his situation.

A part of him was frustrated, because everyone needed to chill out and stop being so dramatic.

He looked up at the driver’s side window, pure shock rushing through him when he saw Lance’s
mother standing outside of the car in his jacket. Keith blinked, and then unlocked the door, figuring
that leaving the man in the rain would just be a dick move, and despite what people thought, he
wasn’t a dick (most of the time).

“It’s getting cold out here;” the man said as he climbed inside and closed the door behind him.

Keith didn’t answer, staring at the other Omega with a suspicious expression. His hand twitched a
little towards the door handle, ready to spring if he had to.

“Tell me what happened in Vegas,” Lance’s mother said, his dark eyes almost boring into Keith’s.
“Everything that you can remember, from your point of view. I’ll only interrupt to get some
clarification if I’m confused.”

He was more than a little stunned. Keith’s mouth opened and closed wordlessly, before he realized
this was his chance. He could explain everything and hopefully clear the air and get rid of any
confusion. Knowing that it could blow up in his face, Keith launched into the story – starting with
the exact type of creep that Lotor was and mentioning that he had hurt Keith’s sister-in-law before
she had that title or Keith was on his radar.

In a way, Keith felt incredibly detached as he told the story, and that was probably how he was able
to get through the whole thing. The parts about meeting Lance and retracing their steps were fine, but
he started to get choked up a bit when he spoke about his brother being drugged, about how he had
left safety behind to help his sister.

Yes, Keith knew that a lot of this was classified, but honestly, he didn’t care at the moment. If
anyone came back at him for that, he’d simply play the naïve Omega card. Sadly, most people would
believe that.

He wasn’t sure how long that they sat there and he rambled on, but eventually, he got to the end of
the story.

Silence took over the car for a moment, until Lance’s mother said, “Thank you for telling me all of
that. It couldn’t have been easy.”

“What made you decide to listen?” Keith knew he shouldn’t be pushing his luck, but he really
wanted to know. Was getting in between Lance and a crazy woman all it took?

“Lance told us, and I want to hear all sides of the story.”

Ah. That made sense. Keith nodded slowly. “He probably underplayed all his moments.” It wasn’t a
question, he knew Lance well enough by now to know that’s exactly what he would have done.

“That he did.” The man paused in thought, and Keith didn’t interrupt, knowing that sometimes it was
important to figure out exactly what you wanted to say before saying it (he always kind of sucked at
that). “He was always the most sheltered of his siblings. When he was young, he was so sure that he
was in love with the girl he dated. He was devastated when they broke up and then he became a bit
of a flirt after that, until Nyma. She not only broke his heart, but shredded his confidence, his self-
worth. Lance loves with all his heart, and that makes him vulnerable.”
Lance’s mother held up his hand. “And I’m getting the impression that you’re very similar.” He looked back to the house. “Perhaps I’ve just been too reluctant to let my last child go.” Silence overtook them again, before the other Omega reached out to open the door. “Don’t wait out here too long.”

Keith watched him go, not entirely sure what to make of the exchange. He couldn’t help but feel a little bit of hope that maybe they could put all of this nonsense behind them.

“I swear, you’re more dramatic than I am at times,” Lance said as he tossed a towel over Keith’s head. “Going out into the rain? Completely dramatic.” He felt fidgety and finicky, and knew that his mate had to just be humouring him at this stage of the game.

Keith had very willingly let him fuss a bit over him, and Lance really did appreciate that, because it gave him something to do with his hands to stop him from becoming overwhelmed.

Why did everything involving his family have to end in disaster? This was exactly why they couldn’t have nice things (and in Lance’s opinion, Keith was, in fact, the nicest of things).

“At least they finally listened, right?” Keith reminded him.

That they had. At first, Lance was glad that Keith wasn’t there to hear the story again. It was traumatic in general, but he knew for a fact that Keith startled awake from nightmares far more often than he himself did. Then he found out that his mother had gone and asked Keith to recount the story anyway. He had been livid until Keith calmed him down and assured him that it was okay.

He still took time to make sure that the welts on the Omega’s arms were clean, that he had been well fed, and was completely comfortable and ready for bed.

Of course, that had also involved going back out into the rain to collect more of the specific blankets Keith brought with them – hence the wet hair again (“Would it kill you to wear a hood?”).

Still, the smell of content, relaxed Omega – his mate specifically – was one that Lance would never end up being accustomed too. It was honestly one of the best things in the world.

“Come here,” Keith grumbled quietly, holding out his arms. Lance stopped pacing around their room like a crazy person, allowing himself to sink down into the other man’s arms. He made himself comfortable as Keith ran his hand up and down his back soothingly. It basically turned him into a malleable mold of jelly.

“They listened,” Keith repeated. “Trust me, just listening to someone else is a big thing.”

Lance shifted a bit, gently running his fingers against the welts on his wrist. “You know, you’re not the first person Ella has done something like this too. I know she needs help but…” Nothing he said really mattered to anyone that could do something.

“She lost her child,” the Omega said. “That can’t be any kind of easy, though she did make it all about herself, didn’t she?” Lance doubted Keith would ever say something like that in front of the rest of the family. Not that he could blame him. He agreed with it, but he wasn’t going to say that in front of anyone else either.

“Hopefully we won’t have to be here long,” Lance replied. “But until we can go home, I’ve got your
back, you know that, right?” He thought about something that they talked about back when Keith first met his parents. “We said we were going to prove them wrong, didn’t we? It’s a good time to do that.”

“It is,” Keith agreed. “I wouldn’t mind exploring this house a little more too. Pretty sure it’s haunted.”

“Don’t say that!” He shuddered. “I don’t want to think about ghosts watching us cuddle! God, when we get a house, I don’t want it to be this old or big.”

“Agreed,” Keith said quickly, holding him close.

"It's going to have a big yard! And a pool some day! And a swing set! You cool with a swing set?" Lance looked towards him curiously, excitement welding up in him.

The Omega smiled warmly at that. "I'm cool with a swing set."

So maybe there were more adventurous and exciting things to do than lay around and build an imaginary dream home with one another, but to Lance, it was honestly one of the best things in the world.

Chapter End Notes

I hate S8. That's all I'm saying about it.

So who remembered the story about Lance's cousin that he told Keith in Vegas? No?
No one?

Good news and bad news. Good news: I'm going to continue this story. Bad news: I'm going to be continuing this story much, much slower. I'm actually really struggling with the chapter of this I'm currently writing, and I'm also taking on another...very big project. I can't guarantee an update schedule for THIS story due to that, but it IS going to be finished.
Keith wasn’t quite sure what to expect when they got back home once it was deemed safe by the authorities. He’d never experienced anything like the hurricane that hit, never had to abandon his home.

Living in an apartment building apparently gave them the benefit of having absolutely no damage done to anything they personally owned. The rest of the McClain family seemed to get through scot-free as well. They were lucky.

Not everyone was though. There were plenty of neighbourhoods without power, plenty of places with flooding and ruined homes.

Things didn’t go quite so well at the aquarium, apparently. Keith didn’t know what that actually meant. What he did know is that Lance left incredibly early to help, even though he had planned to focus more on his thesis. From what Keith understood, everything went hand-in-hand anyway.

It was still weird to wake up and have Lance already gone, their normal home-routines thrown off entirely. Especially since it meant that he couldn’t exactly go anywhere on his own. It didn’t help that, when Lance came back, he was cranky and exhausted.

This had quickly become their new norm over the week, and Keith didn’t like it at all.

His saving grace came from Lisa. Keith had no idea how she got his phone number, but he was more than a little thankful that she managed to find it.

With so many homes that were without power, Luis and Lisa decided that they were going to provide breakfast for the people who needed them. They were still a business, of course, so they had their normal menu for sale at lunch and supper, but breakfast was a free donation to the community.

“We could use a few more hands,” Lisa admitted to him over the phone. “We’re paying our employees, but there are so many people that need a helping hand right now that we’re struggling a bit.”

That was how Keith ended up hitching a ride from his sister-in-law down to her diner early in the morning to help her, Luis, their employees, and a few other volunteers start prepping the lunches for the day.

Time and time again, Keith professed his love for breakfast food, but honestly, he was getting sick of the scent of scrambled eggs. Never before in his life had he been around so much of it before. Sure, he wasn’t cooking it, but he still had to smell it when he was helping to make the to-go boxes, and when he was helping clean later on.

“How are you dealing with this?” Keith asked Lisa, wondering how she could stand to be around so much grease with the heightened sense of smell that came with being pregnant.

“Honestly?” she asked as she packed another box with eggs. “I actually really, really like the smell of all this right now.” She paused in thought before an embarrassed smile slid across her face. “I got Luis to get me ice cream and bacon last night.”
Keith snorted at that. “You know, I was talking to Allura, my sister-in-law in Nevada, and she said something about fried beans and caramel sauce. Actually, now that I think about it, you and her are probably due pretty close to the same time.”

“So you’re going to be an uncle twice-over at the same time, that’s fun,” she noted. “Maybe I can swap recipes with her, since that actually sounds great.”

His face scrunched up in disgust. He wasn’t one to truly judge what someone ate when they were pregnant, because he couldn’t help it, but he couldn’t help it. Fried beans and caramel sauce? Gross.

“You just wait until it’s your turn,” Lisa said, the corner of his eyes scrunching as she smiled. “I bet you’ll have Lance running all over for the weirdest things.”

He thought about that briefly, a smile flitting across his lips. “I’m going to purposely tell him I want things like squirrel or lizard.” The look on Lisa’s face made him snicker. He and Lance had really weird inside jokes that he wasn’t even going to try to explain.

Honestly, going to help out left Keith feeling good, despite the fact that he didn’t have access to the car to go whenever or wherever he wanted. He didn’t feel nearly so listless, and it was nice seeing the way people would light up for some food.

His favourite was the old man that lived in the alley way across from them. He was such a nice old man, though he had a very hard time walking now (and got screwed over with no benefits), so they usually ran the food over to him. Two days in a row, he stopped Keith to tell him a story about his past. He was a veteran, and it broke Keith’s heart that he was on the street. Mr. Thomas was a hell of a lot more optimistic than him about it though, telling him that it wasn’t so bad and there were some kind people out there.

Keith didn’t know he’d have the strength to think like that.

Then again, people also wouldn’t just ‘leave’ an Omega, bonded or not, on the street. The thought made him shutter. Just because the FBI had bagged a huge figure in the Omega-trading ring didn’t mean that they had everyone by a long shot.

That was why he was still a bit cautious when he grabbed bus and subway maps. He wanted another way to get around if Lance was going to keep taking the car in the morning, but he also knew that it could be dangerous for him to wander around.

Keith could defend himself, and he could be impulsive at the best of times (there was no need to deny that), but he wasn’t stupid. He wasn’t going to purposely put himself in danger for no reason, thanks.

He left the maps out on the coffee table at home and went about to make some kind of food for supper, even if he’d likely end up eating alone again.

Pidge had lent him her old drawing tablet (that she claimed to never use). It didn’t work 100%, and he’d like to get a new one, but hopefully he could afford one later on. Pidge was really helping him out with advertising what he could do online, and he was more than a little stunned that several people actually wanted things drawn by him.

Keith was hunched over his desk when he heard the door slam open. By the time he shuffled out of his room, Lance was already sitting on the couch with his head in his hands.

“Lance?” He sunk down beside him, placing a hand on his back to rub up and down. Normally, he’d wait to touch someone who was clearly in a terrible mood, but he knew Lance thrived on touch and
would be fine with it.

The Alpha huffed, his angry, disappointed, exhausting scent making the air around them heavy. It was a repellent scent that made Keith’s stomach twist horribly.

God, he really, really hoped that this stress wasn’t going to send Lance into a rut. If Keith was honest, the idea of facing down an Alpha in a rut, even if it was Lance whom he knew would never hurt him, made him uncomfortable. He’d only ever had to deal with an Alpha in a rut once (his sister didn’t count, since he usually just scented a scarf or something for her to wear to calm her the hell down before she bonded with Ezor), and that situation had been literally traumatizing.

He wasn’t sure he would be able to handle Lance going into a rut right now. Just the thought made him feel a bit sick. They hadn’t even actually had sex since they bonded two months ago.

Keith wasn’t a religious person by any means, but he thanked everything out there that Lance didn’t go in that direction. If he was this stressed and Keith was in heat or pre-heat, he probably would have, but instead, he simply sighed and asked, “Do you ever get the feeling that everything you’ve worked for has been for nothing?”

The Omega blinked at that, tilting his head slightly. He didn’t exactly know what to make of that. He had worked hard to keep Lotor and other unwanted Alphas away, he worked hard on making himself strong, but it wasn’t like he even had the option to go to school outside of a few select things that he had no interest in (everyone was fine with Omega preschool or kindergarten teachers, or secretaries or receptionists – and Omegas were sometimes allowed to study what their Alpha partner did to a lesser extent if it was to help said partner, but paths were really limited). None of that interested Keith at all, so he had no real way to relate to Lance. Instead, he rubbed his back. “What happened?”

“One of our blacktip reef sharks – Bitsy – is really, really sick. She was one of the ones that I was working with a lot for my thesis since I can’t get the funding to go out on my own expedition yet and I just…if she dies because some idiots didn’t take proper care of her and the others, then I’m going to be set back months. I started doing research before I started working there.” He flopped back. “I might as well start over.”

Oh jeez. Keith had no idea that this was the kind of thing Lance had been dealing with at work. From what he remembered to, his thesis advisor wasn’t exactly the most patient person in the world, so getting set back like that could cost him. “Hey, you’re doing everything in your power to help her get better, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then I’m sure she’ll be okay.” Keith leaned forward, brushing his neck against Lance to scent him a bit, carefully brushing his wrist over his scent gland. Though not talked about often, there were minor scent glands in the wrists that could be used for scenting as well, but it wasn’t nearly as effective as the ones surrounding the neck. “You’ll take care of her, and I bet you’ll learn loads more about her as you do.”

Lance sighed, carefully taking a hold of Keith’s arm and pressing his lips against the inside of his wrist against the gland. “Sorry. For not being here. For taking the car. For being cranky.”

“I get it,” Keith assured him. He was frustrated, but he truly did get it. No one, not even Lance, could be happy all the time. “Come on, I made food. I already ate, but we can cuddle and watch that awful cop show you like.”
“Hey, that show is golden.”

It kind of bothered Keith that Lance didn’t ask about his day, or how he had been spending the last few days, he didn’t let that show. He wanted to spend time with his mate, and didn’t want to spoil that by dampening the mood, not when it seemed like he just got his first genuine smile from the Alpha since they got home.

…

“Hello again,” Mr. Thomas spoke up as Keith came over to him. “What did I do to keep getting your company all week?” His voice was deep and raspy, brown eyes shining with kindness.

“Just by being you,” Keith replied easily. He liked the old man, and because he wasn’t technically working at the diner, he could spend some time with him. He handed him the box of food and the plastic fork and knife.

“You’re such a nice young man,” Mr. Thomas said as he looked at the food. It was nothing special, but he always stared at it as if it was the best thing that he had ever seen. “That mate of yours is lucky to have you.”

“Hmm,” Keith hummed, thinking of the way Lance’s bad mood had returned the previous night. It was like the universe couldn’t let his Alpha rest and have two good days in a row and that was starting to weigh down on him. No one wanted to deal with someone cranky all of the time, and no Omega wanted to be surrounded by a cranky Alpha’s scent so constantly.

“Uh oh,” Mr. Thomas said. “What did he do?”

“He’s cranky, stressed, and busy,” Keith replied with a sigh and a shake of his head. “That’s all.”

“That’s no excuse to treat your mate poorly,” the man said with a sigh as he set his box down for a moment. “I had a mate once too.” His eyes got that far away look that they did the second day Keith stopped to talk to him, the one that told him he was likely remembering something from a long time ago.

Keith opened his mouth to respond when, out of nowhere, some other man actually picked up the box of food.

“What the fuck?” Keith moved from where he had been sitting with Mr. Thomas, immediately grabbing the box back. “What the fuck’s your problem? You can get your own across the street. It’s free until 11:30!”

“But I want that one.” The man swayed, and Keith realized that he was actually drunk and it wasn’t even 10:00am yet!

“But I want that one.” The man swayed, and Keith realized that he was actually drunk and it wasn’t even 10:00am yet!

“You know what, don’t even bothering going there, asshole.” He turned to hand the box back to Mr. Thomas, half tempted to get him a new one, but he knew that the man wouldn’t accept it and would consider it a waste of food.

“Pretty Omegas like you need to shut up and learn their place!” Keith’s body tensed up and he turned around to face the drunk man. His entire body tensed when he realized that the man had a knife in his hand. He took a step towards him. “And old fuckers like this bum deserve it. Could have worked but didn’t.”

Keith bristled. He was going to fight this asshole, fingers twitching to where his own knife lay. He
didn’t want Mr. Thomas to get caught up in this though. “You have two perfectly fine legs, so use them and keep going.”

The next thing he knew, he was staring at the back of a green shirt as Luis seemed to appear out of nowhere. The tall Alpha glared down at the smaller man, his voice deep as he said, “Walk away.”

“That your bitch?” the drunk man demanded. Keith couldn’t tell if he was an Alpha or a Beta, but the lack of a scent when he was so aggressive kind of gave the impression of a Beta. “Keep it on a leash.”

“Walk away,” Luis repeated darkly. “If you don’t move your drunk ass, I’m calling the police.”

The man growled before stumbling away. Keith could feel his heart pounding in his chest, the urge to fight prickling under his skin.

Luis didn’t say anything outside of making sure that Mr. Thomas was okay, but his unhappy, slightly paranoid stink was really bothering Keith. It was one thing when Lance, his Alpha, smelled like that, but it was another when a different one did.

“Are you okay?” Luis finally asked when they were back inside the diner.

“Yeah.” It wasn’t a lie. Honestly, Keith was more pissed at the audacity of that drunk idiot than anything else. “Thanks, by the way.” He could have handled himself, but Luis stepped in, and he wasn’t going to be ungrateful.

The Alpha stared at him oddly. “He just pulled a knife on you.”

They were close enough to the counter for Lisa to hear. The other Omega looked horrified. “That guy did what?”

“It’s fine,” Keith assured her, but then stopped. “Well, no. The fact that he took someone else’s food off the street while stumbling around drunk before noon on a weekday is ridiculous. Me though, I’m good.” He couldn’t help but internally fume about that. What the hell was wrong with people?

He was so distracted that he didn’t notice them exchanging a look with one another.

…

Keith bit his lip as he carefully worked the metal of the spatula underneath the beef patty that was sizzling on the stove top grill, so focused on the task at hand that he didn’t hear the jingle of keys or the scraping of the lock behind opened.

So when the door slammed against the wall as it was flung open, he jumped, accidentally flipping the burger into the air, and watching it fly, almost in slow motion, into the dirty water in the kitchen sink.

“Oh.” He stared at the submerged hamburger mournfully. He was about to turn to the source of the chaos, but froze as a disgustingly bitter smell reached him. It made him shudder a bit, because he couldn’t remember the last time the normally warm, comforting nutmeg smell was quite like this.

“Are you okay?” Lance demanded, suddenly in Keith’s space. The Omega took a startled step back, staring at his tired, yet almost wild eyes.

“Yeah?” Keith motioned towards the grill. “The burger went into the sink. It didn’t burn me.” He knew that grease burns could be very painful, little bits of it were still flinging up from time to time thanks to the heat. He really needed to flip that other burger before it burned. He could still savage
supper, there just wouldn't be as many burgers. That was okay though. He’d make something else to go with it.

“The burger?” Lance asked, staring at him as if he was the single stupidest thing that he had ever seen in his life.

Keith didn’t like that look at all, and realized that they weren’t on the same page at all. “Yeah?”

Lance bristled with anger, and Keith was sure that if he had fur, it would be standing up on his neck. He set the spatula down, once again taking a step away from him as the Alpha started to rage. “I don’t care about the burgers! I’m talking about the douche that pulled a knife from you!”

Keith froze, eyes going wide. “How do you know about that?” Wait, that was a really stupid question. “Luis told you.”

“Of course he told me! Someone threatened you!” Lance huffed angrily, running his hands through his hair. “Were you going to tell me?”

He honestly wasn’t quite sure how to answer that. “I…maybe?”

“Maybe?” Lance hissed. “The right answer is ‘yes dear’ or something like that!”

Keith’s eyes narrowed dangerously, brow furrowing into a deep v. “Want me to wear a poodle skirt, button-up shirt, and heels too?” He turned away, grabbing the spatula again. “Excuse me, I have to make your dinner, dear.” Was he laying the sarcasm on thick enough? He hoped so.

Behind him, Keith heard Lance groan. “That’s not what I meant! I just—ugh. Look. The worst and best of people come out after hurricanes. You’re not from here, so I get that you wouldn’t know that. People can be a lot more desperate at times like this. It’s probably better for you to not do that for a while.” Lance sighed, sliding his arms around his waist from behind and resting his forehead against the back of Keith’s head. “I’m not sure I could take work and worrying about you right now.”

Keith tensed up at that. He jerked his way out of Lance’s arms and spun around to glare at him with every ounce of annoyance he had. “I fought against people before! I’ve been going there all week! It was one freak incident!”

“You don’t always have to fight though!” Lance cried out. “You shouldn’t have to be ready to duke it out with someone all the time!”

“Stop being a controlling asshat!” Keith said dismissively, turning away from him.

“Could you talk to me?” Lance asked, annoyance creeping into his voice. “Instead of just turning your back on me?”

“I don’t have time for this, Lance.” Keith very purposely didn’t bother looking at him. “You can’t tell me what to do. If I want to go into slums or something, I will!”

“You’re not going back!” Lance snarled at him, his voice dropping deeper than it normally was. “Just…sit down for a bit and listen!”

The spatula dropped out of Keith hands as he immediately stopped what he was doing. He blinked several times, and almost like he was in a daze, he ended up sinking down so that he was sitting on the floor.

He was a good Omega, wasn’t he? He was strong and could keep himself safe, and he was trying to
make food. He hadn’t meant to do something so, so wrong. He blinked his watery eyes, unable to focus on anything as he lulled his head slightly, exposing his neck.

Lance stared down at Keith, completely confused about why he suddenly sat on the floor. He was about to ask, but froze as Keith tilted his head to expose his neck, hazy eyes looking up at him.

“Oh no,” Lance muttered, realizing what he had done. “Oh no. I’m so sorry. Oh no.” He turned off the grill, getting the burgers off of it so that nothing would burn, trying to gather his thoughts together.

When Luis told him what happened to Keith, terror had gone through with him. He hadn’t been spending time with him or anything, not in any good or substantial amount at any rate. He never asked him how his day was, or what he had been doing.

Keith was strong, but Lance promised him a good life where he wouldn’t have to worry about some drunken Beta hurting him, and maybe that made his already stressed mind go a little off the deep end. He didn’t think that it would make him use his Alpha Voice though. He didn’t even think that it would cause Keith to react if it did anyway. Keith had been quite proud of his ability to ignore it from most others.

It was a strange ability that Alphas had – some combination of a certain sound wave with their scents that could make Omegas briefly super submissive to the point where they’d do almost anything commanded of them. For Betas, it more stunned them for a minute than anything else, the impact not nearly as strong. For other Alphas, it just tended to anger them.

Lance had never used it on someone like this before. It made him want to throw up.

“Come on, come here.” He grabbed Keith’s hands, his mate rising up from the floor obediently, and Lance wanted to cry. He carefully guided him to the couch, sitting down beside him.

Lance gently placed his hands on Keith’s cheeks. “Come on, Baby. Come out of it. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do this to you.” He’d never seen Keith like this before, and he didn’t like it at all. Why did some Alphas insist that this was the best state for Omegas to be in? Shit, some even tried to find ways to prolong the effects.

Keith was putty in Lance’s hands at the moment. He’d do absolutely anything Lance requested of him. Anything from just sitting where he was, to letting him have his way with him.

Lance was going to be sick.

“Come on, Baby. I’m so, so sorry.” Not only was he regretful, but he was also worried. Now that he thought about it, the only reason he could think of that Keith so easily succumbed to his Alpha Voice was because he already felt a little frightened or vulnerable.

Keith was a prideful person, and tried to hide his fear more than anything else, especially since he was an Omega and didn’t want to appear weak to people who already underestimated him. Lance came into the house raging, and though he had asked if Keith was okay, it was really his own fear and worry he’d been focused on.

What had he done?

Relief rushed through him as Keith blinked several times, his eyes slowly dilating normally again as he focused on Lance’s face. He stared at him for a moment before his eyes widened and he jerked back.
Lance didn’t try to stop him. “Keith?”

“Don’t touch me!” Keith’s voice rose higher than it normally was. It wasn’t quite an Omega Shrill, that was painful and would have made Lance useless for a few minutes. It was definitely extremely distressed, Keith’s naturally deeper voice cracking a bit from the pitch change.

Lance didn’t try to stop him as Keith hastily made his retreat down the hall, his door slamming shut behind him.

It was normally hard to detect one’s scent, but Lance still managed to catch a whiff of his own, and god, he smelled horrible. Along with whatever distress Keith was clearly trying to bury deep within himself, that scent was probably enough to send Keith spiralling.

Just because he was tired, cranky, worried, and so much more didn’t mean that Lance had the right to do that. Didn’t mean that he had the right to just show up and start screaming. God, wasn’t that what he was pissed as his family for basically doing?

They’d been working so hard on their relationship, and it had been going so well before this past week. Even the rest of his family was starting to come around.

He wasn’t going to let this ruin it. Ruin them. He refused.

Lance eyed the hallway and the door to Keith’s room. He thought about going after him to apologize, but decided not to. He was going to apologize, but he’d let the Omega have his space.

Besides, he desperately needed a shower. Maybe he’d grab a couple of the suppressant strips to slap on, because he’d need to air the house out of his stench too.

He was going to fix this if it was the last thing he ever did.

…

Waking up with a headache was an awful thing. Keith had never actually drunk enough to get a hangover in the past. The closest he had ever come was the night he ended up bonding with Lance, and that was because Lotor had spiked his drink with some pretty powerful drugs as opposed to anything he (or Lance), had done.

That was kind of similar to how Keith woke up that morning, though there were no drugs involved. His head was throbbing, and it took him a minute to remember exactly why.

He huffed and pulled his blankets up tighter around him. A part of him wanted to get something with Lance’s scent to surround himself with, but at the same time, he didn’t want the Alphas scent anywhere near him, not after yesterday.

A part of him knew that Lance hadn’t done it on purpose. Well, he meant to tell him to stay home, but he didn’t mean to use his Alpha Voice on him.

It oddly felt like a betrayal.

Maybe he was being dramatic though. It wasn’t like Lance had done something awful to him. In fact, upon realizing what happened, Lance immediately tried to make him comfortable and tried to draw him out of the headspace he ended up in. A lesser man might have taken advantage of the situation, but not Lance. Not his Alpha, who was truly good at his core.
Keith hugged himself tightly. Maybe this didn’t so much have to do with Lance, but with him. He felt so weak for succumbing to Lance’s voice. He felt weak for actually feeling a spike of fear at the thought of that drunk Alpha pulling a knife on him.

Rolling over again, Keith grabbed his phone, shaking fingers scrolling through the numbers until he found the one that he was looking for. It used to be at the top of his list, but Lance, Pidge, Shiro, and Allura had bypassed it.

“Hi mom,” Keith greeted her after she answered the phone. Good god, was that his voice? He sounded awful, like he had been crying or something, but he definitely hadn’t.

Almost immediately, Krolia picked up on something being wrong. “What’s wrong?”

At first, Keith thought of denying anything being wrong, but realized that was just stupid and he needed to stop being a complete drama queen. He called his mother for a reason, and it wasn’t to pretend that nothing was wrong and play guessing games. “I had a fight with Lance. A bad one.”

“Did he hurt you?” Her words were so quick and sharp that it almost felt like something was physically striking him.

“No, of course not.” Lance would never hurt him, Keith knew that for a fact. “I—mom…did Dad ever use his Alpha voice on you? By accident?”

There was a heavy silence, and for a moment, he wondered if she had hung up on him. Talking about his father could be hit or miss. “Yes,” she finally said. “He did. I almost got hurt when I was trying to find out some information. I was furious with him for doing that. He learned to control his worry and frustration over time so that wouldn’t accidentally happen.”

Jesus, he was a lot like his mother, wasn’t he? “I was volunteering to help hand out food at Lance’s brother’s diner and there’s this old man with bad legs whose homeless. Some drunk ass tried to steal his food and I got in his face. He pulled a knife on me. I was fine, he didn’t do anything, but Lance’s brother told Lance, and he’s been stressed as shit at work and flipped out.” He looked down. “I…I don’t remember ever reacting like that to an Alpha before. Not as much. It was like…being in a completely different headspace. I would have done anything Lance asked me to do.”

“It’s scary.” He could picture her nodding her head. “Your mated partner can have so much more sway over you than any other Alpha. That’s why it’s so important to establish trust with your mate. Odds are, it will happen more than once. One thing your father and I did was that I would get him to use his voice like that from time to time – because an Alpha can do it without the anger. This way, I got used to it in a safe environment with my permission, so it wasn’t as shocking if it happened. It did a couple times after that, but it wasn’t as bad as the first time.”

That certainly was an idea. A safe environment where he could experience what it was like to be in that headspace with permission.

“You’ve always been good at shrugging an Alpha Voice off. Is this the first time that he’s used it?”

“On me? Yes.”

“Let me guess. He’s in a bad mood? Stressed and everything?”

“Yeah.” Keith sighed and shifted on the bed. “I guess it’s been building up all week.”

His mother hummed in agreement. “I doubt it’s just that. I’d say your stress levels were high as well.”
Keith bit his lip as he thought about it. As the reality of the situation came back to him. He squeezed his eyes shut as his mind went back to seeing that knife in front of him. Instead of that Alpha, whose face didn’t stick in his mind, he saw slicked, platinum blonde hair, and dull navy eyes staring at him as a knife pressed against his cheek.

“…I shouldn’t be bothered that some drunk Beta pulled a knife on me. I had my own. I could have fought.” Oh god, his voice was doing that horrible, shaky thing again, wasn’t it?

“That’s true,” Krolia agreed. “You could have handled yourself in a worst-case scenario. But the thing is, you shouldn’t have to always be ready for the worst case scenario. You’re allowed to feel comfortable and safe. You’re allowed to feel shaken when you’re not.”

“But I fought Lotor!” Keith burst out, sitting up and twisting his fingers into his sheets. “And it was nothing compared to what he did to me!” He knew that his mother knew that he wasn’t referring to Lotor when he talked about him. As horrible as what Lotor had done to him was – kidnapping, drugging him, tying him up, cutting his face, and planning to rape him – it wasn’t the same as what that other Alpha had done to him.

“Sweetheart,” his mother’s voice was oddly soft and tender, “why compare them? You’re allowed to feel different kinds of hurt.”

Keith let out a shuttering breath, closing his eyes for a moment. “So, I should just forgive Lance? I mean, I know it was a mistake. And he tried to get me out of his as soon as he realized what he did.”

“Of course not.” His mother’s dismissal actually surprised him. She seemed to realize this, quickly correcting herself. “Well, yes, of course you should. But let him work for it a bit. Don’t torture him, or string him along, meet him half way, but don’t just completely forgive. He needs to learn control too.”

A small smile appeared on his face at that. “I guess that means I should get up.”

His mother pause before asking, “Isn’t it after noon there?”

A quick glance at the clock on his phone answered that. “Yup.”

She laughed at that. “Get up, lazy bones. Get clean, eat something! Relax! Talk to your mate!”

Keith chuckled slightly at her words. “Thanks mom. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

He actually did feel much better after talking to his mother, but a single conversation couldn’t possibly get rid of all the negative feelings he had at the moment. Taking a shower certainly helped as well.

Once he was clean, Keith made his way to the kitchen to find some kind of food. What he found waiting for him made him pause and tilt his head curiously.

A warm flush overtook his cheeks when he picked up the single white rose that was sitting there beside the car keys and a little note.

*I’m sorry. I’ll get a lift home later so don’t worry about that. Food’s in microwave. I hope you enjoy your day.*

<3 Lance
Keith had absolutely no idea where Lance would have found a rose before he went into work. He also had no idea why a single flower more than anything else was turning him into pure mush. No one had ever bought him flowers before. It really wasn’t something done during courting, because people wanted their scents to linger on courting gifts, and the natural scents of flowers took away from that.

Maybe that was the point. He wondered if there was something specific about this colour that meant something. Even if it didn’t, that didn’t matter. It still made his heart leap.

Lance had wrapped up breakfast for him in tinfoil, which he removed before heating it up. Sure, maybe the sausage and eggs didn’t taste as good as they would have been when they were freshly cooked, but it was the thought that counted.

It left Keith feeling oddly giddy. He took the little note and the flower back to his room, staring at them both happily. What a ridiculous Alpha. Keith loved him to pieces.

That was certainly a thought, wasn’t it? Keith didn’t think he was quite ready to say those words yet, but the feeling was definitely there.

Keith decided to take advantage of having the car by going down to the gym to get in a workout. He hadn’t been there since before the storm. The dull ache that came with it made him feel even better, and the workout itself left him positively ravenous.

That was why he decided to spin by the diner. He’d already missed helping with the free breakfast, but that was okay. He had his eye on a more personal prize at the moment, and that was snagging one of those amazing pies that Lisa herself made.

Those were never for free, always for sale, and even though it would have been cheaper to just go to a grocery store and get a pie there, he wanted that strawberry one he had eyed every day he came in to help.

He was fully planning on buying the entire pie to take home. He knew Lance liked it too.

Lisa’s face lit up when she saw him. “Keith! I was a bit worried when you didn’t come this morning.”

“I slept in,” he said, not feeling the urge to divulge everything that happened with Lance with her. She may have been his super sweet sister-in-law, but there were some things that were meant to be private.

“That’s what Lance said too. Well, actually, he sent me one saying to let you sleep in unless you got a hold of us.” She raised her eyebrow, clearly expecting Keith to expand on that.

Keith didn’t rise to that, instead, putting in his order for the entire freaking strawberry pie.

“Could I get two pieces in little to-go boxes?” Keith asked her. “I’m going to take one to Mr. Thomas and eat with him.” Because fuck some Alpha that thought that he could be rude, or potentially scare Keith away.

Not Lance. Keith understood that his mate didn’t mean any harm, and yeah, maybe both Lance and his mother were right, that he didn’t always need to be strong and could take it easy, but this was important to Keith.

He didn’t want another person to end up making their way into his nightmares.
Lisa packed the two small boxes first, handing him some plastic forks for Keith to talk across the
street.

Mr. Thomas perked up as he approached. “There you are! I was worried that jerk yesterday scared
you off.”

“My Alpha wasn’t very happy and didn’t want me to come back,” Keith admitted, handing him one
of the boxes of pie. “I hope you like strawberries.”

“But you’re here anyway. Hope he doesn’t get too mad at you,” the man said with a smile. “And I
do like strawberries, thank you.” He motioned towards the ground opposite of him, and Keith sank
down, opening his own box to eat.

“He was just worried about me,” Keith admitted. “He’s a good mate though. He won’t get mad at
me for coming back here. And I needed to, you know?”

“Don’t let that jerk get to you,” Mr. Thomas agreed. “You’re a good boy, and I’d like to meet that
mate of yours too sometime. The world needs more people like that.”

Keith couldn’t help but smile at that.

When he got back over to the diner to pick up the rest of the pie and head home, he was met with
pure and utter chaos of people yelling in the kitchen. Alarm shot through him, and he went over to
the counter. “What’s going on?”

Lisa looked at him with wide eyes. “One of the shelves let go and half the clean dishes broke. Not to
mention there’s grease and food everywhere.” She looked at a stack of to-go boxes. “Plus, Luis was
supposed to bring all of this to Rachel and her employees. She can’t come and get it herself.”

Keith could see Luis through the door, his face red with stress. Sympathy rushed through him, and
he said, “I have the car. I can take Rachel her food.”

Lisa glanced at him with a raised eyebrow. “I couldn’t ask you to do that. It’s Rachel.” Lance’s sister
that didn’t like Keith. Well, she hadn’t been rude to him while they were all staying together,
especially not after Lance actually got the chance to tell his family the entire story of what happened
in Vegas. That didn’t mean that she liked him though.

Luis and Lisa did though, and he liked them too. “It’s no big deal. I’m just dropping it off, right?”

Relief rushed over the other Omega’s face. “If you could, that’d be amazing. Rachel already paid for
it – she buys all her employees lunch from here once a month – so it’d just be dropping it off.”

As Keith carefully packed the boxes into bags that would keep them warm and went to his car, he
couldn’t help but think that it was awfully nice of Rachel to do something like that for her
employees.

He popped the address into his phone, letting his phone tell him the instructions to get to Rachel’s
shop. It took him a moment to remember that she actually owned some kind of Salon. Not exactly
something he’d be interested in, but it did kind of sound like something Lance would like.

Lance didn’t talk about Rachel much, but for some reason, Keith could just picture the two of them
spending time together. Lance had to have gotten his spa day ideas from somewhere.

That’s why it was important to him to maybe reach out to Rachel and Marco. He didn’t want Lance
to feel isolated from any of his siblings, not on his behalf.
Finding parking by Rachel’s salon was not easy at all, and he ended up having to walk a little bit with the giant bag carrying the food. He didn’t care about how silly he looked, because he knew that most people didn’t actually care.

What did make him pause was the man hovering nearby the salon. His shoulders were hunched, and he kept looking at the door, a hood pulled up over his head.

Keith slowed when he saw him, raising an eyebrow as alarm bells went off in his mind. This person was not supposed to be here, and was acting more than suspicious.

A brush of his hair against his face was enough to clue Keith into the fact that he was downwind from this person, who reacted a moment later to his scent as he drew closer to the front doors. He couldn’t tell if this man was a Beta or an Alpha, but from the way the man’s eyes dropped to his neck as he got closer, no doubt cluing into the fact that he was an Omega.

The man’s gaze made Keith’s skin crawl, but he didn’t do anything as he hurried inside of the salon, breathing in a sigh of relief before turning his attention to the salon itself.

It was bright and open, but at the same time, had an almost sophisticated look to it. Rachel herself was at a counter just in front of the door, and had looked up when he walked in. Surprise passed over her features. “Keith? What are you doing here?” There was nothing malicious about her tone, she just sounded confused.

“A shelf broke at the diner, so I offered to help Luis out and bring you your food.” He motioned to the bag, stepping out of the way of a young Omega woman that walked by him.

“Oh.” Her blue eyes scanned his face for a moment before she smiled a bit. “Thanks. I appreciate that a lot. There are some hungry mouths to feed here.”

“It’s nice of you to buy your employees food,” Keith said as he helped take everything out of the bag. “I—“ They both jumped from the shrill screech that echoed from outside. Rachel’s hands clapped over her ears, and Keith bolted towards the sound.

The man in the hoodie was hunched over a bit, hand over one ear, his other hand wrapped around the wrist of the girl that had left the salon when Keith went in.

Her collar – an older one that likely didn’t have that extremely helpful biometric function that only allowed the Omega that owned it to take it off – was on the ground at her feet as she struggled with the man.

“Let go of her!” Keith launched himself at the man that he could now identify as an Alpha (because of course he was), grabbing the arm that was clutching the woman’s wrist.

The woman stumbled back, and that seemed to snap the man out of the stupor that her Omega Shrill (the sound that had impacted both the Alphas and the Betas around) had put him in. He snarled and lashed out hand grabbing Keith’s hair tightly.

He grimaced from the pain, taking a step towards him to lessen the pressure. Keith wasn’t really thinking, he was just moving. The next thing he knew though, he had successfully managed to flip the Alpha over his shoulder, slamming him into the ground before grabbing his arms, tugging them back to restrain him while keeping pressure on his spine with his foot.

Adrenaline rushed through him, his heart pounding in his ears. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw
someone come out to comfort the Omega, and he hoped to god that he was fast enough to stop this Alpha from biting her. If he wasn’t, it wouldn’t matter if he managed to knock him down or not.

“Let go of me!” The man snarled, and Keith felt the compulsion wash over him from the Alpha Voice. Except he didn’t go into that airy headspace like he had with Lance. It dazed him a bit, but if anything, he pressed his leg harsher against his back, tightening his grip on the man’s arms. He was very easily the stronger of the two.

He hoped that knocked this Alpha’s ego down a peg or 50.

“We got him, son.” Keith flinched, looking up to see a police officer standing in front of him. The man glanced down at his neck, an eyebrow raising in surprise. Still, Keith let go of the Alpha, who fell onto the ground. He backed away so the police officers could grab him. He hadn’t even noticed them show up on the scene.

“Oh my god, are you alright?” Rachel asked, appearing at his side, her blue eyes wide.

“Is she okay? The other Omega?”

“Sasha? Yeah. He didn’t bite her.” She scowled, glaring at the Alpha that was being shoved into the back of a police cruiser. “She’s a regular. That asshole has been stalking her for weeks.” Her eyes watered a bit. “She’s one of my best friends, and you saved her from him.” A small smile appeared on her face. “And you were a total badass doing that. I think—I think if my brother had tried to force you to bond with him, you would have broke his arm.”

Everything after that kind of happened in a blur as his racing heart calmed. The police needed to take a statement from him, but they were all iffy about talking to him alone without his Alpha there. Something about not wanting to influence what he was saying, or something like that? It didn’t matter that Rachel was his sister-in-law and a Beta.

Whatever the reason, that meant informing Lance what happened, and waiting for him to get a lift there.

Keith’s nerves climbed to his throat. Lance had been worried and furious about what happened the day before, and that ended up being nothing compared to this. God, he wished that he could have avoided this kind of trouble, because what were the odds two days in a row? Still, Keith felt like he proved that he could handle himself if he needed too.

The thing was though, the second he saw Lance, he wanted to lean on him, to let him kind of take the lead here.

Lance was the one that was driving home after statements were taken. It was silent, and Keith had to admit, he was a little nervous. If he had listened to Lance, if he had not gone to the diner today, he wouldn’t have ended up at Rachel’s salon when that all went down.

Except…

“I don’t regret what happened,” Keith said suddenly. “That girl, Rachel’s friend, that Alpha would have bit her. It would have been over for her. I’m not sorry that I didn’t listen to you and I went back to the diner. That I went and sat with Mr. Thomas again. I’m not. I had to do it.”

The Alpha was silent, staring at the road. The hand closest to Keith reached out, placing his hand on Keith’s thigh and squeezing gently. “I know. I’m so sorry.” He paused. “If it matters though, I’m super proud of you too.”
A smile ticked up on Keith’s lips. He slipped his hand under Lance’s, intertwining their fingers together, squeezing it gently.

They had a lot to talk about, and he was sure that once everything that happened actually settled in his mind, he’d have to talk about that too. Still, he knew that they’d both be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year to everyone! I hope it's been good so far! :D

Thank you for all the positive responses to this story so far, and for being so understanding about how my updates are going to be coming slower! I'm working hard on a second project now too, so hopefully that'll be coming sooner rather than later. We'll see though!
Keith felt like he was drowning under hateful stares, unable to pull himself to the surface thanks to the knives that met his hands every time he tried to grab the edge. There was just water. So much water. It was getting deeper and darker by the second.

So when he jerked out of his sleep, Keith was physically gasping for breath. He blinked his eyes wildly, trying to get used to the darkened room around him, but it was like being under water. He could make out a few things in the darkness, but because his eyes needed to adjust, everything looked like strange shadows in the dark.

He tugged his sheets up onto himself tighter. This was the fourth time that week he had a similar dream. It wasn’t always the same, but the message was pretty clear. He was not okay. He’d even looked up what it meant to have dreams of drowning, and apparently it happened a lot when people were under physical or emotional stress, which, yeah. That described him.

Keith squeezed his eyes shut. It was just dreams. It was just shadows. He was fine. There was nothing wrong with him. He was strong. He could deal with this.

Except, he didn’t have to deal with this alone, did he?

He hesitated, but still ended up slipping out of his bed. Quietly, he hurried out of his room, the rest of the house just as dark, though the living room kept being lit up by lights of people driving by. A quick glance at the bright numbers on the microwave told him that it was only 2:00am, meaning that the bars were likely closing, so more people were traveling to get home. It was odd that they were open on weekdays, but he was getting used to it.

Keith carefully opened up Lance’s door, breathing in the warm, nutmeg smell. It instantly relaxed him a little bit, and he slowly and quietly made his way inside.

Unlike the rest of the house, Lance had a little light on, which was kind of funny, because the Alpha was stretched out on his back with a sleeping mask over his eyes, the thick goop of his overnight face mask on his skin. Sometimes he wore headphones to bed, but it happened less and less frequently.

It was easy to slid into the bed beside Lance, to shift close to him. Keith liked sleeping curled up on his side anyway.

Lance muttered a bit, and with his eyes covered, Keith couldn’t actually tell if he woke up or not. Either way, the arm that had been resting behind his head dropped down, draping over Keith’s should and holding him close.

Keith tucked one arm underneath him, nuzzling his face into Lance’s shirt as he rested his head on his chest, the other arm sprawled across the Alpha’s stomach. He made himself comfortable fairly easily, and found himself rifting off to the feeling of fingers gently brushing against the back of his neck.

…

“I think I want to talk to Dr. Tsai about seeing a therapist.”
Lance looked over at Keith, who was hunched over his sketchbook with a frown on his face. He set his own book down, staring at Keith with a thoughtful expression. It wasn’t a bad idea at all, Keith had been through a lot. From being raped years ago, to what happened with Lotor and Honerva back in Vegas, to the Beta that threatened him by the diner, and the Alpha that he had fought to protect someone else.

It was a lot for anyone.

“If you want to,” he said with a nod of his head. “You know, maybe I should too. I…clearly have some issues with being overprotective.” He paused. “Maybe we can see about having some sessions together? And some apart?”

“Marriage counselling?” Keith asked, his eyebrow raising as he looked towards him.

“Not necessarily. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that aspect…uh…but I mean, if you do we can do that. I was just thinking more working some of the shared memories and issues out together? Maybe getting some tools or ideas we can use?” Lance tried not to grimace at how his voice was rising uncertainly.

He didn’t want to be that Alpha that tried to control their Omega. Sure, he had apologized time and time again, and Keith had explained his mother’s suggestion of using his Alpha Voice in consensual, safe situations. Lance wasn’t sure he was comfortable with that right now, but he wanted to try eventually.

Keith thought for a moment before nodding his head. He leaned over, resting his head on Lance’s shoulder as he continued to draw. It was a nice picture with what looked like the beginning of a dragon on it. He was really happy for his mate, having found something that he liked to do. “I think we’re doing pretty good. I guess I don’t mind the idea of working some things out together with some help.”

Lance smiled and slid his arm around Keith’s shoulders. “We can call Monday about getting an appointment with Dr. Tsai.” He leaned in a bit, brushing his nose against Keith’s. “Don’t forget, I get to woo you tomorrow.”

They were finally going to go on that fancy date that Lance wanted to go on. They didn’t have the money to do it often, but he’d been putting a little bit aside to save for it. Plus, there was something else that he had been saving up for, and even though it shouldn’t have made his heart race to think of, it still did.

Lance insisted on planning the entire thing. He truly wanted to sweep his mate off of his feet. He’d been miserable for the past week, and in retrospect, he felt like a dick for taking that out on Keith. For ignoring him, being grumpy, showing up late, barely eating the food that Keith spent time on. Then getting mad at him because he was stressed and sometimes shit happens.

The worst thing was that he knew Keith didn’t hold it against him. His mate wasn’t perfect, he could shut down very quickly at slights, so Lance was really glad that he didn’t this time.

Of course, it also helped that work had been good today. His sick shark was starting to do much better, and things were really starting to look up. He was so ready for the weekend though. This weekend was going to be all about him and Keith, and nothing else.

Keith’s eyebrows tilted slightly, lips spreading into a teasing smirk that sent Lance’s heart racing a mile a minute. Keith set his sketchbook down on the coffee table before slinging his leg over Lance and straddling him.
Maybe Lance made a little bit of a choking noise at that, but he’d never admit it and there were no witnesses. His hands slid around Keith, palms resting on his lower back. He looked up at the Omega with wide eyes.

Keith balanced his arms over his shoulders, nose brushing against Lance’s again. “I’ve never gone on a fancy date before.” He paused in thought and then shrugged slightly. “Well, to be fair, as a teenager Olive Garden seemed super fancy.”

Lance laughed at that. “Don’t worry about it, babe. I’m going to sweep you off your feet. Put that suit Allura helped you pick out to good use.” He pouted a bit, wanting to see it on his mate now, because he was sure that Keith was going to look amazing.

Formal wear really did things for him, okay?

Rachel had actually offered to go with Lance to get a new one, but he still had a suit, and decided not to spend the money on a new one when it still fit. He was still a little mind-blown that Rachel offered. Apparently, between hearing the entire story of how they became to be mates, and having Keith save one of her friends like the badass he is, she decided to give the Omega a chance.

Lance wasn’t going to lie, he was more than a little bit excited that his sister was coming around. It gave him hope for Marco and his mother as well.

Keith stared at Lance with that sly smile on his face. “I do look good in it.” He leaned close to Lance, breathing against his ear. “I guess we’ll see if you can ‘woo’ me out of it.”

Lance couldn’t stop the splutter from escaping his lips as Keith easily slid off of him, grabbed his sketchbook, and he swore to god, the Omega sauntered out of the room.

His mate was going to be the end of him.

…

To say that Lance was nervous would be an understatement. He was jittery and twitchy, moving aimlessly from one place to the next. Hearing Keith go in and out of the bathroom earlier made his heart leap, though he refrained from going out, managing to avoid him easily.

He looked at himself in the mirror that was above his dresser, staring at himself in the mirror. The one thing he wasn’t worried or nervous about was how he looked. Maybe it was a bit arrogant to say, but Lance knew that he looked good. His navy suit may have been old, but he managed to work out the wrinkles in that and his royal blue tie with ease. He was glad that there were no stains or anything on his crisp, white shirt.

He leaned in close, making sure that his hair fell just right, and double checked to make sure that his skin was flawless, which it was.

It was stupid, he knew Keith wouldn’t care how he looked, his mate had seen him sobbing over a bowl of Cheerios while watching videos of puppies, wearing pyjamas that he hadn’t washed in a week. Still, he wanted to look good and make an impression.

Lance glanced at his phone, wetting his lips nervously when he realized that it was time to get going.

He made sure that he had his wallet, cellphone, keys, and a few other important things on him as he made his way towards Keith’s bedroom door. The Omega had simply told him to yell for him and he’d meet him in the living room, but Lance refused. He wanted to pick Keith up at his door.
He was pretty sure that his mate thought he was ridiculous, but he was playing along with him, so that was nice.

He knocked, and Keith actually had the gall to snicker at him from behind the door before flinging it open. “Alright drama queen, let’s go.”

“Um, rude,” Lance replied with a dramatic sigh. “And to think, I got you this. Should give it to Mrs. Paplinski down the hall.” He held out the single rose in his hand, this one a red one. He caught sight of the white one he had given Keith earlier that week in a vase on his desk, making him smile.

The Omega’s eyes widened with surprise, his ears turning pink as he carefully took the flower from Lance. He instinctively brought it to his nose to smell, and the small smile nearly gave Lance heart palpitations. “Thank you.” He moved over to his desk and put it in the other one.

Lance stared, taking Keith in in all his glory. His suit was entirely black outside of a silky red tie, looking like it was tailored to fit him though there was no way he had time to get that done, and his long hair was tugged back into a ponytail at the base of his neck.

When Keith came back to his side again, Lance couldn’t help but notice that his eyes stood out a little more than normal. Was he wearing eyeliner? Holy fuck, he was. That was entirely unfair, because Keith already had the prettiest eyes Lance had ever seen, framed with long, thick lashes that he was entirely jealous of, and now he had just a touch of eyeliner on? “God, you’re gorgeous.”

The Omega smiled at him warmly, leaning in close to him. “You’re not half bad either.”

Lance didn’t know if he was blessed or cursed to have such an attractive mate. Both? Both was good.

Shoving all of that down, a silly grin spread over his features. “Shall we go? I do have to get you home before curfew. Can’t have your mom hunting me down.”

Keith’s lips kept tilting up into an amused smile that he was very clearly trying to force off of his face. It was too late though, Lance had seen it. He bowed, holding out his arm dramatically. Laughter bubbled out of Keith, and he looped his arm through his.

“You’re ridiculous,” Keith said as they left their apartment arm in arm, Lance making sure to lock it behind him.

“Ridiculously hot,” he shot back immediately, winking at him.

Keith’s indigo eyes very purposely slid down and back up before locking his eyes onto Lance’s again. “Yeah, you are.”

The laughter that exploded out of the Omega when Lance walked into the door at the end of the hallway was almost worth it.

…

Lance very wisely chose not to use the valet service at the restaurant they went to, which was probably a very good life choice on his car, because Keith was sure that the other car he saw there was worth more than everything he had owned in his entire life added together.

Honestly, Keith was a little intimidated by just how nice of a place Lance brought them to. There was nothing this fancy back where he used to live.
Thank god the menus were in English and filled with things he recognized. He was super wary that the prices weren’t even listed, knowing that they had to be through the roof. They decided to split an appetizer, and they were going to skip over dessert and any kind of wine.

“Everything is so tiny here,” Lance whispered to him, looking at his meal.

Keith had to agree. They got different things and took a little bit from one another. They were visually the most stunning plates of food Keith had ever seen in his life. Not to mention they were delicious, and he wasn’t even entirely sure what everything was. The problem was that the portions really were fairly small. Or maybe they were just used to making a whole lot of stuff at once.

The Alpha suddenly let out an unimpressed sound, prompting Keith to look up from his food. He coughed a little bit, trying to hide his smile when he saw the bright green sauce that had been on Lance’s plate now staining his white shirt.

“It’s not funny,” Lance groaned, taking his washable napkin to rub it off, leaving an even bigger stain behind. “Oh my god. I look like an idiot. And it’s going to stain.”

“Button up your jacket more,” Keith suggested. “Don’t worry. I’ll help you clean it when we get home.”

Lance did button it up a little bit higher. At least it hadn’t gotten on the top of his shirt or his collar. That would have been a little more difficult to hide.

Luckily, no one around them had noticed the little mishap.

That was probably for the best. Keith was pretty sure the woman at the table next to them had thousands of dollars’ worth of diamonds on her hands alone. What kind of rich nonsense place was this? How much were they paying for this?

“This is really nice,” Keith said, looking around the restaurant, “but maybe next time we can go to a place that’s a step down so we don’t bankrupt ourselves.”

“You don’t like it?” Lance’s shoulders slumped slightly.

“Of course I do,” Keith scowled at him. “Don’t twist it that way. I’m having a great time. I’m just thinking of saving us some money, honestly.” He smiled at him bashfully, feeling a sudden shyness well up within him. “You could take me to McDonalds and I’d be happy just to go somewhere with you.”

“McDonalds,” Lance snorted. “I’d at least take you to Wendy’s.” He reached out, placing his hand over Keith’s, fingers brushing against him. “But you are having fun?”

“Of course I am. Sorry if I’m seem a bit down. Gotta get out of my head about money.” Keith chuckled a little bit. “Wonder if a place like this give discounts for like, proposing there. Because that’d be the way to go, honestly.”

Lance’s eyes suddenly lit up excitedly. “I don’t know if they would, but want to give it a shot?”

Keith stared at him blankly. What the ever-living fuck? They were already married. They had a video and everything! He watched as Lance got up, winking at him as he walked around the table until he was right beside his chair.

Lance fiddled with something in his pocket for a moment, before suddenly sinking down onto one knee, catching the eye of the tables closest to them, who seemed very interested in them. “Keith.
You’re an amazing Omega, and in a very short period of time, you’ve become the best friend and mate I could ever ask for, and I want to share every moment of my life with you.”

Keith’s eyes were wide as he stared at him. Internally, he was freaking out because what the hell was happening? They were already married? Not that anyone here would know that. They’d know that they were bonded to one another, but it was very common to mark your mate first, and get married legally later on. Since it gave a certain security that an Omega mate in particular wouldn’t be claimed by someone else in the meantime.

He focused on Lance again, having tuned out the rest of his probably sweet speech, tuning it just as he opened a box to show him an actual ring. It was just a simple wedding band with a strip of silver in the middle and gold on the outside, but holy shit, it was an actual ring.

Yeah, when a person got close enough, they could smell when someone was mated, but rings allowed people to see it from far away. It would be obvious in pretty much every way aside from wearing a neon shirt that said ‘I’m Taken’ on it.

Keith actually felt his eyes watering, which, what the fuck? They were already married. Lance didn’t have to do this though. Speaking of Lance, he was clearly waiting for an answer, as was all of the people watching them.

His heart beating loudly, Keith found that he couldn’t actually talk at the moment, nodding his head rapidly. Lance beam brightly, and he managed to say, “Yes.”

The people around them started clapping, and Lance put the perfectly fitted ring on his finger. As he tried to stand up, Keith tugged him in and kissed him. It was brief and sweet, but they were in public and anything else wouldn’t be cool at the moment.

Keith had no idea why he was feeling so giddy. Literally nothing had changed. They weren’t actually getting married again or anything like that. Still, the gesture, doing that, it made something warm grow in his chest.

Needless to say, they ended up getting their food for free.

…

It was really, really hard for Lance to not skip down the board walk. Seriously, he was tempted to swing his hand that was intertwined with Keith’s while full-on skipping. Maybe he’d break into song too.

Any time his finger brushed against the ring on Keith’s finger, a spike of excitement rushed through him. He had put on the matching band that he had gotten, a two-piece set that his Abuela actually helped him pay for. They weren’t extremely expensive or anything like that – if they wanted really nice ones, they could get them when their funds were more stable – but he had really wanted wedding bands.

It felt odd to wear at the moment, but Lance knew that he’d get used to it. There was also something very nice about having a visual representation of his bond with Keith – one that people could see without being invasive.

It also helped that after a week of sad, negative scent clinging to both of them, Keith smelled so content and happy, even as he was eating the donut that he bought earlier, their miniscule dinner a little too small for the both of them, though they had gotten dessert then too.

To be fair, they both also ate corndogs a few minutes ago too.
They were probably a sight, walking around with their fancy button-down shirts and pants (jackets and ties were left in the car), eating greasy fried food. They didn’t talk much, but that was fine.

A fancy dinner followed by a stroll along the boardwalk and beach as the sun slowly set? Lance thought that he had done pretty good. Maybe he should have added in dancing or something? That sounded like fun.

He was about to bring it up, when a yawn escaped Keith’s lips. He looked almost embarrassed as he muttered, “Sorry. Dunno why I’m tired.”

“Wanna head home?” Lance asked him, a soft smile on his lips. It was a little earlier than he would have thought their night would end, but that was fine. Hopefully he had played all his cards right and he could get some real cuddles out of it. Not ones prompted by nightmares and Keith slipping into his bed.

“Yeah.” Hand in hand, they made their way back towards where the car was parked, which was actually a pretty far walk. They had gone really far while Lance was thinking, hadn’t they? No wonder Keith was tired.

Being in their car (because yes, it was theirs now, not just Lance’s) with the windows rolled up, Lance could very clearly smell just how happy Keith was. God, he missed that warm, honey scent that had been soured over the past week (and he hadn’t even realized it).

“I like when you’re happy,” he blurted out as he focused on the road.

Keith chuckled a bit. “I like when you’re happy too. And you know…I guess you’re forgiven for the past week.” The teasing tone to his voice let Lance know that, yes, he was forgiven.

“Don’t expect anything fancy for your birthday,” Lance teased in return. “I was going to save the rings for then, but I thought now was a better time.”

“It was,” Keith agreed, leaning over and resting his cheek against Lance’s arm, fingers brushing up and down the fabric of Lance’s sleeve.

The Alpha didn’t say anything, letting his mate linger in peace. They only moved when they got out of the car to head inside.

Honestly, he was kind of glad to be rid of his shoes. They were definitely newer than Keith’s (which had to be hurting at this point), but it sucked wearing formal shoes around all day. Okay, maybe he was slightly too gleeful as he kicked them off, earning an amused snort from his mate.

“Not done yet,” Lance said, holding his arm out to him.

“Really?” Keith raised an eyebrow, slipping his arm through his. The two walked down the hall, stopping outside of Keith’s opened door.

“That’s right.” Lance leaned down the slight distance between them. Had he gotten a little bit taller? They were pretty much the same height, but he swore he was leaning down just a little bit more. “That’s the rules of dating. I gotta drop you off at your door.” Lance pressed his lips against Keith’s, humming happily as the Omega wrapped his arms around his neck. It was difficult, but he managed to pull away. “Then I say goodnight, and go back home.”

Keith’s hands slid from his shoulders down to his chest, fingers twisting into the collar of Lance’s button-up shirt. “Or, you realize that we have the house to ourselves, and you stay the night, since it doesn’t have to be over yet.”
He stared at the Omega with confusion, but found himself leaning back in a little more, eyes fluttering slightly due to the even more enticing than normal smell, which was odd because why would—

Oh. Lance’s eyes opened as he stared down at Keith, who was staring back at him with half-lidded eyes. His breath hitched slightly. “Are you sure?”

Keith nodded his head, looking and smelling very sure of himself in his decision as he tugged Lance down into a searing kiss that sent his heart racing.

They stumbled back through the door, Lance kicking it shut behind him.

…

A happy sigh escaped Lance’s lips as he slowly regained consciousness, a part of him wishing that he didn’t have to get up. He wanted to bask in his comfortable slumber, feeling perfectly relaxed.

Lance shifted slightly, grimacing a bit from the sudden pain in his back, coming from between his shoulder blades. His heart started beating quickly, and god, he was a decently healthy man that just happened to love his deep fried food, but he swore he was going to have a heart attack at 22. His stomach lurched with a rush of excitement.

Blinking his eyes, the room slowly came into focus. He was confused briefly, realizing that he wasn’t in his own room. As his memories of the night before came back to him, the realization of where he was and what had happened made a smile spread across his face.

He took a deep breath, the sweet, almost citrusy smell with floral notes that had him picturing honey reached him, and god, it was the single best thing that had ever graced his presence. It calmed him down in one sense, but riled him up in another. His stomach twisted in a good way, and the urge to hold, cuddle, protect, and there was even the tiniest urge to mate.

Warmth from another body beside him prompted him to twist around, eyes landing on the figure that was sleeping faced away from him.

Lance pouted a bit at that, blue eyes scanning across broad, bare shoulders. He leaned in a little more to get a look at Keith’s face, only making out his smooth, pale skin as his hair obstructed the view. He reached forward, brushing the hair away from Keith’s face and neck, eyes falling to the mark that he had left there about two months ago. The mark that made him his mate.

It wasn’t violent or fresh like it had been when Lance first woke up and discovered himself in an actually very similar situation. It had faded, blending in with his skin more, though it would always be paler than his skin.

Lance ran his fingers over the mark, causing Keith to hum slightly. The Omega shifted, opening his eyes and looking up at him. “What are you doing?”

“You’re too far away,” Lance said with a pout, wrapping his arms around Keith and tugging him closer, nuzzling his face against the scent gland that essentially wrapped around his neck.

A soft purr escaped the Omega, who pressed back into him. “Here now.”

“Yeah, you are.” Lance laid beside him for a moment, fingers mindlessly brushing circles on his stomach. “Hey, are you okay? Feeling okay I mean?”

Keith groaned and turned around in his arms, burying his face into Lance’s chest. “Why do you keep
talking? Sleep.”

“I just—“

“Shh, sleep,” Keith repeated, nodding off against moments later.

Lance chuckled a little bit, rolling over so that he was on his back again and bringing Keith with him. Luckily, the Omega didn’t wake up. He simply sighed contentedly and nuzzled closer to him.

He gently ran his fingers through Keith’s hair as he slowly nodded off against too. Keith was right. Now was a time they could just sleep and be together in this small, comfortable, safe little piece of the world they had found together.

Everything else could wait a little longer.

Chapter End Notes

And so this is where we start getting into the more 'episodic' chapters, where I start skipping around to important days for them! I won't lie, I'm struggling a bit with this right now, but I'll keep going with it, promise!

Thank you for all your wonderful feedback! If you have any questions, want to ask anything about this universe, don't hesitate!
Now, if there was one thing that Lance was positive about, it was that he did the right thing giving Keith his wedding ring when he did, in the way that he did. Given the events that had transpired that night, he was very, very sure about that.

Where things had been tense and a bit cold between them for a week, now it was anything but, and Lance was absolutely thriving.

Of course, it meant that Lance also didn’t have an actual birthday present for Keith anymore. He brought this up once, and the Omega made sure that he understood that he didn’t want anything else.

What he wanted was to spend the day together, maybe see Hunk and Pidge too. And honestly, how could Lance turn down a request like that? All Keith wanted was to be around his friends, his pack.

That being said, Lance was determined to make the day special for him. It wasn’t like they needed a ton of presents or a big party or anything.

Lance awoke with the sun, Keith slumbering peacefully beside him. He rolled over onto his side, running his fingers up and down his arm gently, not wanting to wake him up, but unable to help himself. Luckily, the Omega didn’t wake up, simply shifting slightly and settling again. He couldn’t help but smile at that, knowing how light of a sleeper Keith could be unless he felt completely safe and comfortable.

He didn’t bother getting up, enjoying the comfortable warm air that settled around them. It luckily wasn’t too hot yet, and he was perfectly happy to snuggle close to Keith. Then again, snuggles with full skin-on-skin were new things, and there was so much to discover, with Lance finding new small scars, freckles, and blemishes all the time. Not to mention, there was absolutely nothing obstructing Keith’s scent.

Yeah, Lance could really, really get used to this level of intimacy.

Eventually, when it was a little later in the day, Lance gently started pepper kisses along Keith’s shoulder and neck to wake him out. The Omega shifted a bit, groaning unhappily. “Mmm. More sleep.”

“Happy birthday, Babe,” Lance said lightly, breath playing right against his ear. “Time to get up and get ready.”

“Don’t wanna,” Keith muttered, turning over and burying his face in Lance’s chest. “Is my birthday. Lemme sleep.”

“Sorry Baby, we gotta get up.” He smirked a little bit. “I know, I know. I really tired of you out last night.”

Keith suddenly came alive, pushing him away and rolling over. “Oh my god.”

Lance scooted after him, tugging him back towards him. “Yeah, you said that a lot too.”

“I’ve made a terrible mistake.” The Omega groaned unhappily. “You turned into a—a—horn dog.”
“Um, excuse you, you’re just as bad as I am.” That wasn’t at all a lie. It seemed like once the floodgates had opened, at the end of the day when all their work is done, they couldn’t quite keep their hands off of one another.

Well, that wasn’t entirely true. It was very much a learning experience, exploring and discovering this avenue with one another, and sometimes that meant stop and hands off.

Lance was young when he dated his first girlfriend, and they didn’t even really do anything with one another, not really. In between Plaxum and Nyma though, he had a few different partners but nothing permanent, so it wasn’t like he was actually having discussions with people. And with Nyma…well…they just didn’t do that.

It was so different with Keith, where they actually talked about things that were okay and not okay. It was actually kind of amazing and super encouraging. There was something so deeply intimate about the entire thing, and it involved so much trust and respect that it actually made Lance want to cry a little bit.

Keith settled back down beside him, that soft smile that sent his heart reeling appearing again. It prompted Lance to swoop down and kiss him. When he tried to lean back, Keith pulled him back in. “I told you, I don’t wanna get up,” he muttered when he leaned away.

Lance laughed at that, his shoulders shaking. “And you called me the horn dog. You, good sir, are besmirching my good name and I do not appreciate that.”

“Shh. I’m older than you. I know what I’m doing.”

Another laugh erupted from his chest. He ran his finger along Keith’s lips. “And what if Shiro calls when I have you all flustered?”

Instead of making him back down, that seemed to spark something in him, entirely waking the Omega up. His lips turned up into a smirk. “Are you challenging me to see if I can keep my cool while on the phone with my brother?”

“Jesus Christ no! We’re not doing that!” Lance burst out without even thinking about it. His face instantly flushed with humiliation at the thought. Jesus fuck, was Keith into something like that? Oh no, did his Omega have an exhibition kink? He could learn to deal with that, it wasn’t like it repulsed him, but that would take a while.

Keith’s sly face gave way to a loud, amused laugh, and Lance realized that his mate was just teasing him.

The Omega pressed a quick kiss to Lance’s lips as he rolled over and got up. “I’m getting a shower.”

“Wanna save some water?” Lance wiggled his eyebrows at him, though he very well knew that showering together did not mean fooling around. That was something that they discovered together the day after their date. They had both very quickly agreed that shower time was good for intimacy if they wanted it to be, and that was about it.

Lance really didn’t want to have to go to the hospital and explain what had happened. Again.

Keith narrowed his eyes at him briefly and left the room. Lance sighed, flopping back on the bed, until he heard him called out, “Are you coming or not?”

He quickly sprang up and ran after him with a smile on his face.
“I can help you, you know.”

“Nope.” Lance waved a spatula at him. “I don’t want to see you up from that couch for anything. I’m doing the cooking today.”

Keith raised an eyebrow, wanting to comment on the fact that Lance was clearly making enough for an army. He decided to let that go, instead looking down at his phone as it buzzed. A small smile appeared on his face when he realized that it was a text from Shiro (meaning he had to be awake ridiculously early where he was).

He wondered if Shiro realized that he was texting in the group chat that Lance had made with the two of them, Shiro, Allura, Hunk, Matt and Pidge. Pidge had very happily made the chat name.

Shiro > We’re Better Than The FBI

Shiro: Happy birthday to my little brother. I can’t believe that you’re 23 and off on the other side of the country.

Shiro: It feels just like yesterday that you were stealing my car.

Hunk: I’m sorry, what?

Shiro: Oh, this is the group chat?

Keith: Shiro wtf?

Allura: Yes! Happy birthday, Keith! Your present should be getting there soon

Keith: Why are you guys awake?

Shiro: Allura was hungry.

Allura: I needed salt, vinegar, and tuna chips.

Keith: Gross.

Hunk: We’re not going to talk about Keith stealing Shiro’s car?

Hunk: No?

Hunk: Fine.

Hunk: Happy birthday, Keith!

Pidge: Happy Birthday asshat! Haunted house on November 3rd!

Keith: Haunted house!

Allura: That’s after Halloween?

Pidge: It’s a real one. We’re going to one of those other ones on Halloween.
Pidge: Also can we appreciate that Allura has the power to know exactly when a birthday gift is going to be delivered?

Pidge: #omegagoals

Keith chuckled at his friends, warmth rising up within him. “Our friends are ridiculous.”

Lance hummed in acknowledgement and picked up his phone to look at the messages. He grinned broadly and started rapid-fire texting.

Lance > We’re Better Than The FBI

Lance: I HAVE ARRIVED.

Lance: HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE MOST AMAZING MATE EVER!

Shiro: Aren’t you guys in the same house?

Keith: Same room actually.

Lance: And yet you didn’t say that out loud.

Lance: I need everyone to see my praise.

Keith: Do you see what I love with?

Pidge: Love with, huh?

Keith: LIVE

Keith: I meant LIVE

Hunk: Aww, love with.

Allura: That’s so sweet.

Keith: I swear to god

Allura: I’m pregnant watcha gonna do? Scowl at me?

Lance: -picture sent- He actually is.

Keith looked up at that, glaring at Lance, who laughed at him and winked.

Keith > We’re Better Than The FBI

Keith: The food is burning.

Lance: FUCK

Shiro: I am so proud of you Keith. You’ve grown up so much and I wish I could be there with you this year.
Keith: Ugh are you crying?

Allura: He is.

Shiro: Only a little.

Keith: At least you get one twin?

Keith looked up as he heard a knock on the door. They weren’t expecting anyone. He hoped it wasn’t Neighbour Norman again, coming over to complain about something again.

“Can you get that?” Lance asked, clearly stressing out over the sheer amount of food.

“You’re ridiculous,” Keith sighed, stretching as he stood. He walked towards the door, opening it without checking through the peephole.

Instantly, Keith’s entire body froze and he was pretty sure that he stopped breathing for a moment. His eyes went wide as he found himself staring into a very familiar pair of violet ones. “Mom?” His voice ended up cracking on the one syllable word.

His mother smiled at him warmly. “Happy Birthday, sweetheart.”

Suddenly, he remembered how to move again, and Keith practically threw himself at his mother, wrapping his arms around her waist tightly as he rested his forehead on his shoulder. Holy shit, he hadn’t realized just how much he actually missed her until she was right in front of him, her familiar, comforting scent surrounding him.

Were his eyes watering? They needed to stop that. He wasn’t allowed to cry.

He inhaled sharply, and that’s when a different, gingery smell that was both sweet and spicy reached him, and he froze again. He knew that scent better than even his mother’s or mate’s.

Keith’s head snapped up, breath leaving him again. “Acxa?”

His sister grinned at him. “Happy Birthday, baby brother.”

He let go of Krolia, and hell, they weren’t hugging people, but he still enveloped his sister in a tight hug that clearly startled her. God, he had missed her just as much. “Happy Birthday, brat.”

She laughed lightly, hugging him in return.

“Breakfast is almost done!” Lance called out a moment later, prompting Keith to let go of his sister. “I hope you’re all hungry! It’s the best scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast around!”

“You!” Keith burst out, going back into the house without even inviting his mother and sister in, though they both followed him with clearly amused expressions. “You knew!”

“You have no proof of that!” Lance replied, a grin on his face as he waved the tongs he was using to scoop up the bacon in his direction.

“You are going to eat those, you know!” his mother spoke up, “us visiting was entirely Lance’s idea. He called us to see if we could come. It was a little more last minute, so Shiro and Allura couldn’t come, but they sent presents with us.”

Keith blinked his eyes rapidly, because fuck, no, he wasn’t going to cry. “You did this?” Did his
Lance sighed and then smiled at him. “You mentioned it was going to be weird to have a birthday without your sister, so I just thought you might like it? And I figured you missed your mom too.” He suddenly turned his attention towards Acxa too. “Happy Birthday to you too.”

“Thank you,” she replied graciously, and it occurred to Keith that maybe his sister had been just as bothered as he had been about having a birthday away from one another. There literally wasn’t a time that they had been apart since then, not on their shared birthday.

And Lance had planned this entire thing. God, Keith loved him so much.

Running into him in Vegas had been the best thing that had ever happened to him.

…. 

Lance knew that he had done the right thing by reaching out to Keith’s family. It was too bad that Shiro and Allura couldn’t come too, though it was a last minute thing so that made sense. Just seeing the genuine smile on Keith’s face said a lot.

He mostly stayed on the side lines as Keith caught up with his mother and sister, volunteering to wash the dishes after they were done eating his breakfast. (He’d been quite proud when Krolia announced that he was a great cook, because hell yes, he could provide and cook for her son.)

“You know…when I thanked you earlier, it wasn’t just for inviting us here.”

Lance jumped and looked around. Despite the fact that their apartment was small and the floor creaked like it was no one’s business, he still hadn’t heard her coming. What was with these two? Her and Keith were clearly ninjas that needed bells hung on them. “What?”

She chuckled and nodded towards Keith, who was showing Krolia some of the sketches he had on him that he sold online (well, he sold the finished copies). “I genuinely can’t remember the last time I saw him so…happy and healthy.” She frowned a little bit. “Just since we got here, I swear I’ve seen him smile more than he has over the past four years since…yeah.”

Lance counted backwards in his head until he realized what she was referring to. He lowered his voice and said, “Keith told me. Everything.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Everything? Including his…suicide attempt?”

“What that really was? Yeah.” Acxa looked even more surprised by that. “I hate that someone did that to him, that someone made him feel like he had no choice but to do what he did. I would never hold it against him, and never put him in a position where he felt like he had no choices again. I just… want him to be happy, you know?”

The other Alpha eyed him for a moment, blue eyes a bit critical until she apparently found what she wanted, shoulders relaxing slightly. “I believe you.” She looked back at Keith and Krolia for a moment, watching as their mother inspected the ring on Keith’s finger. “I got so protective of him, that I was an idiot and tried to give him to Lotor, thinking it was the right thing to do.” She looked back up at him. “Honestly, I think you’re the best thing that could have happened to him.”

Lance flushed a bit at that. Those words weren’t unfamiliar, but it was still nice to hear him. He smiled at that. “He’s the best thing that could have happened to me too.” There was no hesitation to his words, no regret in saying them. It was a pure fact, plain and simple.
“That’s good,” she said with a nod. “I guess I don’t have to kill you.” She shifted away from him, heading back over to her mother and brother.

Lance didn’t know whether he should be amused or completely terrified.

…

When Acxa heard of Lance’s suggestion that she (and her mother) come out to celebrate her shared birthday with her brother, she wasn’t quite sure what to feel. Yes, Keith texted her almost daily, and they occasionally spoke to one another over the phone even though they both hated talking over the phone, but if she was honest, a part of her expected to never actually see her twin again. He was an Omega with an Alpha mate and lived far away. That was just how things worked.

Yet here she was, walking beside her brother who happily prattled on about living in Florida, showing her all the things that he did and all the places that he went. Keith never prattled. He was more like her with how he was generally silent until he had something to say.

He just seemed to have an awful lot to say.

She watched her brother as they walked towards the diner that Lance’s brother apparently owned. There was something about him that seemed brighter and happier than she could ever remember. Keith always had an air of confidence around him, a sureness that others tried to break in the past but always ended up enduring. Now though, he was holding his head high with a genuine smile on his face.

Shit, even his hair seemed shinier, his skin healthier, and if she wasn’t mistaken, there was this little extra bounce to his steps that no one else but her would have noticed.

They’d been together all their lives, and in a selfish way, it hurt to see that he was thriving without her. He was doing things he loved and enjoyed, it was very clear to her that he adored his mate. Acxa couldn’t really ask for more for her brother, but it still felt really weird for her.

Of course, Alphas tended to be a bit possessive of their familial Omegas as well, and it wasn’t like Keith and Lance had a long courtship with one another. She lost her brother so abruptly. At the same time though, she’d been ready to sell him off to Lotor when he ended up running into Lance, so it wasn’t like he was just going to remain her little brother after that vacation.

It was so much better this way. She knew that now.

Lance stopped outside of the diner, opening the door for them with a wide smile. “After you.”

Keith muttered something that Acxa couldn’t hear, and Lance laughed loudly and winked at him in response. Neither offered to share what that was about

“Surprise!”

Keith jumped backwards, one hand grabbing his knife as the other pushed Lance behind him protectively. Acxa and Krolia both tensed up, but Lance laughed loudly. “Easy there, killer. Put it away.”

Acxa had no clue who these people were, though she recognized three of them from Vegas, and the rest resembled Lance in one way or another, so it was pretty easy to figure out. Made sense.

What didn’t make sense was the banner slung up on the ceiling that read ‘Happy Birthday Keith & Acxa’. She blinked several times at her name, not expecting it at all. Well, she wasn’t expecting any
kind of surprise, but given the situation, seeing her name was just strange.

“What?” Lance said, nudging her side and drawing her out of her thoughts. “Did you think I was going to invite you here, on your birthday, and only celebrate your brother’s? I may be a fool, but I’m a classy fool.”

Acxa stared at him with surprise before smiling. He really was genuinely a good person, wasn’t he? “Thank you, Lance.”

Half the diner seemed to be boxed off for their little party, the other half just normal patrons that happened to be enjoying the rather cheerful atmosphere.

Acxa was grateful for it, she genuinely was. The food was excellent, she got to see her mother give Lance’s parents (his mother specifically) a harsh stare-down, and Keith was smiling so brightly that it was almost blinding. He laughed openly with his friends, tentatively smiling at the younger of Lance’s siblings—the ones he had a hard time with, if she remembered right.

She looked up as the woman with short brown hair and pale blue eyes slipped into the chair beside her. “Hey. I’m Veronica, Lance’s oldest sister.”

“I’m Acxa, Keith’s only sister,” she replied, earning a bright laugh from the other Alpha.

“I can tell,” Veronica said with a smile. “You two look a lot alike.”

“And yet people in high school used to asked if we were dating.” That had always confused Acxa, because she knew they looked alike. “Little did they realize we’re both very gay.”

The other Alpha laughed again. “People are idiots.” She looked over towards their brothers. “My brother can be one of those too. Please tell me he invited your mate too.”

Acxa’s stomach twisted with nausea. “He did. I didn’t ask her to.” She could feel Veronica’s curious stare. “We’re not together anymore. Keith doesn’t know.” She was always told that she had a habit of being so blunt that it made situations uncomfortable, and this might have been one of those times. She wasn’t entirely sure.

Veronica’s eyes widened a bit, flickering down to her neck where the bane of her existence was. She straightened her shoulders a bit. “Oh. Uh, what happened? I mean, you don’t have to answer that, you don’t know me.”

She shrugged. “She cheated on me. Had been for a long time apparently.” The thought left a bitter taste in Acxa’s mouth. Her mother had warned her that she and Ezor bonded too young. Acxa hadn’t believed her for a moment, and yet, here she was, an Alpha without her mate, who had been cheating on her with another Alpha, their friend, for years now.

Ezor once told her that she couldn’t have kids, which happened with Betas sometimes, so Acxa hadn’t questioned it at all. Turned out she just didn’t want to have kids with her. Just thinking about it had her Alpha instincts bristling. There was a reason Keith moved with Lance, a reason why mates separating was exceedingly rare. It really, really sucked on multiple levels.

“I’m sorry,” Veronica said, a genuine sympathy in her eyes. “For asking, for that happening to you. God, and I brought it up on your birthday.”

“You didn’t know, and I didn’t have to share,” she assured her, because yeah, it wasn’t the best time to talk about it, but there would never be a good time to talk about it. Also, it was pretty noticeable that her mate hadn’t come with her during her birthday. Keith had asked about it earlier, but she said
that Ezor was busy, not wanting to ruin his day too. She looked over at him, watching him smile as Lance kissed his cheek. God, they were almost sickeningly sweet together, weren’t they? “Being here for our birthday helps. We’ve never been apart for one. Besides, this is…fun.” She wasn’t doing much, but it was better than sitting at home.

“Well, it’s good that you’re having a good time,” Veronica said with a nod. “You know, I think they’re really good for one another. I know Keith is really good for Lance. I’ve never seen my brother so…head over heels for someone.”

A small, genuine smile spread across Acxa’s face as she looked at her mother, who was now smiling and talking to Lance’s parents, before glancing back at Keith, who met her eyes with his own grin. “Yeah. I think Lance is good for him too.”

Lance suddenly threw his hands in the air. “Cake time! Acxa! Come over here! Don’t hang out with my loser sister! You’re the birthday girl too!”

“Bite me, Lance!” Veronica called over to him.

Acxa sighed and got up, heading towards them. It was her birthday too, so she might as well enjoy it.

…

Keith felt positively giddy as he walked up the stairs with Lance to their apartment. Good fucking god he was in a good mood. He actually kind of felt like skipping, and he was pretty sure that he had never felt that way before.

He got to see his mother and sister again, and would be spending time with them tomorrow too (they were staying at a nice hotel not too far away) while Lance was at work. Rachel, Marco, and even Lance’s mother had been civil to him. The food was good, talking to his friends was good, and god damn, even though he sucked at bowling (they ended up going after they ate at the diner), he still had fun. It was just such a good day.

“Someone’s happy,” Lance noted, swinging their hands back and forth.

“Mmhm.” Keith nodded, bringing out his key to open the door, tugging Lance inside after him. The Alpha locked the door, and Keith practically threw himself at him.

“Woah!” Lance caught him. “Hel-lo, Gorgeous.” He leaned down and pressed his lips against Keith. It was clearly meant to be a small peck, but Keith wrapped his arms around his neck and pulled him closer.

He backed Lance up, warmth rushing through his body as he tasted the remnants of icing on his lips. Lance grunted with surprise as the back of his legs hit the couch and he went tumbling down onto it. Keith followed him, sitting comfortably on his lap with his legs trapping Lance as he pressed their foreheads together. “You’re the best Alpha, you know that? Amazing and just…just the best. Everything I could ever hope and wish for.”

Lance shuddered a bit at his words (the Alpha was starting to think that he might have just a little bit of a praise kink), tugging Keith forward and slotting their lips together.

Keith hummed appreciatively, tilt his head so that he could be as close as possible, though it still didn’t feel close enough.

“Happy Birthday, Baby,” Lance breathed out as they broke apart briefly before drawing him close.
“Wanna—help me—make it a–happier—one for—both of us?” Keith asked between kisses, his eyes opening slightly to look into Lances.

“Jesus yes,” Lance breathed out, and tried to get up, but Keith pressed all his weight down. It took Lance a moment to realize what was going on. “Keith! People that aren’t us sit on this couch.”

“That doesn’t sound convincing,” Keith replied teasingly. It was true. Lance had never sounded so half-hearted about something before. He looked at his mate through his long lashes. “Besides, it’s our couch. If we wanna fuck on it, we can fuck on it. We can do whatever we want on any surface we want.”

Lance laughed loudly and shifted around so that he was falling backwards onto the cushions, his head cradled on the arm of the couch as Keith’s weight fell with him.

Yeah, they could do whatever it was they wanted as long as they were together.

Chapter End Notes

I was thinking of a way to try and keep people up to date if they don’t follow me on tumblr, so now I have a twitter. I'll make updates about my writing, how chapters are going, or if I'm taking small breaks from writing (like I did after KH3 came out). Also I'll be dropping little hints and teases for upcoming projects from time to time!

my twitter
my tumblr
“…This is Halloween, red and black and slightly green, are you scared, well that’s just fine…”

“I’m going to punt you through the window, Matthew,” Pidge snapped at her brother, sienna eyes flashing angrily as shit tilted her head to glare up at him.

“But it is Halloween!” he cried out, clad in an entire banana costume. It was a vibrant yellow, and completely ridiculous. “And like, we thought we were going to do this on the third, and I had plans for today that I so graciously offered to be here.”

“Plans involving dressing as a giant banana?” Keith asked from where he was checking the camera in his hand. Unlike Matt, he was dressed normally, because why the fuck wouldn’t he? It was the day before Halloween. He had a costume, a pretty awesome one if he could say so, but why the hell would he wear it during the day even if it was Halloween? Matt was a nut ball.

It was going to be a busy couple of days. The three of them were going through this real haunted house today, and tomorrow the entire group would be going through a fake one together after Keith and Lance took Sylvio and Nadia trick or treating.

“Natealie and I are matching,” Matt explained, though that did not explain anything at all. “We’re going to her office party later.” That didn’t explain why Matt had to dress up now, but whatever.

“The owners realized that we’re both Omega,” Pidge explained. “They didn’t want to let us in at night, just in case.” Her voice rose mockingly. “So they let us in to explore as close to Halloween as possible.” She sighed and finished pinning her mic to her shirt. “Might be for the best anyway. You are starting to smell like pre-heat. I thought you said you were good til mid-November when we were planning this?”

Keith shrugged, already well aware of this fact. He realized not long before leaving that he was starting to feel just a little bit off. It wasn’t strong enough for Lance to pick up on it yet, but Omegas were always good at picking up on scents from other Omegas before any other, so it made sense for Pidge to smell him when Lance couldn’t.

“Normally,” he agreed with her statement, “but all those drugs that Lotor put into me really messed me up. Doctor said to expect it to be a bit wonky timing-wise.”

The doctor also said that due to fluctuating hormones, there was a slight chance that Keith’s birth control might not work properly, so it was a damn good thing Lance was taking it too. They’d definitely have to sit down and have a talk about what was going to happen if, by some stroke of sheer bad luck, his didn’t work either. The odds were very much in their favour though, so Keith wasn’t actually worried.

Now wasn’t the time to ruminate on that though. Instead, they had to get this investigation up and running. All of them had cameras to get multiple points of view, though Matt was acting as the ‘main’ camera man. There were still a few places dark enough where they’d need night vision (specifically the basement and cellar), but most of it was lit up enough. Pidge was kind of disappointed, but Keith thought it made the place look eerie as is.

“You guys ready?” Pidge asked, getting nods from both of them. Matt held up three fingers,
counting down to one and pointing at her. “Welcome to another episode of the Pigeon Files! This is a special Halloween episode where Matt, Keith, and I are visiting a supposedly haunted house.” She started talking about the history of the place, which including an Alpha going crazy and killing his entire family, as well as another family that claimed to be possessed by the spirits that made the Alpha go crazy in the first place.

Actually, now that Keith thought about it, that really sounded like the Amityville Horror, didn’t it? That thought nagged at the back of his mind.

They went down to the basement, turning on the night vision as they went. “Some people say that the evil entities first appeared down here because one of the children were doing satanic rituals and accidentally summoned a demon.”

Keith hummed at that. “Do you think he’s an Alpha?”

Matt snorted loudly and Pidge laughed, “Keith!”

He looked at her camera unrepentantly. “What about Jesus? He kinda seems like he would have been a Beta to me, but you never know.”

Pidge cackled loudly at that.

Keith and Pidge set up an EVP recorder and a flashlight, sitting around it as Matt put the main camera on a tripod and went to sit with them. Though the room was dark, their night vision would pick them up.

Announcing the time and place, Pidge paused for a moment before saying, “If there’s someone here with us, we’d like to talk to you. Can you give us a sign that you’re here?” She paused, eyes darting around the dark room. “You can speak into our little device here, or play with the flashlight if you want.”

After a moment, Matt asked, “What’s your name?” He paused, waiting an appropriate amount of time before adding, “Did you die here?”

The questions went on and on. Normally, Keith loved doing EVP sessions, but he had a feeling about this house. A distinct feeling that they were wasting their time there.

When it came time for him to ask his question, he couldn’t stop himself from saying, “Are you completely fake?” Everything about this place screamed cash-grab to him.

Matt opened his mouth to say something else when there was a sudden scratching against the floor behind him. He actually shrieked and threw himself forward away from the noise. Keith’s eyes darted in the direction to came from, seeing a dark mass moving in the dim light provided by the flashlight.

Keith dove towards it, Pidge yelling something behind him, no doubt filming the entire thing like the great friend she was. Somehow, he managed to reach the shadow, his fingers wrapping around a warm, furry body.

Definitely not an evil spectre coming to steal their souls, though it was really unhappy.

“It’s a rat,” Keith spoke up, careful not to push too much pressure on its body. He didn’t want to hurt it.

“What?” Matt asked, sounding far too winded for not really doing anything.
Keith turned, holding his hands up to the camera. The rat squirmed and squeaked in his hands. Matt somehow matched its pitch, moving away from him. He raised an eyebrow, looking from Matt, to the rat, and back again. “What? He’s cute?” He moved his hands slightly and looked at it a little more closely. “I’m gonna name him Barry.”

“Keith, no!” Pidge cried out, though she sounded far too amused to actually mean that. “This is just like the alligator incident!”

Keith thought about that for a moment, remembering the little alligator that he found when they went out to look for the Skunk Ape a couple weeks before. “I miss Greg.”

“I’m sure he misses you too,” Pidge assured him. “But, like, you can’t take Barry home with you.”

In a weird way, Keith was genuinely sad to let the rat go. He always loved animals of all shapes and sizes. They were so much easier to deal with than people. Also, he kind of wanted to keep it to take care of it and hug it and god damn Keith knew exactly what was going on.

Some Omegas, when they went into preheat, wanted to hold and care for things. Not all, of course, and not all the time, but Keith had a mate that he cared about a lot, that he was going to have babies with some day. Given that the entire point of heats was procreation, it made sense that he’d start getting a bit baby-brained or whatever beforehand. It wasn’t the first time that sort of thing happened to him, where he projected that urge to care for something onto a pet. Though that mostly just meant making sure his fish tank was sparkling clean for the fish inside. It wasn’t an uncommon thing to happen to Omegas who didn’t yet have children.

Apparently, for Keith, he was projecting onto a rat. He really needed to get out of this room.

Though they explored the house from top to bottom, they didn’t find a thing of interest. It really didn’t take long for all of them to agree that the house was very likely just a tourist trap and a huge waste of time.

“We’ll have to make our commentary on this amazing, because Barry was the most interesting part,” Pidge noted. Her eyes flickered up to Keith. “You probably won’t be up to that til after your heat, right?”

He did some quick math in his head, and though Dr. Tsai warned him that this heat may be a bit wonky, based on what he knew about himself, he realized that he should be okay for another couple days. “I should be okay tomorrow or the next day. After that though…” He shrugged.

“Alright. Tomorrow’s Halloween, so the next day it is,” Pidge agreed, and they moved to start packing up their stuff. “We’re totally putting in Matt’s scream.”

“No, you’re not,” her brother argued.

“You’re a screaming banana! It was the best thing that happened!”

Keith looked over at them, a smile passing across his lips. Moments like this, with people that weren’t Lance, really proved to him that coming to Florida was the best choice he could have made.

…

Lance, Hunk, and Pidge had a Halloween tradition. Well, Matt was normally included in that as well, but not this year. This year things were changing. Matt was off somewhere else with his girlfriend, but Keith had been added to their group.
The tradition? They chose a theme for their costumes, and wore them while going through the scariest haunted house around. It wasn’t a unique tradition, but it was still theirs.

It was flattering to be included, because really, Lance didn’t have to include Keith in everything. He might be a little hurt if Lance didn’t, but he’d understand. They definitely weren’t strangers anymore, but they were their own people, not just one…super person or something.

Keith snorted at his own thoughts, given his current attire.

He stared at his reflection, taking in the one-piece, black suit that was fitted, but not to the point where it was uncomfortable or felt like it was trying to creep up every little crevice or crack.

When they decided that they were going to be the Avengers, Keith was very quick to call being Black Widow. He was well aware of the fact that a lot of Alphas overly sexualized the character, but damn, Keith admired her so much. She was allowed to be a strong, powerful Omega that used the natural draw that Alphas had towards Omegas to her advantage. She was kickass and amazing, and even though that one movie did a god awful job with her, he still loved the character to pieces.

He was actually very vocal about his issues with said movie when watching it with Lance.

“They should have been together,” Keith ranted.

“Keith…”

“No!” he waved his arms around. “That other romance came out of nowhere! Then they had the gall to put him on a farm. A farm, Lance! Who wants to work on a farm? Do you?”

Lance blinked at him. “Jesus, no.”

“Exactly!” Keith pointed at him, his finger barely a millimeter away from Lance’s nose, causing him to go cross-eyed. “Then she had two moments with Hulk where she was scared of him and oh that translated to sexual tension? That’s stupid.”

“What if I be Hawkeye?” Lance suggested. “I mean, I am a sharpshooter!” He winked at him.

“…I’d like that.”

Okay, maybe Keith was a little too enthusiastic to be able to sort-of play out his MCU OTP.

He looked over his outfit, pretty pleased with it actually. Despite the sexualized images online, Black Widow’s costume was actually pretty practical, and was very easy to turn into one for guy too. It was pretty much the exact same, minus showing off cleavage. Well, he could if he wanted to, but no, he was going to leave it zipped, thanks. Also, Pidge managed to get the tasers to actually work, which was pretty kick ass.

He felt fucking powerful.

A whistle came from behind him, and he met Lance’s eyes in the mirror. His husband came over, wrapping his arms around him and resting his chin on his shoulder. “I’m going to have to keep a close eye on you.”

Keith chuckled, completely okay with the way Lance looked at him. Actually, he was the only person that Keith was fine with whistling at him that way. Probably because he knew Lance wasn’t actually objectifying him. “Don’t shoot anyone.”
Lance laughed in response. The bow and arrows with his costume were fully functional as well, because, as Pidge put it, ‘if we’re going as superheroes we should be able to save the world at a moment’s notice’. Given that she was going as Iron Man, Keith was kind of expecting her to show up in a fully functional suit, and that was terrifying. “I make no promises.” Lance met his eyes in the mirror again, both eyebrows raising as he looked them over. “Jesus, we make a great blackarrow, don’t we?”

Keith blinked. “The fuck is that?”

“It’s your OTP and you don’t know what it’s called?”

“Wouldn’t we be Hawkwidow or Blackeye?”

Lance whined, burying his face in his neck. “Babe, work with me!”

Keith ran his fingers over the exposed arms that were wrapped around him. He knew that Lance kept saying that he had to go to the gym under some misguided belief that he had to get stronger or something. Keith found him plenty strong and attractive. “Trust me, I am.” There was a slight unintentional purr to his voice that he knew his mate caught.

“You smell different,” Lance noted, brow furrowing. “It’s familiar though.”

“Preheat,” Keith explained, watching the Alpha’s face warp with understanding. When they first met this was the way that he smelled. “I need to put a suppressant strip on before we go out.”

“Is that all you need?” he asked seriously.

Keith nodded his head, smiling a bit at the fact that Lance didn’t instantly tell him to stay home. A lot of people, both Alphas and Betas, tended to try (and usually succeeded) to keep Omegas home when they were in preheat under the pretense of protecting them. Reality was, he was fine for now. It was simply the result of the internal shift as his body prepared to go into heat. “I’m not going to go into heat for a few days. We’ve got time to prep and talk.” This happened every three months since he was thirteen, minus that time when he was nineteen where everything was thrown out of whack for a little while. He had this down.

“Okay, you know best,” Lance said with a small nod. “If something goes wonky though, you’ll tell me?”

His heart melted a bit at the acceptance. This was exactly reason why it was so painfully easy to fall for him. God, how did Keith get so lucky? “I will.”

…”

“Oh my god,” Keith whispered from behind Lance. “They’re adorable.”

Lance had to agree with that assessment. The sky was starting to get darker, meant that it was time to get this show on the road. He absolutely loved taking his niece and nephew out for Halloween, and since Lisa was pregnant this year, she was more than relieved when he volunteered to do it again.

“Did you tell them about our theme?” Keith asked as he took in the costumes that Sylvio and Nadia were wearing.

“I mentioned it off hand, but I’m not surprised that they’re dressed like that,” Lance admitted. Before them, Sylvio was dressed as Spider-man, while Nadia was dressed as Princess Shuri. It honestly took everything that he had to not coo at them.
“Tio!” Sylvio called excitedly as he rushed forward. “We’re both superheroes too!”

“You bet we are!” Lance agreed with a fist bump. “You got your bags?” Bags, as in the pillow cases that they would carry around.

“Curfew is at eight,” Lisa reminded him, a slight scowl on her tired face. Lance thought that was awfully early to stop trick-or-treating, but it was the way things worked around there.

“I know, I know,” Lance said, waving her off. “Don’t worry, it’ll be fine.”

Lisa raised an eyebrow at him before looking at Keith. “Off the streets at eight?”

Keith snickered as Lance spluttered. “We’ve got this.”

“Yeah mom!” Nadia agreed before posing. “We’re all superheroes!”

Sylvio nodded in agreement before looking at Keith with excited eyes. “Tio Keith, you’re Black Widow, aren’t you?”

“Yeah?” Keith asked, his expression softening.

“We’re both spiders!”

The Omega blinked at that before chuckling. He crouched down in front of the young boy and said, “I guess that we are, aren’t we? Is that a good thing?”

“It’s the best thing!” Sylvio answered excitedly.

Lance watched the two of them interact and couldn’t help but smile broadly. Sylvio took a lot from their side of the family, and people had mistaken him for Lance’s son when he had the kids out before. So watching Keith smile at him so warmly, watching them interact, made his heart swell. “I think we need some pictures before we go!”

Lisa was quick to agree to that, because of course she was. What kind of mother would she be if she didn’t when they looked so adorable?

Lance passed her his phone, because he wanted pictures of the four of them. Of course, he took pictures of Lisa with the kids too (Luis was working that night while she was home), since that was only fair.

“Let me get one of just the two of you,” she suggested with a smile, and why would Lance ever deny that request? He didn’t have a lot of pictures like that with Keith (though their selfie game was through the roof) and wanted as many as possible. Plus, he knew they both looked hot as fuck.

He felt like preening at the picture when Lisa gave him back the phone, because damn, they looked good together.

“Come on!” Nadia said as she bounced up and down excitedly. “We need to go get candy!” Sylvio agreed with this, and they both ran out to where the car was. The plan was to actually go around his parents’ neighbourhood because it was a proven candy utopia. It was when Lance was a child, and it proved to be now as well. Lance absolutely planned on bringing his own kids around there some day in the future (including when they were in a stroller—he’d go up to the doors himself).

Luckily, the drive to his parents’ house was a pretty short one. Lance considered it lucky, because the kids were so hyped up for trick-or-treating that that were almost bouncing in the back seat (he
was sure they’d literally be launching themselves off of the sides of the car if they weren’t buckled in), and while he was normally cool with their antics, they were a little too wild.

Despite the fact that they parked at his parents’ house, they didn’t bother going in to see them before heading out around the neighbourhood. It would be their last stop, and where Lance (and Keith this year) would leave the kids to spend the night with their grandparents.

“Alright guys,” Lance said. “Stick together, and always stay close to us, okay? Try not to run, cause you could fall and hurt yourself, and we’d have to stop and go home. Don’t go in to any houses without one of us. Don’t go with any adults outside the two of us. If someone tries to drag you into a car, scream as loud as you can no matter what they say. Oh—and—”

“Lance,” Keith interrupted, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. He looked down at Sylvio and Nadia. “Be careful, have fun, watch for sketchy people, we’ll be on the sidewalks, so when your little bags get too full, come dump them in the pillow cases we’ve got. Right?”

He took a deep breath then nodded. “Right. Be free!” The two quickly ran to the first house.

“What was that?” Keith asked as they started walking down the sidewalk together, waiting by the ends of the drive way while Sylvio and Nadia got candy.

Lance didn’t know, if he was honest. He’d never gone off on the two of them before like that. They were smart kids, and Luis and Lisa did a great job teaching them what to do if someone tried to hurt or take them. It was normally enough for Lance.

Except, he’d never personally had anyone taken from him before. Never had someone he cared about kidnapped from right under his nose before. Now he knew what that felt like, and that was knowing that Keith was an adult who could take care of himself too. Little kids weren’t as strong, and while Sylvio was already showing signs that he would be an Alpha, it was unclear whether Nadia would be a Beta or Omega. It wasn’t just adult Omegas that were taken by people like Honerva, and having actually seen that himself made it much more real.

It was something he’d been talking to his therapist about, having started up with them recently.

“Nerves,” Lance admitted, realizing that Keith was waiting for an answer.

The Omega rubbed his hand up and down Lance’s back. “Don’t worry, they’ll be fine. I have working tasers on me, and you have a fully functional bow and arrow.”

He brightened a bit at that. “Yeah, you’re right.” And despite the fact that any place could be dangerous, he knew this neighbourhood and the people there. He knew that there were a ton of trustworthy adults out and about with their own kids.

In fact, Nadia and Sylvio ended up meeting a few friends of theirs’, and set out together in a little herd. It made him feel a lot better.

“Lance McClain, is that you?” He perked up, looking around at an old woman sitting on the bench by her house, dressed up as a witch while giving out candy, enjoying the warm October night.

“Hi Ms. Bell,” Lance replied to her as he paused. “Lots of kids so far?”

“It seems like there are more and more every year,” she said happily. Her eyes looked away from him, and Lance knew that she was looking at Keith. “Who’s this young man?”

Lance looked over to him to see that Keith was focusing on the kids. He chuckled, startling his mate
slightly, who looked around curiously. “This is Keith, my mate.”

The old woman’s eyes lit up excitedly. “Oh yes! Your father mentioned you hate a mate now! It’s nice to meet you, Keith.” He eyed the old woman for a moment before replying in kind, causing her to chuckle merrily. “I won’t keep you so you can catch up to the little ones. I do hope that this means we’ll be seeing your little ones around in a few years.”

Lance laughed. “We’ll see!” The two of them continued following the kids down the road, Sylvio and Nadia running back to them a few times to empty their smaller bags into the big ones that they were carrying with them.

“This is a really nice neighbourhood,” Keith admitted after a while. “We haven’t run into any douchebags that have tried to hit on me yet.”

“I mean, I am right here,” Lance pointed out.

“Yeah, but I have scent blockers on, and you can’t see my ring.” He held up his gloved hand, and that was true enough. The reason most mated Omegas didn’t wear scent blockers was because you couldn’t tell from smell alone that they had a mate.

Still, this was a pretty good place. He didn’t think someone would just waltz up and seriously try to hit on Keith when it was extremely obvious that they were together. Hell, they had matching costumes.

It was getting darker, almost time to go inside when Sylvio and Nadia came up to them with their final bags full of candy. Both of them were trying to hide their yawns, clearly tired from the excitement and exercise.

Lance expected them to perk back up as they got closer to his parents’ house, but both were exhausted. It made him wonder what they did in school that day to be so tired. Nadia, in particular, was so sleepy that Lance took her bag of candy from Keith, who proceeded to carry her.

It to everything Lance had not to coo at them, because Nadia was a little tiny Shuri with her arms wrapped around Keith’s shoulders, her face buried in the cook of his neck, and damn if that wasn’t the cutest thing ever.

“Oh dear, looks like someone had a lot of fun,” his Papá said when she opened the door, a smile playing on her lips.

“We come baring gifts,” Lance replied, holding up the two pillow cases full of candy, even if they strained against his arms some.

They left the bags of candy downstairs, helping to get the kids situated up in the room they always stayed in. He couldn’t help but admire the way Keith tucked them in, an absolutely fond look on his features.

“Sorry,” Keith muttered, joining him in the hall after closing the bedroom door behind him. “I just... get a bit... I dunno... weird with little animals and I guess kids when I’m in preheat.”

Lance laughed at that, pressing a quick kiss to his cheek. “It’s adorable. Don’t worry about it.” He glanced towards the clock. “We do have to get moving to meet up with Pidge and Hunk though.”

Keith nodded, following him down the stairs. Both of his parents were waiting for them down there.

“Heading off to the haunted house with Hunk and Pidge?” his Papá asked.
“Yeah, I heard it’s scarier than normal, this year,” Lance said excitedly. He loved going through it every year. As much as he loved taking the kids trick-or-treating, it was honestly the highlight of his Halloween.

“Are you excited, Keith?” his Mamá asked, and Lance felt warm at the fact that the man was at least trying to be polite to Keith now. They weren’t buddy-buddy with one another, probably never would be, but being civil was good enough.

“I’ve never been to a haunted house before,” Keith admitted, but then paused. “Well, outside of the bad one my high school tried to do in the tech lab.”

“Don’t worry,” Lance piped up. “I’ll keep your safe.” He winked dramatically, earning an eye roll that made him laugh. “But yeah, we gotta get going.”

“We were thinking of having everyone over for supper next week,” his Papá said as they headed towards the front door.

“I don’t think that’s going to work for us,” Lance admitted. He didn’t want to just blurt out that Keith would be in heat, but it wasn’t like he was going to make plans to do anything. Though he would have to inform the aquarium that he wouldn’t be coming in. The vast majority of employers were extremely understanding when it came to that. Mostly because most employers thought it was an Alphas right to enjoy their Omega in heat, but Lance would ignore that for now since it benefitted him at the moment.

Somehow though, he got the feeling that his father understood what he was talking about from the way her eyes darted to Keith and back. Thankfully, she chose not to question it, simply reminding them to be safe and have fun.

“Did you have fun?” he asked when they climbed into the car, firing off a text to Pidge that they were on their way to her house.

“Yeah,” Keith smiled warmly. “All those kids looked like they were having a blast. This seems like a great place to take them for Halloween.”

Lance bit his lip, unable to stop himself from smiling at that. Hopefully in the future, it would be their kids that they were taking around.

…”

They, Lance decided, looked absolutely badass strolling up to the line for the haunted house together as a group. Hunk was dressed as Bruce Banner, but with the skin around his neck painted green like he was in the middle of changing, while Pidge had an Iron Man suit that looked like it was made out of armour. Lance was fairly certain that the thing did everything except for fly. It was terrifying.

Everyone else seemed to think that they looked badass too, judging from the eyes that turned towards them. On one hand, Lance thrived on the attention because fuck yeah they were awesome. On the other, he also found himself more annoyed than normal when appreciative eyes turned to Keith specifically.

He knew that he had an attractive as hell mate. Lance knew that better than anyone else, and honestly, he was kind of proud of him even though he had done absolutely nothing to earn that pride. So yeah, he knew that Keith was going to have heads turn his way in his costume (he genuinely looked like a real-life spy and it was amazing), and he knew that there was nothing he could do about that as long as people kept their hands to themselves.
He didn’t have to like it though. Lance had never been in a relationship with an Omega before, and though Keith had been in preheat before, so much was happening and even then he knew that they weren’t going to spend Keith’s heat together. Now though, he couldn’t help himself. Keith was his mate and he was in preheat, and any jackass would love to get a hold of him. Not that they could smell him or anything, but that just meant that they couldn’t smell Lance on him.

It was funny, because this was the exact thing that Keith mention earlier, and it hadn’t bothered him then, but now it was making him livid.

The thought put him on edge until a hand brushed against his bare arm. He looked at Keith, who sent him a knowing look and urged him forward. “You were glaring at those guys back there.”

“Sorry,” he replied sheepishly.

“Mind your posturing, Lance,” Pidge teased him, laughing when he stuck his middle finger up.

“Oh man, oh man, it’s almost our turn,” Hunk said, practically bouncing on his feet.

“Careful Doctor Banner, don’t want you to Hulk-out on us,” Lance replied quickly. Hunk was always so nervous to go to the haunted houses, but he always sucked it up and went with them. “Don’t want you to rage at any of the workers.” Also, they came pretty early in the day this time, since they all had stuff to do later that night anyway and this specific haunted house was open early in the day. Not that it mattered, since the inside was so dark anyway.

Hunk groaned and then said, “Worry about Keith. He’s the one more likely to punch someone in the face then scream.”

Keith opened his mouth to protest, but then immediately stopped, shrugging instead.

It was very quickly agreed that Keith would walk in the middle of the group. None of them wanted to get banned.

They could hear the screams and shrieks coming from inside of the old warehouse that was transformed into a house of horrors every single year. The owners took great pride in their attraction, as they should, because it was amazing.

“We’re next,” Hunk squeaked as they got closer, already quivering a little bit.

The university student that was manning the door looked them all over, her eyebrows raising up. “Wow, you guys look great.”

“Wow, you guys look great.”

“Don’t we?” Lance replied, flexing his arm in response and puffing out his chest. Keith elbowed him in the stomach, and he started coughing.

The girl laughed, and let them inside.

The first thing that they encountered when they walked inside was a narrow, almost pitch black hallway that forced them to walk in a straight line. It was completely quiet, outside of the faint murmurings behind them.

Pidge led the way with Hunk behind her, followed by Keith, and then Lance brought up the rear. Lance didn’t particularly like being at the back, but he wouldn’t leave Hunk there, and Pidge kind of felt invincible in her costume, so of course she was in front.

That didn’t stop her from jumping when a part of the wall opened up and someone screamed. Hunk
screamed in response, and if Lance wouldn’t have grabbed Keith’s arms, he probably would have ended up punching the poor worker.

It only got worse from there. Or better. It really depended.

The first thing they walked into was what looked like a creepy hotel room with plenty of things that creaked and moaned and groaned, but nothing popped out at them. It was enough to make them tense as they were waiting for the next scare.

It didn’t come until they rounded a corner and someone tried to grab Pidge’s leg. That proved to be a mistake, because she yelped, and ended up stomping on it with her metal shoes.

Needless to say, they all screamed apologies as they took off.

Hunk was nearly in tears as they made their way through a mad scientist’s lab, into a vampire’s torture chamber, and then through a hall that looked like it was covered in spider webs that they had to walk through.

And if anyone asked later on, no, Lance did not scream louder than Nadia could when a giant spider fell on his head. He just almost ended up scaling Keith because he liked his mate, thanks.

Besides, Keith was the weirdo that stopped when a clown tried to chase them to admire its’ knife.

“Where can I get one like that?” Keith asked the clown, who didn’t seem to know what to do since he wasn’t screaming or running. “It looks really cool.”

Needless to say, the clown just slowly returned to its’ starting place.

They all screamed and ran properly when they were going through the graveyard in the end, and some psycho in a mask chased them with a chainsaw.

The entire thing made their hearts pound, and was absolutely thrilling.

“Oh man!” Pidge cried out as they approached the car afterwards, practically skipping in her Iron Man suit. “That was the best one yet. Let’s go again!”

“No way!” Hunk protested as he climbed into the back seat. “I don’t think I could do it again!”

“You okay?” Keith asked, twisting to look at him.

“Well, yeah, it was fun,” he admitted, “but once a year is enough for me. Did you like it?”

“Yeah! It was way better than the ‘haunted’ house Pidge, Matt, and I went to yesterday.” He rolled his eyes, and Pidge snorted at that.

“Best Halloween yet!” Lance spoke up, almost bouncing in the driver’s seat. “We looked awesome! Taking the kids out was fun! That haunted house was fun!” He honestly felt so energized at the moment.

Naturally, that meant that they had to blare cheesy Halloween music while singing loudly as they drove to drop everyone else off, because honestly, there was no better way to end a great day with his friends.

Chapter End Notes
And another chapter bites the dust. Keith has feelings about his ships. I personally don't care, but Black Widow is perfect for Keith, Hawkeye is perfect for Lance, and you know, Hawkeye ended up on a farm.

That's why we're calling it now. Not being put on a bus or something. Put on a farm.
“Do you think that this one is good enough?” Hunk held up a sparkling seashell necklace, light dancing off it in soft rainbows. It was absolutely perfect, and if Lance were a good friend, he’d tell Hunk that. They’d been looking for a present that he could send to Shay for a while now, and this was the first time he seemed to find something he remotely liked.

It was honestly super sweet. Lance never heard of long-distance courting before, but that’s definitely what was going on between Hunk and Shay. From what he understood, she was actually going to be visiting sometime in the near future (with her brother, of course), so Hunk wanted to make a good impression.

So if Lance was a good friend, he’d reassure Hunk that he found a great gift. There were no oceans around where Shay lived, after all, but he was too lost in his own thoughts, because when wasn’t he lately. Is this what it meant to be an adult? To become so consumed by your own life you kind of forgot about your friends? That would suck.

“You okay?”

He broke out of his thoughts, meeting Hunk’s concerned brown eyes. Guilt instantly washed over him, and he nodded his head. “Yeah. Sorry, I’m just a bit antsy.” He looked down at necklace. “Get that one, I’m sure she’ll love it. I swear, I’m not just saying that.” He would never do that to Hunk. Not everyone could be courted by breakfast food fights, after all. Well, no, that sounded a little too domestic to be courting. Jeez, their situation was super weird.

“What’s got your head a million miles away?” Hunk asked as he headed towards the register. “You love shopping.”

Lance hesitated before saying, “I’m just a bit antsy. Um, well, I guess I won’t really be around for the next week or so, cause Keith’s going into heat soon.”

“Oh!” Hunk didn’t look all that surprised. “I guess that makes sense. Normally he smells like you… well himself and you if that makes sense. I was wondering why he was wearing blockers, but preheat…yeah. Wow, it’s been three months already.”

“Yup.” Lance waited patiently as Hunk paid for his purchase.

They walked out of the store, and the other Alpha asked, “It’s your first one together, right? I’d be a bit nervous about that too.”

“I’m just…okay. In Vegas I did get all protective and stuff, but I felt like I couldn’t really act on it or anything cause we literally just met. Then all that shit happened. But now I just feel so…agitated.”
“Most Alphas do when their Omega is going into heat. Even pack mates get more protective.” So it was probably a good thing that Hunk wasn’t able to smell Keith the night before, because he might have been a little snippier at the actors in the haunted house. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of or anything.”

“I’m not,” Lance assured him. “It’s just…odd. Like my mind knows he’s fine, but my instincts just want to wrap him in a blanket and hide him away.”

Hunk actually laughed, clapping a hand onto his shoulder. “You’ll be okay. He’s with Pidge and Matt right now, right?”

“Yeah, they’re working on editing the video they shot the other day,” Lance agreed. “I’m not worried about that. I know he’s okay. It’s just…” He tried to sort out his thoughts. “Keith’s really going to be counting on me, and I don’t want to screw up.”

“Don’t forget, it’s his first heat with you too,” Hunk pointed out. “He’s probably nervous too. You guys will be fine.”

“I hope so,” Lance agreed. He focused back on the task at hand. “Where to next?”

“Do you wanna head home? I won’t be mad.”

“Nah.” He shook his head. “Food court?”

“Food court,” Hunk agreed, and the two set off together.

…

As much fun as it normally was to actually shoot their videos, Keith actually wasn’t a huge fan of editing. He’d help with it of course, and he was always making new graphics for it, but sitting down for hours and cutting, splicing, editing different sounds and commentary over things, and trying to put it together in an entertaining way wasn’t his idea of entertainment.

It was a good thing that Pidge seemed to love doing that even more than filming.

Of course, most days he could suck it up and help out a little more, but he felt so antsy, his skin feeling like it was gross and crawling.

“Barry the rat,” Matt groaned as they were watching through a part that they just edited.

“That’s not as bad as the last video we did. The skunk ape one?” Pige pointed out.

“That’s not as bad as the last video we did. The skunk ape one?” Pige pointed out.

“He threw an alligator at me!”

“He picked up George and held him up to you.” She paused and looked back at Keith, frowning when he didn’t speak up about Barry or George. “Are you okay?”

Honestly, Keith wasn’t quite sure how to respond. He hated feeling so bothered by the fact that he was out of the house. It was this kind of feeling that truly bothered him the most. Every time his preheat was shifting into his actual heat, he got like this. The only time it stopped was when he was in his secure, safe place.

That was what he really wanted right now. He wanted to go home and surround himself with Lance’s scent. It wasn’t that he expected any of the Holts to hurt him, but there were spicy and so many metallic sounds around him that he couldn’t help but feel nervous.
“Keith?” Pidge asked, worry crossing her features.

“I want to go home,” he blurted out, grimacing at how desperate he sounded.

Pidge scented the air, and her eyes went wide. “Oh! Yeah!” She looked at Matt. “Think you can drive us?”

“Oh of course!” Matt leapt up, hurrying to go and find the car keys.

“Sorry,” Keith said to Pidge as she saved everything that they were working on. “I thought I’d be okay. I usually am.”

Her expression was oddly soft as she met his gaze. “Hey, it happens. I’m an Omega too. I get it. Plus things are different this time, right? Those drugs, plus having a mate, right?”

“Yeah,” Keith agreed, because he knew that was exactly what was happening this time around.

When Keith pointed out that Pidge didn’t have to come for the drive home, she immediately protested, and joined him in the back seat instead of the front. Honestly, it was really nice of her. Matt might have been a Beta, so he didn’t smell extremely strong, but it was still really soothing to have another Omega around for now.

Some people were attracted to one specific type of smell, but Keith was never really able to handle the extremely intense scents that came along with most Alphas. He liked the more subtle, tamer smells like Lance’s, Hunk’s, Acxa’s, and a few others he knew, but he always really enjoyed fruity smells. Particularly apples.

Getting into the apartment building, Keith had to struggle not to shudder. There were so many smells, including the remains of some that made his skin crawl. The only thing that helped him keep it together was the fact that Pidge and Matt were on either side of him like a couple of bodyguards.

They didn’t come inside of the apartment with him, simply accepting his profuse thanks, and waiting until he locked the door.

Once he was in his apartment, Keith actually felt much better. It smelled of him and Lance, with small tints of Hunk and Pidge. He knew that no one was coming through the door, not even Lance, who was out with Hunk. That was fine by him.

After his mother and sister went back home, he and Lance decided to splurge a little bit, and ended up going to Lush, shopping for bath bombs, candles, body washes and so much more. Keith wasn’t one to have a skincare routine, but he did love having certain scents around, especially when he was in heat.

(He was pretty much obsessed with a candle that smelled like apple pie, though Lance always side-eyed it as if it insulted him since there was, in fact, no freshly baked apple pie in the apartment.)

Keith also normally wasn’t one for baths, but his muscles were tense from his earlier nervousness, and if he didn’t relax himself now, he’d probably be miserable later.

Their bathtub wasn’t big, something Lance sadly lamented about (a nice, big tub that could fit two was a must on Lance’s dream house list), but it would work for now. It was enough for one person to relax for a little bit.

Once he got it filled with slightly-too hot water, he tossed the So White bath bomb into the water, admittedly very amused by the fizzing and spinning (it was the little things in life you had to enjoy).
The water turned a lot greener than he expected, but that was fine. He still wasted no time shrugging off his clothes and ambling into the warm water.

A sigh of relief overcame Keith as he slumped down as much as possible, closing his eyes and just relaxing for a few minutes.

His mind slowly started going over everything that he needed, and everything that he had to do before his mind went completely baby crazy.

In heats where an Omega didn’t feel safe, it was still common to feel a bit of arousal, since the biological urges didn’t completely go away. It was honestly a little startling how intense those feelings could be during the worst of it though, even for unmated Omegas. It was reportedly even worse for mated Omegas.

Keith got to sort-of experience what a heat would feel like now that he had Lance. Thanks to the drugs in his system at the time, he’d gone through it super quickly, but he was still miserable.

The popular conception of Omegas were that they completely lost their minds during heat, which wasn’t true. However, Krolia took him aside and warned him that those ideas didn’t come out of nowhere. At the peak of their head, in a safe place with the person they loved and respected, an Omega could act that way. It was a pretty high list of demands and conditions to meet, so Keith himself had never experienced that before, and he was honestly a little bit apprehensive about it now.

He’d always been aware of his surroundings during his heats, a bit on edge and ready to move if he had to. It was why he was honestly a bit nervous about this heat, because he knew it was going to be different. As embarrassing as it was that his mother had to talk to him about all of this like he was a little kid, it was good to get an idea of what was going to happen this time around.

In the end, he felt safe in his apartment, and he trusted Lance. Those were really the two things that mattered most.

After a while of soaking, Keith realized that he should probably give Lance a heads' up. He leaned over the edge of the tub, rooting around for his phone in the pocket of his jeans, finding Lance's number at the top of the list. He pressed the call button and held his phone to his ear, careful not to drop it into the water as he waited.

“Hey babe!” Lance answered after a moment. “How’s editing going?”

“I came home,” Keith admitted, amusing himself a bit but playing with the faucet with his foot. “Definitely going from preheat into heat.”

“Okay,” the alpha said, sounding a little more serious. “I’ll head home.”

A part of Keith really did long for Lance to be there, but he knew that was selfish of him. Lance would be spending almost all week with him. “You don’t have to hurry. Spend time with Hunk.”

“You sure?” Lance asked curiously.

“Yeah, but you think you could get some things for me before you come home?”

“Of course!” There was a sound of him fumbling. “What was your list again? Water bottles, juice boxes, granola bars, vitamins…?” He trailed off.

“I got the vitamins, but you could get freezies too?” Keith found that he could never eat much during heats, so instead of big meals or anything, he always had things that he could pick at without going
far. He wasn’t sure what other Omegas did, but he only ever ventured from his nest to change the top layer of sheets (which he had set aside in an easily-accessible pile), to go to the washroom, or to have a shower. He never had much of an appetite, so small snacks and vitamins were essential, and freezies always helped him a bit, since it was easier to keep things clean as opposed to ice cream or popsicles.

“You got it, babe!” Lance said cheerfully. “If you need anything else before I get home, fire me off a text, okay?”

“Alright. I… I’ll see you later.” Keith quickly hung up before Lance could reply, his cheeks burning as he dropped his phone beside the tub. He just almost told Lance that he loved him. It was something that he hadn’t done before.

His heart thudded wildly in his chest. It wasn’t *that* big a deal, he knew what he felt for Lance, and they’d been together for three months now, it wasn’t like they rushed into saying it or anything. It just… mattered for some reason. He knew Lance felt the same way, he’d said it without really realizing it before, but Keith wanted it to matter when he said it. He didn’t want to say it for the first time over the phone while his mind slowly became addled with heat.

He lowered himself into the lukewarm water a little more, determined to stay in there until the water got cold and his fingers started to prune.

Eventually though, he got out, draining the tub wrapping himself in the fluffy towels that they bought before heading down to Lance’s room.

It was becoming a habit to sleep in Lance’s room together at night, so it only made sense that it was the room Keith wanted to build his nest in. He preened a little bit at the sight of it, having kicked Lance out of the room super early in the morning (later finding him asleep on Keith’s bed) so he could start working on it.

Some people liked to use articles of clothing in their nests, but not Keith. Well, he had scarves that had his mother’s and sister’s scents on it, and one of Lance’s hoodies, but for the most part, it was built up around the sides with pillows and covered with sheets (the top layer purposely designed as easy to switch out), his cooling blanket propped up on the side, ready to pull on top of him when he needed it. There were also sheets hung from the walls and ceiling with specially designed hooks made for that type of thing, creating the illusion of more privacy and security like a giant blanket fort.

Honestly, Keith was *incredibly* proud of his nest, and if Lance didn’t like it or made fun of it, he’d probably smack him.

The urge to crawl into his nest overtook him, prompting Keith to drop his towel to the floor, quickly change into loose shorts and a tank top, before climbing in and settling down. There were still things that he had to do, but now that he was fresh, clean, and smelling over apples, a nap sounded like a really good idea.

…

The apartment was quiet when Lance got home, but that didn’t surprise or worry him. He simply made sure the door was locked securely, and tip-toed down to his room. He peeked into the door, and was instantly floored by the construction of the nest inside. Of course he had seen nests before. They were also built for comfort, and really, any dynamics could build them despite it being a thing most commonly associated with Omegas. It was also very common for parents to nap in nests with younger pups. All that being said, he’d never actually seen on this intricate himself.
He scented the air, a protective surge washing over him as he realized that Keith wasn’t in heat yet, but he was very close to it. It wasn’t like they came on suddenly, it was a slow progression into preheat and then heat, but he could still detect the small change.

Instead of walking into the room, he decided to wait until Keith woke up and invited him in. He knew that an Alpha walking in on an Omega in preheat or heat could be a bad thing, but he wasn’t quite sure if that counted towards mates or not.

Instead, he scurried around, putting water bottles and juice boxes into the fridge, freezies and popsicles into the freezer. He made sure to double check all of the spices that they had, because Omegas in heat had a crazy strong sense of smell, and he didn’t want to accidentally make Keith pick up on a smell that would hurt him again.

No one really talked about how strongly scent tied into memory, and it was almost like a curse for Alphas and Omegas. Betas had it lucky with how they could smell less. He realized very quickly that the smell of wasabi put him on edge for some reason, and it made Keith positively nervous, looking over his shoulder almost fearfully.

It took just a little bit of discussion for them to realize that it was because it was a highly similar scent to Lotor’s, so that was one of those things that they decided to not have in the house.

He didn’t know about the turmeric though. It had such a strong scent as it was, but his parents used it in all kinds of things, so Lance hadn’t thought anything of it. Not until he accidentally got it all over Keith. Not his mate fell into the worst panic attack that Lance had ever seen from him.

Just thinking about it made his heart ache, but it also made rage creep up within him too. Apparently turmeric was pretty close to the scent of the Alpha that assaulted him. There was nothing he could do to help outside of getting rid of the spice, air out the apartment, and light those apple caramel candles they found.

Everything seemed to be good, and Lance was sure Keith had the room all sorted out. He thought for a moment, before his eyes widened and he darted down towards the bathroom, just to check it.

Not that he expected there to be turmeric or wasabi or anything like that in the bathroom or anything. Lance just felt like he had to do something. He didn’t like just sitting still.

He heard shuffling from the room (the walls were really thin) and perked up a bit. He left the room and pressed his hand against the door. “You awake, Babe?” He heard the confirmation from inside, but still didn’t open the door, even though he normally would have just thrown himself into the room. Instead, he asked, “Can I come in?”

There was a moment of hesitation before Keith called out, “Yeah.”

With a grand flourish, Lance threw open the door and flounced inside, posing as he did. His theatrics proved to be successful, judging from the soft, fond look on Keith’s face (who hadn’t bothered to get up, still lounging comfortably in his nest).

With that thought, Lance’s eyes turned towards the fabric structure before him with a whistle. “This is impressive. Seriously. I think this is the best one I’ve ever seen.” He wasn’t lying either.

Keith smiled broadly and held his arms out, his fingers twitching like he was trying to refrain from making grabby fingers, which was fucking adorable.

Of course Lance went to him. He’d only ever been in his Mamá’s nest as a pup, and maybe hastily made one himself when he was sick, but it was nothing compared to the sheer masterpiece that Keith
He sunk into the nest, nuzzling his face into Keith’s neck, smiling at the gentle purr he got in response. “Hmm…almost there?”

“Almost,” Keith agreed, running his hand up and down Lance’s back as he cuddled him close.

“Still feel good enough to go over some things first? Just to make sure?”

There was a split second of hesitation before Keith nodded his head. “While cuddling?”

“Of course!” They shifted so that Lance was laying on the bottom of the nest (which was super soft and comfortable), and Keith was tucked on his chest.

“Okay, so,” Lance started, “we need to establish rules and stuff while you’re all here, clear minded. I never asked, but do you have like a trigger word?” Trigger words in the sense he was using them were more like safe words than anything else. The idea was that it would trigger the brain, even if a person was deep into their rut or heat, because it was drilled into their mind as an important word. “Mine’s papaya.” It would instantly drag him out of the headspace that he was in during a rut. They were supposed to be unique, perhaps something they wouldn’t normally say to retain the impact of the word.

“Platypus,” Keith replied.

“That’s adorable,” Lance positively gushed. “So cute.”

Keith gently slapped his chest. “Shut up.” He thought for a moment before shifting so that he was leaning on one arm, so they could clearly see one another. “There is one thing. One super important thing.” Lance nodded his head. “You need to make sure I take my birth control.”

That made a ton of sense. It was powerful stuff, able to start working quickly. However, the downside was that it stopped working just as quickly. One day off, including during heats and ruts, could make the entire body go a little bit wonky and it could stop working.

It really wasn’t a problem, because Lance was on birth control too. The problem stemmed from the fact that heats could trigger ruts too, which in turn could impact him. If Keith didn’t take his pills, and Lance went into a rut, it was also certain that he’d get pregnant. As much as Lance cooed over the thought of having kids with Keith, they weren’t ready for that yet.

“I won’t want to take them, so you have to make sure I do,” Keith admitted. Lance raised an eyebrow, and he flushed a bit. “I was cooing and cuddling with a dirty rat while in preheat. I already know I’m going to be all baby-brained during the worst parts of my heat, which is usually day two, three, and I’ll start coming down a bit on day four. I mean, I feel…safe and happy with you, and yeah, my brain is definitely going to be all sex and babies during the worst of it. Slip it into my food or drinks if you have to. I am giving you permission.”

Lance’s stomach twisted at the thought of drugging Keith’s food. “I…”

“I know,” Keith said quickly, and it hit Lance why he really wanted to talk about it. Not just for practicality’s sake, but because they both realized during their first joint therapy session, they came to the conclusion that just the thought of it made them both super uncomfortable. That made a ton of sense, because they’d both consumed the drink that Lotor drugged in an attempt to get Keith.

This was different though. So very different. This was someone who trusted him, and someone who
he trusted in return. Keith wanted him to do this, and it was for his health and not harmful at all. Lance would just have to remind himself of that when he crushed the pills and put them in Keith’s drinks and food. Intent and permission were so important. “I’ll make sure you don’t miss out on your pills, and I swear to you, I’m not going to miss out on any of mine either.”

Keith smiled at him, laying back on his chest. Lance ran his fingers through his hair, earning a soft, happy chirrup in response, which was the most adorable thing ever.

“I should be able to get to the bathroom and shower on my own for the most part,” Keith said. “I try to do it once a day cause, uh…well…”

“Sex is messy,” Lance said with a laugh. “So heats are even messier. I got it.” It was nothing to be ashamed of, though he knew that a lot of Alphas (and some Betas) groaned and went on about the ‘downsides’ of heats, which including cleaning up some messes.

“Right,” Keith repeated with a nod. “Like…if you could…maybe help me out with some cool clothes in the mean time?”

Lance nuzzled his forehead. “Sponge baths it is!”

Keith snorted “You know what I meant! Sweat and all…”

“And all.”

“Lance!”

He laughed and squeezed him firmly. “I got you. I promise.”

Apparently, Keith liked to schedule things during his heat. He had a special ringtone on his phone that was Acxa saying the word ‘platypus’ to jerk him out of whatever headspace he was in. This time though, they sat together, figuring out when to set alarms on Lance’s phone to remind them about eating, drinking, showers, bathroom trips, and so on. When the alarms went off, Lance would be the one to wrangle Keith. The Omega insisted that he didn’t have to do that for him, but Lance wanted to.

Once that was done, they settled back down against one another, Lance’s fingers trailing up and down his arm, his mind trying to think of anything else that they needed to talk about. Honestly, he was a tiny bit nervous himself about the whole thing. Keith didn’t exactly have great experiences with Alphas in the past, and before they had sex (not counting the time they couldn’t remember), his last experience all together with that was when the nameless Alpha raped him. Not to mention more recently only escaping a rape attempt due to a severe allergic reaction.

That was why Lance let Keith decide when to take that leap. It was why he listened to him carefully, respecting what he wasn’t, and what he was okay with. He needed to make sure that those things were still the same during his heat.

It was such an awkward conversation to have, but so, so important. “Okay, boundaries, things you’re okay with. Just to make sure. I remember everything you said but…anything different? Don’t be nervous.”

In the midst of things during their first time together, Lance caught onto Keith’s nervous scent, stopping things entirely until the Omega finally admitted that the thought of knotting freaked him out a bit. Retroactively, that made a ton of sense, given his last experience with that (that wasn’t their forgotten bonding moment). So, he assured him that it wouldn’t happen, and he kept his word until get wanted to give it a shot the last time.
“No restraints, blindfolds, anything like that,” Keith reminded him.

“Of course not.” He himself was actually kind of into the idea of being restrained or tied up, but things like that were enough to make Keith panic. He was okay with being, you know, *underneath* Lance, he was okay with holding hands (knowing that he could very easy toss Lance aside if he wanted to), but he couldn’t handle bend held down, or even any *talk* of tying him up.

“Sex, same rules in general,” Keith said with a note. “Almost everything is fine, knots too, but not, you know…butt stuff.” He flushed vibrantly.

Lance laughed at that. “No butt stuff.” That had the potential to be dangerous when Alphas were involved. Omegas has very specific biology to be able to handle Alphas ruts and knots, so if not done properly, other things could go very, very badly.

Unable to help himself, he winked at Keith. “We can save that for me.” Of course, male Betas and Omegas didn’t have quite the same problem that Alphas did.

Keith was normally pretty composed, but his entire face exploded into a bright red blush and he once again smacked Lance’s chest. “Oh my *god*.”

The Alpha laughed again. He nuzzled Keith again, unable to stop himself. Jesus, his mate shouldn’t smell this good. It should be illegal. “Seriously though, anything else? Like…I’ll tell you before I move you and things like that? Keep you informed?”

“I trust you,” Keith said immediately, “that’d be nice though.”

Honestly, Lance was pretty happy with how this conversation was shaping up. There was one other thing though. One thing that they needed to discuss. It was a huge thing that they couldn’t ignore.

“Like said, I’m going to take my meds and make sure you take yours, but, well…” He trailed off, knowing that Keith would know where he was going.

“Sometimes things happen, and they stop working,” Keith said grimly. They both knew what would happen in that case. Lance watched his hand drop down to his stomach, and had to wonder what he was thinking. Was he remembering what it felt like to have something growing inside of him? It wasn’t there for long after that Alpha hurt Keith, but he’d been aware of it for a little bit before he took matters into his own hands. Or was he thinking about what it might feel like to have *their* child in him.

Warmth rushed through Lance at the thought, but he *knew* for a fact that they weren’t ready. Also, a part of him really just wanted to keep Keith to himself for a little while (they’d definitely have to schedule weekly date nights once they had kids, because there was a spark between them and he wasn’t going to let it go out).

That being said, sometimes accidents happened, and it was better to be prepared for that. “If it happens, I’ll support whatever you choose to do. No matter what it is. I swear it.”

Keith sighed. “I’m pretty confident it won’t, but if it does…it’s not the worst thing. I’d rather it didn’t right now, but I think I could handle it mentally.”

“You don’t have to decide right now,” Lance assured him. “Especially since it probably won’t happen.”

“I know.” Now the Omega sounded so sure of himself that Keith could only nod with him. “I just don’t want *you* to be nervous about it. Not just because it’ll make me nervous. Because I genuinely
don’t want you worried.”

Lance pressed his lips to Keith’s forehead, affection rushing through him. Never before with his past girlfriends, or the hookups he had between them, had he ever felt so safe and loved. He didn’t know what he did right to deserve this, but he would forever thank fate or whatever it was that lead him to crashing into Keith at the casino that night.

Chapter End Notes

Consent is so important and though it might be a bit uncomfortable at first, having conversations like they did is a must with a partner!
The second that his Papá got wind of the fact that Keith was going into heat very quickly, she called Lance and tried to give him a little bit of last minute advice. Or at least, a warning that the first one with a mate was always much more intense than the ones that come later, or even heats with the same person prior to mating.

Lance kept her words in mind, but in retrospect, he was still surprised by just how intense it was. Not just empathizing with Keith either. It was intense on a personal level for him that had absolutely nothing to do with sex. In fact, heat sex where he knew Keith was comfortable and entirely okay with what was going on was actually pretty fun. He’d gotten quite a few smiles and laughs from the Omega.

Lance glanced down at Keith, who was asleep with his head on his chest. He ran a hand up and down his back. They were a couple days out from that now, onto what Keith called ‘the bloody business no one talks about regarding heats’, but he couldn’t forget the feelings. They were honestly bothering him a bit.

The protectiveness was one thing that Lance expected. Keith absolutely trusted him not just to be around him during such a vulnerable time, but to help take care of him in so many ways. From sex, to reminding him that *alarms are going off it’s time to eat*, to simply making him laugh and smile.

He found that he was incredibly responsive to any shifts in Keith’s attitude or emotions, which he didn’t expect. It made him twitchy and almost paranoid, especially in the moments where Keith went to use the washroom or have a cool shower on his own. The Omega didn’t ask him to prowl outside the door on guard, but he did. He also found himself zooming through his own showers and business, ignoring his skincare routine and everything just to get done quicker.

Well, he did, until Keith told him to knock it off and be normal.

His attitude wasn’t just about trying to protect Keith though. There was something else that almost frightened Lance. It was the sheer possessiveness he felt.

Some people often likened their instincts as a secondary thing within them, which Lance thought was dumb, and almost like they were excusing their shitty attitudes towards other people. Now though, he kind of got it. It was a pretty good metaphor. It frightened Lance to know that he could feel so possessive. How he could worry about needing to stay near Keith because *what if another Alpha showed up?* Forget that they were already mated and their apartment was sealed down. Forget that Lance had no doubt that Keith was unwaveringly loyal (he’d been very vocal about how much he now despised his sister’s mate for cheating on her).

At the height of it all, where Keith was at his worst, it took every ounce of self-control Lance had to not fall into a rut. At the absolute worst moment, while he crushed up Keith’s birth control to mix in his drink as per his request, his mind pointed out that forgetting to give him that wouldn’t be a bad thing.

Lance literally slapped himself in the face for that one, because intrusive thoughts like that could kindly go *fuck* themselves. Not today Satan. Not *ever*. The disgust he felt with himself was enough to keep him rut-free for the rest of the time.
He felt awful about it, and promptly admitted to Keith after his heat was over.

“You didn’t though,” the Omega pointed out. “Many Alphas would have. Everyone gets weird thoughts like ‘what if I did something bad’ but they’d never do it. If anything, you proved yourself.”

Keith tried to describe to him what it felt like, but he wasn’t exactly the most poetic person. He felt safe and happy nearly the entire time, his small spikes of anxiety so rare compared to past heats. He’d been completely coherent the majority of the time, though he didn’t stray far from his nest. There were some moments when he was clearly lost in some kind of headspace, and Keith described it as feeling just content and happy about everything, at least this time. Apparently any other time, he felt a bit anxious and desperate in a bad way.

Lance never spent a heat with someone before, but he knew now that the descriptions of them were very wrong.

Keith shifted a bit in his arms, eyes blinking open slightly. He glanced around before muttering, “Too early. Why are you awake?”

Lance chuckled, nuzzling his forehead. “It’s almost noon.”

“And it’s Saturday.” He burrowed into the blankets a little more. “More sleep.”

“We have a lot to do today,” he pointed out. “Groceries, gotta go to the pharmacy, and date night!”

Keith opened his eyes, peering up at him unhappily. “We don’t have to go to the pharmacy. I’m not pregnant.” It was something they agreed on, to get an actual pregnancy test afterwards, though there was very little doubt in Lance’s mind that his mate remained pup-free. “I’m bleeding out of my vagina. If something tried to cling on in there, it’s out now.”

Lance was pretty sure that wasn’t how it worked, but hey, Keith knew himself better. “Don’t look at me. This was your idea.” Mostly just so they could completely assure everyone that no they were not having kids yet, thank you very much. Lance himself heard so many people say something along the lines of ‘but are you sure sometimes it’s not obvious’, which might be true but was kind of insulting.

Betas, yes, they had to wait a little longer to find out if they were expecting so a question here or there made sense. Omegas? You could tell within days unless things were weird. They were both positive, but it would be good to say anyone prying into their business that yes, Keith took a test. It was just them for now.

Keith hummed a bit, but instead of getting up, he curled up under the blankets more. “Still not a lot. Sleep in more.”

Lance laughed at that, and honestly, he couldn’t blame him. He too wanted to just lounge around all day, though he knew that they couldn’t.

A few more minutes wouldn’t hurt anything though.

…

The pharmacist closest to them, Keith had come to find out, was actually pretty chill. There were a few, Keith knew, that were almost belittling. They’d question an Alpha if they let their Omega have birth control, and they guarded pregnancy tests like they were given the duty by some kind of ancient deity or something.

True, pregnancy tests were closely monitored (hence why Acxa had to steal some for him years ago),
and it was required to submit the results within 24 hours (it took ID to get them). There were specific rooms that they could be taken in.

It was more and more common to find tests that used just a little prick of blood from a finger as opposed to urine or anything like that. The rooms allowed their partner to sit with them, and if an Omega couldn’t prick is or herself, the pharmacist could help them out.

“I can do it,” Keith assured the pharmacist. “I know I’m not pregnant, but it’s just to confirm to everyone.” Lance would be able to access that information to so people if need be.

The blood tests took a little bit longer than other ones, but that was fine. It beat peeing on a stick, or waiting for results from a hospital.

“What if it did turn out positive?”

Keith raised an eyebrow as he looked up at Lance, who was staring at the little screen on the test with an intense expression.

“Then I’d ask for another one,” he replied easily. A smile ticked up on Lance’s lips and the Alpha rolled his eyes. “Lance, don’t worry about it. It’s not going to happen, not yet. And even if it did, I told you before, it’d be okay. Not as okay as waiting, but it wouldn’t be the end of the world.” It wouldn’t. Keith wasn’t ready for that kind of responsibility yet, neither one of them were, but it wouldn’t be the worst thing. “Why, would you turn tail and run?”


“Joy,” Keith quipped sarcastically before the timer went off. He peered down at it, and as expected, it said negative.

Lance whooped. “Freedom from dependants!” He held up a hand, and Keith burst out laughing as he high-fived his ridiculous mate.

They happily reported their findings to the pharmacist, got their prescriptions since they needed to refill those anyway, and happily went on their way.

Keith felt good about that day, and was actually glad they decided to get checked even though he knew he didn’t need it. There was something entirely freeing about it. Not only that, but it was concrete proof that he could trust Lance, who he knew had struggled in some moments, his mate was very up front about it, having felt awful. Keith wasn’t put-off about that though. He knew Lance was only human, and though wildly exaggerated, stories of human instincts did have an origin. He was honestly kind of proud that Lance overcame those small moments, proving once again that Alphas could control themselves if they even put minimal effort into trying.

So many didn’t bother trying, and not only that, but embraced the idea and excuse of ‘it’s in my instincts I can’t’ help it’ over anything else.

Once again, Keith couldn’t help but marvel at the fact that he ended up with someone so inherently good. That wasn’t how stories like what happened to them were supposed to go. Meeting, bonding, and marry one another in a drugged-drunken haze? Those never turned out well. He’d never promote it as a good thing in general. For once in his life, he’d been the exception in the best way possible.

The second that they settled into the car, Keith leaned over and pressed a quick kiss to Lance’s lips. The Alpha blinked before asking, “What’s that for?”
Keith shrugged as he settled back in his seat. “Felt like it.”

“You felt like it?”

“What of it?” he challenged, an eyebrow raising up.

Lance snorted and shook his head. “You’re ridiculous.”

“For wanting to kiss you?” He crossed his arms in front of him. “Fine then. No more kisses.”

“Wait, no! That’s not what I meant!”

Keith turned away so that Lance couldn’t see the smile that he just couldn’t keep hidden. What a ridiculous mate. He was so lucky to have him.

…

“So, my family goes hard for holidays,” Lance said, leaning on the cart as he pushed it forward. “Thanksgiving is no different. Heck, it might as well be called Family Day. A nice autumn day to spend with family and be thankful for one another.”

“Family Day’s in February,” Keith noted offhandedly as he compared the red peppers in his hands.

Lance made a face at that. “Not the point. My family goes hard. It includes extended family that’s nearby. So we’re all kind of expected to bring something that Mámá assigns.”

Keith snorted and looked at Lance with amusement, only to be met with a very serious face. “Oh, wow, you’re serious?”

“Deadly,” he said with a nod. Keith stared at him skeptically, but he didn’t understand. This was very important.

“So what’s our assignment?” There was that bite of sarcasm as he looked at some sort of strange white-carrot-thing and placed it in the car. (Parsnips? Is that what that was? Why did they need those?)

“Pie. Apple. Not pumpkin.” It was very important that it was apple. That was the only kind his family could universally agree on. Any other kind caused so much needless drama.

Keith scrunched his nose. “You know how to make apple pie?”

“Well, no. Normally I do the mashed potatoes, but after the churros Mámá assumed you could bake since everyone else only does an okay-ish job, so he changed ours to pie.”

The Omega’s eyes widened. “Lance, I burned my batch! Hunk helped me! I can’t bake!”

They stared at one another before Lance sighed. He wasn’t going to tell Keith that he actually requested apple pie, because Keith seemed to love the smell of apples, and honestly, it was getting torturous coming home to the smell but no pie. “I can always tell him that it’s a no-go. Get someone else to do it.”

He wasn’t at all trying to be manipulative, but Keith’s eyes lit up with a burning flare of a challenge. “We’ve got a couple weeks. We can figure this out and make the best fucking pie in existence!”

“Fucking pie!” A little pup, only a toddler, repeated while swinging his legs back and forth in the cart his mother was pushing beside them.
Lance absolutely lost his shit while Keith turned to apologize frantically to the boy’s extremely displeased mother.

“Thanks for the help,” Keith muttered after the woman stopped away, her baby still babbling on about ‘fucking pie’.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t help it,” Lance replied with a laugh, leaning against him. “That was one of the funniest things I’ve ever seen. Oh man, our kids going to curse like sailors.” He pecked Keith’s cheek and kept going. “Alright, let’s find the right kind of apples!” They still had a lot of other groceries to get, but the pie was definitely more important.

…

**Lance > Thanks...for nothing jerks**

**Lance:** We doing a Friendsgiving this year? I heard a certain Omega was visiting? ;)

**Hunk:** Yeah, Shay’s here but so is her brother and he keeps giving me the stinkeye.

**Hunk:** I don’t think he likes me.

**Allura:** I only knew you for a couple days face to face, but you’re a delight, Hunk.

**Lance:** This is why we stan 1 (one) queen.

**Allura:** <3

**Shiro:** Where’s Keith? I keep trying to call him and he’s not answering.

**Lance:** Busy.

**Shiro:** …with what?

**Allura:** Did he find another animal! The rat in the video was hideous but it was hilarious!

**Lance:** God I hope not.

**Pidge:** The Pie.

**Lance:** The Pie.

**Shiro:** What?

**Hunk:** The Pie.

**Allura:** The Pie.

**Shiro:** You know what they’re talking about?

**Allura:** No.

**Lance:** Anyway, I was helping, and I was helping good. But then I got kicked out cause I kept eating the apples, which, rude.
Pidge: How many times did you cut yourself with the apples?

Hunk: …you mean you got sent to the couch that’s in the same room?

Lance: I’m not used to knives this sharp.

Lance: And nO. It’s our living room, not our kitchen. It’s just…open concept…

Lance: ANYWAY

Lance: No friendsgiving?

Hunk: Can’t. One with the fam, and one with Shay’s fam.

Pidge: Moving quick?

Hunk: It’s not like I met her, married her, and bonded with her all within the span of a couple hours.

Lance: liSTEN

Pidge: Point made.

Pidge: Anyway, Nonna would never forgive him if I ditched.

Pidge: You don’t disappoint Nonna.

Pidge: You just don’t.

Pidge: Matt would back me up…but we never added him. For good reason.

Allura: I would /love/ a Friendsgiving, but I’ve been officially banned from air travel. We’re having Coran, Krolia, and Acxa over.

Keith: RIP none of you can cook.

Allura: I am a fantastic cook, Kogane.

Keith: Not my name, Shirogane.

Lance: No, it’s definitely not ;)

Shiro: lance.

Pidge: The dad vibes…

Hunk: Keith! How’s the pie?

Keith sent image IMG_1045.jpg

Pidge: That actually looks really good wtf?

Hunk: It does!!! Good job!! Did you use the recipe I gave you?

Lance: Of course we did! And it looks even better irl
Lance sent image IMG_7849.jpg

**Pidge:** did you just take a selfie with the pie?

**Lance:** Um yes?

**Pidge:** ok carry on

**Lance:** The fam is going to cry when they see this.

**Lance:** !!!!

**Lance:** BABE! You should make them all the time?

**Keith:** No.

**Pidge:** Ha! Rejected!

**Lance:** :O :O :( :'( Babe why?

**Keith:** 1. Too much effort.

**Keith:** 2. Too expensive.

**Keith:** 3. You’ll get fat.

**Shiro:** Aren’t you two in the same room?

Lance ignored the phone, hurt expression on his face. “So the truth comes out, huh? You only like me for my body? You wouldn’t want me anymore if I got chubby.” He sighed dramatically flopped onto the couch. “Fine then! I wouldn’t like you if you got chubby either!”

He heard Keith hum thoughtfully before saying, “Well, at least I know what you’ll really think when I’m pregnant.”

Lance thought for a moment, then panic erupted into him and he shot up. “No! Nope! Didn’t mean that!” Good god he’d seen some pregnant people get really upset over that and less. “That’s different.”

**Lance > Thanks...for nothing jerks**

**Keith:** Is it rude to tell a person that you won’t like them when they get fat because pregnant?

**Lance:** that’s nOT WHAT I SAID.

**Keith:** It’s what I heard?

**Shiro:** You’re pregnant????????????

**Keith:** Jesus no.

**Keith:** That’s future me’s problem.

**Keith:** But I guess I know in advance that Lance is going to find me gross
“Oh my god! Keith!” Lance whined. “Stop telling them that! Allura’s going to materialize here to beat me.”

Keith laughed loudly at that, clearly amused by the entire thing, and that was how Lance knew that he wasn’t being serious, that he was just teasing him. His indigo eyes positively glinted as he said, “Through better or worse, Lance. Better or worse.”

“I’ll give you worse!” Lance launched himself at the Omega, who snorted and leapt out of the way. Somehow the chase took them through their entire, tiny apartment, through Keith’s room, then Lance’s, and then back to the kitchen.

Keith had his back to Lance, facing the microwave. Of course, the Alpha took that opportunity to practically throw himself at Keith, who spun around at the last second and held something out in front of him.

Lance froze, staring at Keith with wide eyes. “You…made a second pie?”

“I made you one,” he admitted. “It’s a bit smaller than the other one, and doesn’t look at nice cause I had to do it while you weren’t paying attention, but yeah.”

The Alpha stared at it with wide eyes, nearly tearing up. No one ever made him a pie before, just because. Not even Hunk. Sure, Hunk made extras and gave him some, but never one just for him.

“You…oh my god, Keith.” He took the pie from him, set it on the counter (because you bet he was going to rip into that baby later), and pulled Keith into a hug.

“It was just a pie…a really tiny one,” Keith said, more than a little amused as Lance pepper kisses on every inch of exposed skin that he could reach.

“It’s not—nobody ever—and I just…god, I love you.” He didn’t realize exactly what he declared out loud, but when he did, he didn’t regret it. Despite their beginning, Lance had known couples that said that much sooner. Some even said it on their first date, though that was definitely a bit inappropriate and almost desperate-sounding (to him, at least).

“I know.”

What? “What?” What kind of response was that?!

Keith chuckled, cheeks pink, eyes happy. “You told me that before. Don’t even think you realized.”

Lance didn’t at all sound like a balloon letting out air. Nope, not at all. “What the heck? That was supposed to be a super romantic, dramatic moment!” He hid his face in his hands. He didn’t even remember saying that before, but if Keith said he did, he was pretty sure that he wasn’t lying. Why would he lie about that?

“Hey.” Keith put a hand to his cheek, still very amused. “This is still the first time you told me on purpose. It counts.” His eyelashes fluttered slightly. “And you know what? I’m pretty sure I love you too.”

Lance’s heart jumped in his chest, warmth spreading through him. “Yeah?” Wait a second. “Pretty sure?”

“I could use a little more convincing.”
Oh. Ohhh. Lance smirked and leaned in close to him. “My Omega thinks he’s a clever one, doesn’t he?”

Leaning even closer, Keith brushed his nose against Lance’s. “I know I am. What’s my Alpha gonna do about it?”

_Jesus Christ_. Lance leaned forward the rest of the way to catch his lips in a kiss. What was he going to do about it? He was going to kiss the living daylights out of him, then drag him back to their bedroom for the rest of the day. Maybe the night too, since they didn’t have to be at his parents’ house until later the next day.

Yeah, that sounded like a great idea.

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The McClains never did anything half way. Seriously, the decorations were something to be both admired and feared (the fear came from the potential of them falling down or something and the wrath it would bring).

All of Lance’s siblings, their partners, his parents, and grandmother were there, along with a couple aunts, uncles, and cousins.

It was actually kind of wild.

There was plenty of drinks, including warm apple cider of both the alcoholic, and non-alcoholic variety.

Ms. McClain eyed the drink in Keith’s hand, and asked, “Are you quite sure _that’s_ the one you want, dear?”

He blinked and looked down at the cider, aware that it was the alcoholic one. “Yeah. Lance is driving.”

“Oh, and you’re _sure_ it’s okay to drink _that_ one? Why not have the other one? Just to be safe.”

Keith looked at Lance, raising an eyebrow at him. His Alpha narrowed his eyes before they went wide and round. “Oh! Oh it’s fine!” He waved his hands around. “No pups. Keith’s not pregnant.”

Lance’s father genuinely looked disappointed, and Keith couldn’t help but bristle a little bit. If he even thought there was a _chance_ he was pregnant, he wouldn’t let a drop of alcohol anywhere near his bloodstream. What kind of person did she think he was?

His annoyance definitely showed through in his scent, her expression softening as she placed a hand on his shoulder. “I didn’t mean it that way. I admit, I was just fishing to see.”

“We’re waiting,” Keith told her, knowing that they had this conversation before. “At least a year. At least. Maybe more.”

She pouted slightly and said, “Yes, I know, and I _am_ proud of you both for coming to such a mature and smart decision.”

“But?” Lane prompted.

“But more grandkids would be nice,” she admitted with a dramatic sigh.
Subtly, Keith’s eyes slid over to where Lisa was. She was close enough to have heard the
conversation, an amused smile rising up on her lips. No one else knew yet about the news she
divulged to him and Lance a while ago now.
Sitting down to eat with the entirety of the McClain family actually getting along (with no
unnecessary conflict, and without Krolia eyeing everyone, ready to pounce if they said the wrong
thing to her son) was an odd thing. Everything looked formal, and they were all dressed fairly nicely,
but it was completely wild.
The food was great. Generally a lot spicier and flavourful than Keith was used to, but hey, that
worked for him. It was good.
“I was a bit surprised when Lance requested to do the pie this year,” Mr. McClain noted. “But now I
can see why. This is quite good.”
Firstly, Keith took the compliment, especially coming from his mother-in-law. Secondly, he turned
his narrow gaze towards his mate, who cowered down a little bit. “He asked?”
“I just wanted pie!” Lance burst out before anyone else could reply to Keith. Marco snorted, and
Rachel rolled her eyes at him.
Luis cleared his throat and said, “There is something we’d like to tell everyone while you’re all
here.”
“Nope!” Rachel burst out. “Nope! You are not stealing my thunder!”
He narrowed his eyes at her.
“I’m getting married!”
“We’re having a baby!”
There was a long, intense pause, before the table exploded to life with excitement and
congratulations for both.
Keith scooted back out of the way, leaning into Lance as they watched the family gush over Luis,
Lisa, Rachel, and her partner, Bella.
“Isn’t it nice to not be the center of attention for once?” Lance muttered, close to his ear. He was
watching his family with a warm smile on his face.
“You knew about Rachel,” Keith noted, staring up at Lance with interest. “How’d you keep that a
secret?”
“I only found out about half an hour ago,” Lance admitted, and that made a bit more sense. The
Alpha sucked at truly hiding things from Keith. Even before his birthday, Keith knew that his mate
was up to something, he just didn’t know what it was. “You know, when I was younger, I used to
imagine just how excited my family would be when I told them that I was getting married. That I had
a mate.” His slipped his arm around Keith’s shoulders. “But, I wouldn’t change what we had for
anything. Well, I mean, if it was you in another scenario, then maybe, but only if it was you.”
Keith sighed and leaned onto him, nodding his head silently. He couldn’t remember the last time he
trusted someone so explicitly. He didn’t doubt Lance’s words at all.
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“Look at that!” Lance gushed as he stared at the image on his phone. “Look at it, Keith! It’s so cute”

Keith narrowed his eyes at the picture before saying, “It’s a blob?”

He squawked at that. “You can very clearly see that this is a baby, Keith.” He turned back to the sonogram, cooing at it.

After regarding his mate oddly for a moment, Keith turned his attention back to his phone, and the video that was on it. “Uh, nice baby?”

Shiro laughed loudly at that, Allura leaning against him so that she could see into the image as well. She beamed and said, “Are you sure you don’t want one now? Just picture how he’ll react when it’s yours.”

The thought warmed Keith a bit, because Lance was over the moon about Luis and Lisa having a baby (she was due in March apparently), and seeing the sonogram Allura sent over put him over the moon.

“Not yet,” Keith assured her. Honestly, for as ‘progressive’ as the current group of people around him seemed to be, he had to field that question a lot. He also thought about it a lot too, more than he wanted to admit. It wasn’t like it was always on his mind, but it was there enough to sort-of play into a couple Omega stereotypes. “Do you know what your baby is yet?”

“It’s hard to tell before they’re born,” Shiro reminded him. “Though...did you read that new research that says that dynamics can be classified at birth? And how technically dynamics themselves as we know them don't exist, and how it should be labelled as at least six separate sexes?”

“What? Really?” Lance perked up at that, looking away from the sonogram.

"Pidge made me read it," Keith answered with a nod. "She lost her mind at that one, since she likes to talk about those kind of things."

"No one mentioned it to me," Lance spoke up again. "Six sexes and...no dynamics?"

"That's right," Shiro nodded. "It's just newly released, but the studies have apparently been going on for years! Though it does get rid of the adaptation explanation for why Alphas and Omegas are both male and female, instead of just one or the other," Shiro explained. “Not my area of study. Anyway, we decided to join the study, since it's really non-evasive.”

Allura looked positively excited. "They check our baby after they're born, use the parameters they set out to predict which 'sex' they'll be - Male Alpha, Male Beta, Male Omega, Female Alpha, Female Beta, or Female Omega. They check in on them once a year until they present to see how they develop. It's fascinating." She leaned forward towards the camera little more. "Also it shows proof that, though it's exceedingly rare, and quite a challenge, a female Alpha potentially could carry a child. Not only that, but a male Omega might be able to impregnate, but again, it's super rare.”

“Imagine that, someone actually puts some non-biased research into play, and it turns out everything that we know about yourselves could be wrong,” Lance said with a shake of his head. “Go figure. So you guys are waiting to see what they say your baby is before telling anyone?”

Shiro snorted at that. “That's right.” He and Allura exchanged a glance. "As of right now though, they were able to eliminate a a female Omega or Beta. That's about it."

Keith perked up a bit at that. “So odds are, I’ll have a nephew?”
Lance cleared his throat. “Um, excuse me. We’ll have a nephew. I’m included in this too.”

“Sure, sure,” Keith said, patting his leg and earning a pout.

“Are you still coming?” Allura asked excitedly. “When the baby’s due? It’s not until the last week of February.”

“Thank god it’s not a leap year,” Shiro added, prompting Keith to snicker. It was childish, but he still gave Shiro shit for being a leap year baby.

Of course Keith was coming when the baby was due. That was something that they worked out early on. It was a few weeks after his heat, so he’d be okay to travel without the scent attracting anyone.

“Keith’s going,” Lance answered for him with a pout. “I can’t though. Can’t get the time off at the end of the month.” It was one thing for an Alpha or Beta to have time off when their Omega was in heat—in fact, it was government mandated that workplaces allow Alphas to have their week-long “Breeding Leave” as it was called. The same thing went for the occasional Omegas that were employed. Asking for additional leave in the same month didn’t fly though.

Allura and Shiro both spoke excitedly about the different things that they wanted to do when Keith got back there (Shiro reminding Allura that she couldn’t do everything that she planned, since she was supposed to be having a baby at the time) until they had to hang up.

While they were talking, Keith realized something. They kept saying the word ‘home’ to describe him going back there, but the word didn’t fit right in his mind anymore. There would be no Lance there. How could it be home without his mate?

“Come on,” Lance urged him up from their couch. “We should head to bed. Gotta get up really early in the morning.”

That was right. They were joining Hunk and Pidge for some Black Friday ‘fun’ in a few hours. Then coming home and having a nap. “I’m going to parkour over everything and no one can stop me.” No way any Alpha security guard would believe that an Omega launched himself over a shelf.

He’d done it before.

Lance snickered, nuzzling against him. “No you’re not. C’mon. I’m tired and want cuddles.”

Keith followed the Alpha back into his room without any argument.

That didn’t change the fact that, a few hours later, Keith indeed climbed over a shelf to get something before a really cranky soccer mom could. It made getting up super early worth it.

Chapter End Notes

The whole 'research' thing at the end is a tiny bit of world building that shows just how...behind this world is in the understanding of their own biology, largely due to sexism. Two theories were brought up in this story: different dynamics exist due to survival adaptations (why male Omegas and female Alphas exist).

Since then though, I've gone over the concept with a few others and we came up with
the idea that there are no 'secondary genders' or 'dynamics' at all, but rather, six separate sexes (minimum, and of course trans people who would exist who were born one way but it doesn't fit them, so they go by another name). If I write a different ABO fic in the future (not sure if I will), I might go with this idea (with different names for female Alphas, Betas, and Omegas), but we'll see. Just a fun thing to work in!
Christmas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

1 – Music

It was rare for Lance to wake up earlier than Keith. Rarer still for him to be more than a zombie before he got his shower and did all his morning routines. So the fact that Keith was startled awake by music and singing, of all things, was, well…startling.

“Jingle bell! Jingle bell! Jingle bell rock!”

Keith blinked his eyes several times before the lyrics that were coming from the kitchen settled in. He noted Lance’s absence after that, and got up, padding out into the living room with only his pyjama pants on.

He watched his mate spin around the kitchen as he made breakfast, dancing and singing, wide awake and ready to go. Normally, when Lance had to wake up early for work or to talk to his advisor, he was pouty and grumbly in the most adorable way possible.

“Cariño!” Lance called out when he spotted Keith watching him. He shimmied—actually shimmied—his way over to Keith, grabbing his arm and tugging him close, swinging him around excitedly into a messy dance of twisted legs.

It was enough to make a small smile rise up on the Omega’s lips. “What are you doing?”

“Merry Christmas!” Lance cooed happily as they found their footing and started swaying and rotating around like they were at a middle school dance.

“It’s December first,” Keith said to him.

“Exactly! The first day of Christmas!”

“I thought there were twelve days of Christmas, not twenty-five,” he said, unable to hide his amusement.

Lance blew a raspberry. “People who celebrate Christmas that way are wrong. Either you go hard, or it’s not a holiday you celebrate, which is fine, but like, in this house we go hard.” He paused and narrowed his eyes at Keith. “You do celebrate Christmas, right?”

(Of course I do.” It was one of the things that his family did bother to celebrate. “But all December?”

“Listen, if we had our Thanksgiving earlier like Canada does, I would be celebrating Christmas since November,” Lance answered seriously. He hugged Keith close again. “This isn’t too bad, is it?”

Keith hummed, allowing himself to sink into Lance’s embrace. He kind of felt like taking it easy today. No gym. No running around. Lance could take the car, and he could stay home, do some commissions, and maybe listen to a little music.

He sniffed, his body tensing. “What’s that smell?”

“Breakfast!” Lance yelped, letting go of Keith and scrambling to try and salvage the burning food.
Keith laughed as he watched him go. His mate was absolutely ridiculous. He loved him so much.

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2 – Decorations

Keith should have been surprised to come home from Pidge’s house to find that the storage closet seemed to have exploded. Should being the key word. As it was, he was kind of just resigned to the fact that his home was a mess.

Another box was shoved out of the closet. So apparently this was a mess in progress.

He kicked off his shoes and made sure Lance heard him close the door.


“Either that or you’re calling a criminal pet names,” Keith replied as he made his way over to the room. He was honestly a bit annoyed at first, but that quickly gave way to concern when he got to the door and realized that Lance was under a pile of boxes. “Are you okay? What happened?” He quickly started lifting them off of his mate.

“So I went looking for the boxes of decorations I had shoved in here,” Lance explained wearily. “And I realized that when we cleaned up, we put them at the very back. I tried to get them out and realized I was making a huge mess so I tried to just grab a couple of things but…that didn’t end up panning out.” He grimaced as Keith lifted a box off of his arm.

Keith managed to get Lance out of the closet, helping him to the couch and looking him over for injuries. “Idiot Alpha. Why didn’t you want for me to help?”

Lance’s shoulders slumped. “I actually wanted to get all of the Christmas decorations up before you came home. Wanted to surprise you.”

A sigh escaped his lips and he pressed his forehead to Lance’s. “We’re going to check you over, then clean up this mess, and then we can do it together, okay?”

Lance’s shoulders slumped. “I actually wanted to get all of the Christmas decorations up before you came home. Wanted to surprise you.”

A small, slightly pained smile appeared on Lance’s face. “Okay.” His eyes lit up a moment later. “I have the perfect spot for a tree!”

Keith snorted and let Lance start rambling on, thankful that he was okay.

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3 – Mistletoe

Okay, so maybe his first attempt at putting up decorations wasn’t exactly successful. That was okay though!

It still blew Lance’s mind just how…domestic he and Keith were at times. Yeah, they were married, and living together, but half the time they acted like college roommates rather than what Lance saw with his parents growing up.

Then again, they also didn’t have kids or anything yet so there was that.

So yeah, putting up Christmas decorations around their small, crappy apartment felt domestic as hell to Lance, and he thrived on it. And okay, it was super nice putting things up with Keith too, who
brought his own little spin to things.

Honestly, there wasn’t really any rhyme or reason to anything, not like how carefully planned his parents’ place was. It was more like a strange form of organized chaos. He loved it.

Lance’s eyes turned up to Keith to ask him a question, when he saw what it was that Keith was hanging up right at the entrance to the hallway that led to the rooms. He lit up excitedly as he slid across the floor with his socks, startling Keith as he wrapped his arms around him.

“What are you doing?” he demanded, twisting his neck and bit and tilting his head back so he could glare at Lance.

The Alpha awkwardly sept in and pressed a quick kiss to his lips. “You’re standing under the mistletoe. I can’t help it.”

Keith huffed out a breath of air, but Lance could tell that he wasn’t actually annoyed. They knew each other well enough by that point to know that.

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3 – Tree

In Lance’s perfect Christmas vision, they had a real tree. One that would tower over everything else in their house. It would have a lights, tinsel, and a theme of reds, greens, golds, and silvers.

“We can’t get a real tree,” Keith reminded him as they walked through Walmart, of all places.

Lance knew this. It wasn’t in the cards for right now. He wanted something that wasn’t his little two-foot tall tree that he propped up on boxes. Something that might last for more than one Christmas would be nice so that they could buy something else next year.

So okay, artificial trees had their benefits.

He led the way, Keith pushing the cart, back to the section with lights, decorations, and so many trees on display. He had to pry his eyes away from the blow-up decorations, because he really wanted that giant dinosaur with the moving head. It was almost a physical need.

Worst thing was, he was pretty sure Keith would go for it, even though it would take up their entire living room.

He needed to focus. They were here for a tree, not an amazing, kickass dinosaur.

The thing was, there were way more trees than Lance expected. A lot of them were on display, set up so that the customers could see what they actually looked like, but not all of them. That annoyed Lance quite a bit.

He went to complain to his mate, only to find Keith looking at a boxed one. He looked up and said, “This is the cheapest big one.”

Big was an overstatement. It was probably the same height he was, maybe a tad shorter. Lance wanted a grand tree that towered above them to the point where he would have to lift Keith in his arms so that he could put the star on the top. Well, okay, it’d be more likely that Keith would be the one doing the lifting, but Lance was fine with that too.

He eyed the picture of the tree and scrunched up his nose. “It’s not worth it though. It looks dead.”
Keith looked perplexed at that, but didn’t protest as Lance put the box back and guided him down the aisle. “Now this one here, this is a tree!”

Okay, Lance knew that they weren’t going to get this tree. Not only was it way too tall for their apartment’s short ceilings, but it was way out of budget. He was counting on Keith to know that though.

Sure enough, the Omega’s eyebrows shot up. “It’s $400! We don’t have that!”

Lance sighed dramatically. “Okay, fine. I just thought it had some nice razzle dazzle to it! What about this one?” He pointed to one that he actually really did like.

“That’s only $50 cheaper,” Keith deadpanned. He leaned in closer, eyes narrowed. “I know what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to barter, starting with things you know are way too expensive and hoping I give on something that’s closer to our budget.”

Well, shit. That was exactly what Lance was trying to do. He already knew which one he wanted, but it was a little over budget. Okay, more than a little, but it wasn’t as bad as these ones! “The nerve! Accusing me of things like that.” Keith stared. “Okay, fine. Maybe I was going to, but listen…” He scooted over to the tree he actually liked. “This is the cheapest one with an acceptable amount of fullness. Everything else looks dead.”

“That’s true,” Keith agreed, and for a moment, Lance thought he won, but Keith pointed at the one beside the one he wanted. “That one’s pretty nice. Sure, it’s not as full, but when you add decorations to it, it’ll look fuller.” He paused for a moment. “And it also leaves enough money to get new lights.”

Lance knew exactly what Keith was doing. There probably was one or two around that were a little bit better that they could afford, but he was reeling him in with the fact that they could get a brand new set of lights instead of his old faded ones, and still come in under budget.

Now that the option was brought up, Lance really wanted a new set of lights for the tree. It’d only be right!

“Add new garland and a kiss to that, and you got a deal.”

A nearby, teenaged employee snorted with amusement. Well, he might not have his perfect tree yet, but he had a good enough one, new lights, some new decorations for it, and he provided entertainment for a bored employee. It was a good day, over all.

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4 – Cookies

Back when they were in high school, and Keith was forced to take home ec classes (he was an Omega, so of course he had to take classes pertaining to cooking, cleaning, and also child rearing), every year they made basic sugar cookies for Christmas. It was one of the things that he actually became pretty good at doing, since he repeated the process so many times. Honestly, he was a bit proud of himself, because it was one thing he could do without a recipe.

So maybe it hurt a little bit more than he would ever let on that, when Lance brought up Christmas cookies, he offered to make them, but was immediately shot down with a scoff of how he didn’t have to worry because Hunk was making things way better than high school sugar cookies.

Apparently, every year in December, Lance and Pidge would go to Hunk’s house, and join his
family’s “cookie marathon”. That involved making enough cookies to feed an army. They weren’t just plain sugar cookies, in fact, Keith was sure Hunk would scoff worse than Lance had. There were so many different kinds, that they were actually getting a pretty big Tupperware container filled with them.

If Keith was honest, he did have fun with Hunk and Pidge. Not only that, but Hunk’s parents were both amazing women, and his siblings were just about as wild as Lance’s. The thing was, he still felt a bit put-off by the rejection that wasn’t actually a rejection. Then he was frustrated with himself over being so petty.

It led to him being silent on the drive back home from Hunk’s house, the back seat filled with not one, but two giant containers of cookies (one for each of them). Lance didn’t seem to notice at first, chattering on happily. His vibrant mood did make Keith feel a bit better.

Except, his mate was pretty perceptive when he wanted to be, and caught onto the fact that not everything was well. “What did I do?”

“Huh?” Keith looked up at him, surprised.

“You’re not really happy,” Lance explained as he eyed the road. “So, what did I do?”

Keith shrugged. “It’s nothing. Me being stupid more than anything.”

“Babe. If it’s upsetting you, it’s not stupid,” Lance insisted.

“It is though!” Keith shot back immediately. “Cause like, I offered to make those cookies since you were going on about Christmas cookies, and you were right to say Hunk’s is better. No big deal. And I don’t know why that’s bothering me cause you were right!” There was a long silence, so he added, “Told you it was stupid.”

Keith yelped as Lance very suddenly pulled into a parking lot, the car behind them honking at them loudly. “What the fuck?”

Lance put the car in park and turned to him with a very serious expression. “I’m so sorry Keith. God, I’m an asshole.”

He blinked a few times, not understanding what was going on. “Why? Cause you didn’t let me waste my time when we were getting better cookies?”

“It’s not which ones are better that matter though!” Lance waved his hands up in the air, narrowly avoiding accidentally beaming Keith in the face. “You made those every year, right? For your family?”

“Yeah…” Keith answered slowly, not sure where this was going at all.

“I am an asshole,” the Alpha repeated, the last word said with so much passion that it was almost painful.

“No you’re not,” Keith insisted, getting a bit annoyed now. He hated when people belittled Lance and was always willing to fight for him. It would be a bit weird fighting Lance for the sake of Lance, but he’d do it if he had to.

“Everything we’ve done so far is what I grew up doing,” Lance explained. “Not just this one. Thanksgiving, Black Friday…you just blend in with everything I do. I never thought that maybe there were things—traditions that you were used to and wanted to do.”
Oh. “I…hadn’t thought about it that way,” Keith admitted. “It’s okay though. I became a part of your family, so I just—“

“No.” Lance grabbed his hands and squeezed gently, his thumb brushing over the ring on his finger. “No, that’s wrong. You didn’t become a part of my family. We’re a new family together. That means things from both of us, not just me.”

Keith let what his Alpha was saying wash over him for a few minutes before he very reluctantly said, “I was pretty proud of those cookies.”

“We’re making them,” he said immediately.

“But we just made—“

“We’re making them.” There was really no arguing this point now.

Once everything was said and done, Lance knew that Keith thought he was just trying to flatter him when he said that his cookies were the best, but it was an honest truth. They were the best cookies Lance ever had. They were simplistic in their flavour, but they were warm and practically melted in his mouth.

Hunk’s cookies were phenomenal, but Keith’s made him think of home, and he couldn’t wait to get them every year for now on.

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5 – Cold

“God, I hate the cold,” Pidge complained. “We need to do a video on why cold weather is evil.” She must have looked ridiculous, wrapped up in more than one sweater while trying to edit their most recent movie.

“Objectively speaking, it’s really not that cold here,” Keith pointed out from where he was sitting on his own chair a few feet away.

Pidge blinked at him before narrowing her eyes. “You used to live in the desert—“

“—Where it gets really cold at night!”

“—And you’re wearing two paints of giant, fluffy, Christmas socks.”

Keith pulled his feet up underneath him and glared at her. “They’re comfy, okay.”

“Sure, wimp.” Forget that she started this conversation about the cold. She was going to drag Keith as much as she possibly could about this.

It really was beginning to at least feel a lot like Christmas.

…

8 – Outdoor Decorations

“We’re going to die.”

Lance wanted to argue with his brother’s almost monotone exclamation, but really, what would be
the point at this point? They were precariously balanced on top of their parents’ house, carefully lining the roof with multicoloured lights. Already, they almost slipped twice, but he blamed that on Marco.

He was pretty sure his brother was at least a little high.

“‘It’s looking good so far!’”

Lance leaned over slightly to look down at Keith.

“Yeah? Why don’t you come up here and help then?” Marco called back before Lance could say anything. He was just glad that they weren’t completely at odds anymore.

“I’m supervising,” Keith replied immediately. “Good job. Get a gold sticker.”

Lance snorted and smiled down at him. “Done with the lights around those windows down there?”

“Yup. Rachel says they look…” he trailed off and looked down towards the front porch, “…like a bomb-ass bitch.”

Lance laughed so hard that he actually almost fell off of the roof. It wasn’t even that funny, but Keith sounded so dry.

Decorating the outside of his parents’ house didn’t take nearly as long as it normally did, with the extra help that Keith and Bella (Rachel’s fiancé) provided. Lance slung his arm along Keith’s shoulders as he took it all in. They couldn’t decorate their apartment in this way, but Lance couldn’t wait until they had a house of their own to decorate.

He pressed his lips to the crown of Keith’s head, and the Omega huffed happily as he shifted closer, arm going around his waist.

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6 – Christmas Lines

Keith was starting to notice a slightly disturbing trend. Well, no it wasn’t disturbing, it was also kind of funny.

It started with an innocent enough comment. Lance pressing his lips to Keith’s cheek and saying, “I must be a snowflake, because I’ve fallen for you.”

Keith snorted and quickly kissed him on the mouth. He didn’t like to admit it, but Lance’s pickup lines actually did things to him, the cheesier, the better.

Maybe Lance finally realized this, because more often than not, conversations involved pickup lines now. Not just any lines either. No, of course not. These ones were Christmas themed.

“Do you celebrate Boxing Day? Cause you’re the whole package.” Lance winked at him, throwing a pair of finger-guns at him. This one heard a groan from Pidge and a laugh from him.

“Can I take a picture of you, so I can show Santa exactly what I want this year?” He asked innocently when they took Nadia and Sylvio to the mall to get presents for their parents. Both of them thought that was hilarious.

(“Tio, Santa can’t give you a present you already have!” “I guess you’re right. I’ll have to think of something else.” The look he gave Keith told him exactly what ‘something else’ was.)
Later on that same day, when they got home, Lance crowded him to the kitchen counter, and leaned in close to almost purr in his ear, “Let’s both be naughty this year and save Santa the trip.”

“Oh my god, Lance.” Keith was absolutely, 100% done with the pickup lines and knew that his mate had to be stopped. The best way to stop him? Make him laugh with a clever response.

“Santa said you wished for me. Good choice,” Lance said to him in passing when they were out getting groceries.

“Think it’s too late to send him a letter? I’m having buyer’s remorse,” he shot back, not considering where they were.

The group of teenagers that were walking by them laughed really hard at that.

Another time, Lance pressed a quick kiss to his lips and said, “Even Santa doesn’t make candy as sweet as you.”

Keith tilted his head slightly, feigning confusion. “Santa doesn’t make candy.”

“Keith!” He whined, shot down again.

He was most proud of the time they were sitting on their couch together, and Lance wiggled his eyebrows at him along with the line, “Are you interested in seeing the “North Pole”?”

Keith very purposefully let his eyes slide down Lance’s body before meeting his gaze. “I’m more interested in the one down south.”

Lance spent the next five minutes laughing so hard that he ended up crying.

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7 – Greeting Cards

The strangest concept that Keith was introduced to was the greeting card. A picture of a family that they sent to others, usually accompanied by some sort of note that bragged about big events that happened that year. Sure, he got the concept for sending Christmas cards to someone, but this was something entirely different.

Apparently, the McClains were that family that did that. He wished he could be surprised, but Keith really, really wasn’t. He also wasn’t surprised by how hard Lance’s parents went with the entire thing. Then again, when didn’t the family go hard on things like this?

Everyone was dressed up in nice, matching clothing (not ugly Christmas sweaters, Lance’s Papá insisted). Not suits, but rather sweater vests with button-up shirts, and a colour scheme, of course. It was so weird trying to figure out what to wear.

He basically ended up letting Lance’s Abuela dress him. He didn’t really have any complaints about the dark green button up and red sweater to go over it—the exact opposite of what Lance was wearing.

“We’ll send one to your mother,” Lance’s Papá told him. “I need her address. Oh! Your brother and sister as well!”

Keith got the feeling that he was never going to live this one down.

…
When it came to Christmas shopping, Lance had a few tips and guides that he always followed. Firstly, he looked at if there was something that a person really wanted. If not, was there anything that they really needed? If not, was there something more heartfelt that he could make or buy? Something sweet and sentimental? If not, was there something he could get that would make them laugh?

He didn’t think a gift was useless if it could make someone laugh.

He ended up at the mall with Keith, Hunk, and Pidge. They split up into groups, leaving him with the latter. Lance didn’t know what he wanted to get his mate, but he had a pretty solid idea of how he was going to go about it.

They worked out a budget together for friends and everyone else, as well as for one-another, and swore not to go over it if possible.

Keith seemed almost frenzied and panicked earlier when he left with Hunk, and the text Lance got from his friend later simply said that Keith was a disaster when it came to shopping.

“I’m going to buy Matt a dildo,” Pidge said suddenly. “Because it’s what he is lately. A fake, rubbery dick.”

Lance snorted loudly. “Well, I mean, if you wanna go find a sex shop, I’m sure I could find something fun there. Or funny. Or just get more lube.”

She eyed him oddly. “Keith’s an Omega. Why would you need that?”

He stared back at her blankly for a moment. “Pidge, I know you’re ace, but you like, live on the internet. There’s no way in hell you don’t know there’s more than one way to have sex.”

She slapped her hands over her ears. “Shut up, shut up, I realize my mistake. No. Forget that idea. I’ll think of something else because I don’t want to think about what you and Keith get up to.”

They ended up going for laughs with Matt, buying a bunch of little science kits for kids. Honestly though, he’d probably have a blast with it.

Lance may or may not have conspired with Keith to get Hunk an easy-bake-oven, because apparently that was the kind of gifts they were giving that year. That was fine. Keith was all on-board for the entire thing. Besides, Shiro and Allura were getting Keith this fancy, brand new drawing tablet and laptop to go with it, because that was the kind of gifts people with money gave apparently, and it was also something Keith could really use.

In the end, Lance smuggled a ton of yarn into the house, managing to hide it from his mate. He was going to make him the best darn quilt in existence, even if it meant working on it during his breaks at work so that Keith wouldn’t find it!

…

Lance was actually a fairly craft person. He was good at putting things together with his hands. Keith, well, he was an artist, and was very good at making things look nice when he wanted to.

Yet, somehow, neither one of them could apparently wrap a gift to save their lives. Lance swore that
they ended up with more accidentally ripped wrapping paper, ribbon, and tape in their apartment than decorations!

He looked at his mate, who was clearly as exasperated as he was. “You know those booths in malls where people will wrap gifts for you and the money goes to charity?” Keith asked.

“You wanna go to one of those instead?” Lance wondered, knowing full well that it was what he was getting at.

Keith nodded his head. “Yes.” They were both complete and utter disasters at this.

That was okay though. Lance reached into the mess and pulled out a sparkly red bow, sticking it to the top of Keith’s head. “You’re the only gift that matters to me this year.”

The Omega’s cheeks turned pink, and the kiss that Lance got in return was worth the entire mess they had to clean up later.

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11 – Crafts

Keith was going to shove his mate into the shark tank. He swore he was.

Apparently, every year the Aquarium that Lance worked at did activities with kids leading up to Christmas. That was fine, actually, it was downright adorable. The problem stemmed from the fact that Lance may or may not have let it slip that Keith could draw and was ‘arty’ as he put it, and may or may not have volunteered Keith to run one of the craft workshops with the kids.

At first, he didn’t know what to do, because drawing on a tablet and in a sketchbook were completely different than crafts! Also, he didn’t ask him if he’d do it, impulsively volunteering him for it like the boneheaded Alpha he could be from time to time. So yes, Keith was going to shove him into the pool with Ben and Jerry, the nursing sharks.

That was a threat that Lance genuinely believed, so when he went to check on how it was going later on, he remained weary, and ready to sprint away. He peered into the room that was set aside for activities like that, and nearly cooed at what he saw.

The kids were making what looked like Christmas decorations for trees in all kinds of shapes and sizes, including some of the animals found at the aquarium. There was paint, markers, puff balls, glue, googley eyes, and glitter all over. That would be a bitch of a mess to clean up (which Lance assumed that he would have to help with), and that wasn’t much fun, but Keith and the kids were all adorable.

They were all smiling and laughing. The kids seemed enthralled with Keith, as they should be. He was attentive, and pretty understanding when he got a face-full of glitter by accident, laughing it off.

Maybe it was the way the light and glitter made his hair shine more, or the way that he so easily interacted with these kids after being so apprehensive, but it was enough to make Lance swoon.

…

12 – “Sleigh” Rides

Holidays or not, date nights were still date nights, and they weren’t missing one without good reason.
Keith grew up in a small down a little ways away from a bigger city, essentially in the middle of a desert. Due to this, there were certain things associated with Christmas that he never got to experience before. One of those things was snow.

Sure, the odds of it snowing where they lived now were slim to none, but it felt like a step closer to being able to experience that someday. So they couldn’t exactly go on a sleigh ride or anything like that, but people adapted.

Lance’s eyes lit up excitedly when he realized what he was looking at. “Did you rent a horse-drawn carriage?” It was decorated with bells, tinsel, garland, and bows, the man driving it even wearing a top hat with some holly on it.

“You said you wanted to go on one once,” Keith admitted, which was an off-handed comment Lance mentioned when they were watching a show a little while ago. “So here we are.”

Good god, this Omega was going to kill him by being a sweetheart one of these days. He eagerly climbed up into the sleigh, holding his arm out to help Keith up.

Cuddling in a horse-drawn carriage? Lance would absolutely recommend it to anyone who was looking for an intimate, incredibly sweet date idea.

…

13 – Movies

The tension in the McClain house was through the roof. It hadn’t been this bad since the hurricane where they all had to go up north.

Keith fidgeted awkwardly and cast a look around the room. Bella, Rachel’s fiancé, looked just as awkward as him. Lisa looked ready to bolt. Sylvio and Nadia were eyeing the door to the living room. Lance’s parents looked tired, and Abuela…actually got out her knitting.

Well then.

“We are not watching the Nightmare Before Christmas! It’s not even a Christmas movie!” Rachel snapped, her voice rising shrilly.

“You take that back you heathen!” Lance snapped back, impressively managing to match her pitch. Well, impressive, but Keith still wanted to stuff a sock in his mouth. “It’s all about Christmas!”

“Oh, no,” Marco butted in. “Rachel’s right! It’s all about him finding the spirit of Halloween again!”

“It doesn’t matter!” Veronica slapped her hand on the table. “We’re going to watch Rise of the Guardians instead!”

“That’s an EASTER movie!” Luis growled at her.

“Every year,” Mr. McClain muttered, pressing his fingers against the corners of his eyes.

“I heard of this,” Bella whispered to Keith. “Rachel said I was lucky last year to miss the great movie debate.”

Lisa was rubbing her swollen abdomen, as if trying to comfort the child in her, repeating Mr. McClain’s thought. “Every year.”

Keith blinked, looking between the arguing siblings to everyone else. No one dared to speak up, but
hey, he had no problem incurring the wrath of others. “Do you wanna just...leave him here and go put on classic ones for now? Like that old puppet Rudolph? Or the Grinch?”

The arguing siblings didn’t notice him at all. That was kind of a relief. Everyone else was staring at him though.

Ms. McClain sighed and said, “You know what, Keith? That sounds like a great plan.”

Keith was pretty sure that no one noticed them get up and leave. It took a while until he heard Lance ask, “Where did everyone else go?”

That didn’t really matter though, what mattered was that everyone else was having a great time watching Charlie Brown’s Christmas.

…

14 – Pictures with Santa

Keith was well aware of the fact that he had resting bitch face. He knew it, he was fine with it. People could say or think whatever it was that they wanted.

That day though, he couldn’t possibly hide his glee behind his stomach stoic expressions. He felt like he was going to explode. Beside him, it looked like Pidge was about to do the same, and Hunk was smiling ear to ear.

How could they not? The aquarium was having pictures with Santa that day, and Santa wasn’t necessarily that jolly round, old man with pale skin and laugh-lined wrinkles. Instead, he had lots of fake padding, and dark, sun-kissed skin.

Yes, Keith was going to combust with glee when Lance, dressed up as Santa, met his gaze. He saw the flash of horror in his eyes, because Lance hadn’t told him about this. It just happened that Lance forgot his lunch that day and Keith was running it out to him. Then he was told what was going on, and, naturally, he had to tell everyone else.

Hunk and Pidge demanded that he wait for them, because they had to see this too. Hunk probably broke a couple speed limits getting Pidge, to get there in time.

The kids seemed to be having a great time, hopping up onto Santa’s lap for pictures and to tell him what they wanted for Christmas. When Lance finally saw Keith, there was a little kid rattling off quite the list.

Eventually, the wave of kids and babies that sobbed the second Lance touched them wittled down, and they took their opportunity.

Pidge practically threw herself on Lance. “Sup, Santa? Can you tell me what I’m getting for Christmas?”

“A the biggest lump of coal I can find,” Lance replied, pushing her off of him. He shot a look at Hunk. “Don’t even think about it.”

Hunk leaned on the back of the decorated chair, giggling a bit. “Do I get a lump of coal?”

“No, you’d like that.” Lance turned his eyes to Keith, and though his lips were hidden with a fake beard and moustache, he could still see the smirk rising up. “You though, you can have a seat on my lap whenever you want.”
Keith snorted and rolled his eyes, though he actually sat on him, legs off to one side. “You didn’t tell me about this.”

“I knew you’d make fun of me,” Lance whined.

“And I will,” Keith replied with a smirk before softening a bit. “But I also think it’s really cute. You made those kids so happy.”

Lance smelled happy at that. He tugged Keith a bit closer then looked over at the photographer. “Well First Elf, let’s get a pic with these little brats too.” She laughed in reply and got it ready to take a picture. Hunk and Pidge repositioned themselves on either side of them. It was over quickly, a couple flashes of light.

“I’ve got a surprise for you when I get home,” Lance said in a low voice so only Keith could hear. “Santa’s going to take you to the sack.”

Keith almost choked. That was awful. “You’re not touching me in that thing.”

“We’ll see.”

That was absolutely terrifying. “Nope. Not doing that.”

Lance laughed as he hurried away, and it sounded just as jolly as Santa’s laugh should.

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15 – Gingerbread houses

It started with two simple building sets for gingerbread houses. They weren’t even overly expensive or anything, but Lance looked so proud of himself when he presented them to Keith. At first, it started as almost a competition to see who could make the best one, but somehow, their houses ended up morphing into one.

It probably would have been easier to do with a kitchen table, but they knelt in front of their shitty coffee table, carefully working together to build their two-storey masterpiece.

“I like bay windows,” Lance noted as he broke one of the spare gingerbread walls to be able to make it. “Some people think they’re a waste of space, but I like it. What’s that?”

Keith hummed in agreement. He had no real feelings for bay windows one way or another, instead working with straws and pipe cleaners (they ended up having to incorporate other things too), sticking them into the green icing of the ‘yard’. “A swing set.”

Lance cooed a bit at that, and worked to get his bay windows stuck together with icing.

So maybe they ended up using gingerbread to make their ideal future home, and it looked kind of ugly that way. It still made something warm settling in Keith’s stomach as he stared at the finished product.

Someday.

…

16 – Christmas Lights

There were a lot of people around them on the street, all waiting with baited breath. Keith didn’t
quite get it, but he still stood with the others.

“It’s almost time!” Hunk said excitedly.

Lance’s hand squeezed Keith’s; he was positively vibrating. “Every year they do this, and it’s always so cool. I mean, basically Christmas goals, you now?”

Keith didn’t know, but he’d take their word for it.

The crowd fell silent as 8:00pm rolled around. Then an electric guitar echoed out from the speakers, leading into a rather intense rendition of Carol of Bells, and the yard and house before them lit up in time with the music.

Keith had to admit, it was pretty cool.

…

17 – Hot chocolate

“Keith, sweetheart, baby, babe, my Omega, the love of my life, the bacon to my eggs...what the *fuck* are you doing?” Lance stared at his mate, not quite sure what to make of the monstrosity in front of him.

It started with a simple mug. It was a nice mug, decorated simply with silver snowflakes. The mug wasn’t the problem though. Nor was the steaming, chocolatey drink on the inside, even if it was kind of warm out that day.

No, the problem came from the sheer amount of whip cream, sauces, and other things that rose over the top of the mug. It wouldn’t be a problem normally, at least not when the person intending to drink it wasn’t severely lactose intolerant, and he knew that he hadn’t gotten new pills yet.

Keith met his eyes defiantly, silently daring him to take the dairy-filled monstrosity in front of him away. Lance stared back, fingers twitching.

He lunged forward to try and get it away, but Keith darted out of the way, gulping it down so quickly that it made Lance’s throat burn in sympathy.

That sympathy didn’t extend to the stomach ache Keith had later. Little bugger deserved it.

…

18 – Reindeer?

Pidge > Christmas Hoes

Pidge: There’s a reindeer on the loose!

Hunk: I’m sorry, what?

Pidge sent a link.

Pidge: It escaped from the real reindeer that were going to be a part of the parade!
Lance: Run, Run, Rudolph!

Keith: Be free

Shiro: If it’s domesticated, what happens when it runs into wildlife like an alligator?

Keith: …

Lance: Shiro, no.

Shiro: ????

Keith: Pidge.

Pidge: On it.

Allura: ???

Lance: Keith, no.

Keith: We can’t let the alligators get it!

Hunk: Alligators.

Keith: I have a knife.

Hunk: Understood, have a nice day.

Lance: You are not adopting a reindeer!

Keith: You’re not the boss of me!

Allura: I mean…legally…

Pidge: Since when do we believe those laws in this house?

Allura: Tru

Lance: Good thing I have the car today.

Keith: :D

Pidge: Matt’s on his way!

Keith: :D

Lance: why are you like this?

…

20 – Work Party/Eggnog

If Keith was honest, he actually wasn’t that big of a fan of most of Lance’s coworkers. They weren’t the worst people in the world, but if one more person asked him about kids, he was going to lose his shit.
Yes, he’d been mated since early August. No, he wasn’t pregnant. No, he didn’t want a baby right now. Yes, he did, in fact, like kids. Yes, he planned on it in the future. And then they’d get those *looks* on their faces as they said, “Well why not right now?”

*I don’t know, Luxia. Maybe it’s because I’ve only known my mate for about four months, he’s always super busy with his school work and working ridiculous hours for you with shit pay so we don’t have the money?*

Keith had the rant he’d love to say planned out in detail. Maybe a little more swearing added in. He didn’t though. He could bitch these people out and never have to see them again, but this was *Lance’s* party, and Lance was only a graduate student. He didn’t want to do anything that would make his life at work more difficult.

So he answered the same questions over and over again, wishing that he could be pressed against his Alpha’s side instead of surrounded by all these other strange people. Bonus side was that absolutely no one tried to hit on him. As almost ignorant as these people seemed, they weren’t complete assholes.

Keith’s bar of expectations for positive interactions with people was pretty low.

On the upside: the very spiked eggnog was *really* good. Sometimes it was too strong, but he couldn’t even taste the alcohol, which was probably a bad thing. As a general rule, Keith didn’t get drunk. He just didn’t. He didn’t like the thought of not being in his right mind, because there were awful people out there that would and could try to take advantage of him.

For whatever reason, Keith felt *safe* there. He was mated, and said mate was laughing with a few coworkers still in sight. No one was hitting on him. He recognized most of these people. There was no random person that was going to try and take him away.

Also he may or may not have realized that the eggnog was spiked at first until he realized that he was drunk.

“Hey, you,” Lance cooed as he appeared out of nowhere, which was pretty amazing!

“Hey!” Keith smiled broadly at him, curling up against his side. Someone else ‘awwed’ or something like that, and hell yes they should. He and Lance were *adorable* together.

“You’re so drunk,” Lance said with a laugh. “Guess that’s a good enough reason as any to head home.”

Home? That sounded really nice. It was so much better than a party with a bunch of people that wouldn’t mind their own business.

So Lance’s work party sucked, but at least there were some good drinks.

…

21 – Ugly Sweater

“It’s not Christmas yet.”

Lance snorted at Keith’s blunt observation. He looked down at the hastily wrapped gift and said, “Well aware. Open it anyway.”

“I don’t have anything for you.”
“Trust me, this experience is going to be gift enough for me.”

Keith paused and stared at it before his eyes slowly looked up at him suspiciously. “This better not be some weird sex-thing.”

“You show your mate some toys once…” Lance mumbled playfully. “It’s not a weird sex-thing. This time. Promise.”

Keith huffed out a silent laugh, clearly trying to hide the smile on his face, but Lance saw it anyway, so, victory!

“What…is this?” Keith held up a bright red sweater with a barrage of Christmas images. There was even working lights on it.

“Don’t you love it?” Lance asked, bouncing on his feet excitedly.

“It’s hideous.” Keith stared at the sweater.

“Exactly!” Lance snatched it from his head, shoving it over his head. Keith grumbled along, but allowed Lance to maneuver him into the ugly sweater.

“This is awful,” Keith said as he looked down at it.

“It’s perfect!” Lance couldn’t help but smile, because Keith looked so grumpy about the whole thing.

He couldn’t help but snap a picture, and took off running before Keith could protest. He needed to send it to everyone.

...

22 – Christmas Miracles

“It’s a Christmas Miracle.”

Keith looked up at Lance with a raised eyebrow, having been leaned against him, curled up in a big, fluffy blanket. “Freak weather that’s giving us flurries in Florida is a miracle?”

“Try to be a bit more skeptical, please,” the Alpha said with a sigh, pressing a kiss to his mate’s forehead. “Christmas and snow just goes together, you know? We never get it here. So it’s not just a miracle. It’s a Christmas Miracle. Capital C, capital M.” He tapped his finger against Keith’s nose.

“More like Climate Change, two capital Cs,” Keith replied, grabbing his hand and bringing it back under the comforter. “Besides, there’s no difference between ‘miracles’ and ‘Christmas miracles’.”

“Uh, no, there totally is,” Lance argued, leaning down and brushing his lips against Keith’s neck, by his sensitive mating gland. “You’re my Christmas Miracle.”

Keith shuddered against his will, but kept his glare on his face. “We got together in August. Late summer miracle at best.”

A whine of protest escaped Lance’s lips, but really, he couldn’t protest too much. He was curled up under warm, comfortable blankets with his husband. His husband, his mate. That was mind-blowing to think of still.

He didn’t think that he could truly get Keith to understand just how miserable this time of year was for him last year. How that was when Nyma screwed him over and broke his heart. Honestly, Lance
thought that the season would be forever marred and twisted into something harsh and disgusting, a shadow of what he loved growing up. It was why he put so much effort into doing almost everything that he could this year. To experience everything again in a positive light.

And god, had he ever. Every little thing, while not perfect, was still amazing.

With that thought, Lance leaned down, capturing Keith’s lips with his own. A hum of approval left the Omega as he pulled him even closer.

So maybe Keith was skeptical of the idea of Christmas Miracles, but that was okay, because Lance still knew that they were real.

How couldn’t they be when the presence of a single person saved an entire time of year for him?

…

23 – Christmas With Friends

Let it be known that being the only friends with their own apartment kind of sucked at times. Not because they had to deal with more bills or anything like that (though it was true), but because it meant that everything they did, it was better to do it at their apartment. They weren’t bothering anyone else or anything.

That meant that there was a mess of wrapping paper and food throughout their tiny kitchen-living room combo. There were a couple days until Christmas, but given how busy that everyone was going to be with their families, it was the only time that they could get together.

In reality, Keith didn’t actually care about the mess all that much. They had a lot of fun opening presents together, eating food, and sitting back to watch some Christmas movies together.

He glanced over at Lance, who was excitedly whispering to Hunk about the movie (as if they hadn’t seen it about a hundred times), Pidge tossing caramel popcorn at them from time to time in a useless attempt to get them to shut up.

It was kind of amazing, honestly. He’d spent Christmas with his family, of course, but his family tended to be his friend-group too, so this was a different experience. It was one that he would always treasure and be thankful for.

…

24 – Christmas Eve and Coal

There was no present opening at the McClain Christmas party, but that was fine, because it was very lively. It was an all-evening event, with people coming and going as they pleased. Some came from church, others sat themselves in front of the television and didn’t move. It was really a toss-up.

Everyone was dressed up with semi-nice clothes for the most part, though Nadia’s sparkly dress was really beautiful.

“Mami says we can’t open anymore presents,” the young girl said with a pout.

“You already got one,” Rachel pointed out to her niece. “You need to save the rest for tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” Sylvio poked at his sister. “Santa can still give you coal.”
“No he won’t!”

“Yeah, he will.” Sylvio turned around. “Tío Lance! Santa can change his mind and give us coal, right?”

Lance blinked up from where he’d been talking to Veronica, clearly not sure what was going on. An impish grin appeared on his face as he nodded his head. “Absolutely. You gotta be really good! If you don’t, he’ll load your stockings up with coal!” He looked around then said in a dramatic (loud) whisper, “Don’t tell him, but Santa told me that Tío Keith is getting coal.”

Nadia gasped, terrified by that, and it took everything Keith had not to laugh at her. Sylvio looked confused. “Does that mean you’re getting extra coal, Tío Lance? Cause if Tío Keith is getting it, you gotta be getting a whole lot!”

Keith, Rachel, and Veroinca all burst out laughing as Lance spluttered.

…

25 – Christmas Day

A hum escaped Keith’s lips as he slowly woke from a comfortable sleep, though he didn’t open his eyes just yet. Lance peppered slow, soft kisses on his neck, making sure to tenderly get the spots where he left bruises the night before.

“I don’t you’re awake,” Lance muttered into his ear before pressing a kiss to the back of his neck where his mating gland was.

Keith’s eyes slowly slid open, and he twisted just slightly, leaning his head back a bit awkwardly to kiss his mate. It was quiet, comfortable, and sleepy. It was the perfect morning.

Lance hummed into the kiss before pulling back, “Come on, lazy Omega. Time to open presents.”

That was right. It was Christmas morning. Keith could remember being excited as a young child and getting up at ridiculously early hours in the morning with Acxa (he’d have to call her later), but he appreciated waking up like this.

“In a little bit,” Keith muttered, tugging at Lance’s arm.

The Alpha sighed dramatically, but complied easily, tugging Keith close to him so that they were curled up close together. He pressed a kiss to his cheek and said, “Merry Christmas.”

Keith smiled and squeezed his hand. “Merry Christmas.”

There were many different holidays around that time of year, and not everyone celebrated the way they did, which was perfectly fine, but honestly, this was something that Keith really could get used to. He couldn’t wait to experience this time of year again and again with his friends and (one day) growing family.

Chapter End Notes

I was playing with formatting for this one, using a series of 25 writing prompts under a single theme. Turns out I don’t like it at all. We’ll be back to your regularly scheduled
formatting in the next chapter! I mean, it did make this one quite a bit longer, but yeah, not a huge fan of it!

Oh well. Sometimes we have to experiment and put ourselves out there more!

I was also thinking that it’s sometimes super easy to forget that this takes place in an ABO universe, but hey, that’s a good thing!
December 28th

The time between Christmas and New Year’s Eve was a super weird time, Lance thought as he took a couple notes while observing the nursing sharks swimming in the tank before him. Though the aquarium itself wasn’t open that day, the animals still needed people to take care of them, to feed them, and it was Lance’s shift for that today.

He felt a little restless after Christmas. There wasn’t anything inherently wrong with him, but he felt a little bit unsettled. It was really hard to explain or even pinpoint. Keith confronted him about it already, able to tell that something was wrong due to his scent, but Lance honestly didn’t know what to say.

Was it because of last year?

That thought made Lance put down his pen, eyes following the swimming creatures. This time last year, he’d been hurt so badly. Honestly, Lance thought that nothing was ever going to be okay again. Going into the new year, he expected failure and everything horrible.

Last year, at this point, he was still desperately confused, not wanting what happened to be true. He was so sure that he loved Nyma, and yet, she took him for everything that he was worth and ran off with someone else.

A lot of people had scoffed at him when they saw him with Nyma, since they were both Alphas, but Lance held his head high the entire time, insisting that she was worth it.

Honestly, at the time, Lance was starting to picture a future with her, even if she seemed to want the exact opposite things of him. That should have been a warning sign that it wasn’t going to work out in the end. It would have sucked, but it would have been a lot better than what ended up happening.

It was amazing that he’d been able to fall for Keith as easily as he had after she ripped his heart out and stomped on it. In that regard, she actually hadn’t coloured his choices. Though, admittedly, there was a sense of security with Keith. He actually couldn’t do what Nyma did. (Not that Lance ever once thought about it that way.)

He took a deep breath, shoulders rising and falling. This time last year, any smiles from him were forced ones. He was angry, lashing out at others before falling silent.

Yet, this year the entire month of December had been filled with laughter, activities, joy, and so much more. The juxtaposition was absolutely wild, when he thought about it.

Maybe that was it. Maybe everything was so good that, now that everything mellowed out, the bad feelings he was trying to avoid were coming back. Did feelings work like that?

“You guys are so much easier to deal with,” Lance said to the sharks. “People suck.” Well, not all people. Just most of them. Animals had the right idea. They were intelligent and had their own social structures, but it all came down to survival.
Humans sucked in that regard too, because now survival meant fixing the terrifyingly low birth rates via essentially legal slavery over Omegas. In the eyes of the government, Lance owned Keith in every sense of the word.

The thought made him feel physically sick. Especially since one of the tour guides for the aquarium mentioned that she got a letter in the mail the other day in regards to the fact that she and her mate hadn’t had a baby in the past year. They already had four children!

Lance dreaded the day that he ended up getting something like that about him and Keith. There was something unsettling stirring behind closed government doors, he could tell. Lance never brought it up to anyone else, but Veronica seemed more and more distressed lately. She didn’t tell him anything, but he had bad feelings.

Thankfully he and Keith were fully and truly married and mated. He couldn’t be taken away from him or anything like that.

Lance tried to bring up his mood as he went about the rest of his day, but he felt sluggish and exhausted.

…

Some days Lance had to admit that it was nice to come home to the smell of a meal on the stove. It wasn’t like he expected it, just because Keith worked from home didn’t mean that he had to cook, clean, and slave away all day. Still, sometimes it was really nice.

So he was the tiniest bit disappointed when all he smelled were those darn apple candles (he wasn’t falling into that trap of thinking there was actual pie) again. He tossed his stuff on the couch and meandered down the hall in search of his mate.

He found Keith tucked away in the room that was more or less just Keith’s office now since they slept together in Lance’s room (the two spaces were still their own space on paper though). He was hunched over the brand new tablet that he got from Shiro and Allura for Christmas. Even Lance knew that it was a high end one that he could actually draw on directly. Keith was kind of obsessed with it over the past few days.

The first thing that he drew when practicing was a picture of Lance. The Alpha tried not to sniffle over that.

“Did you move at all today? Or is your back going to be stuck that way?”

Keith hummed but didn’t look up. “I moved a couple times.”

Lance sighed at that and shook his head. He walked into the room and pressed a quick kiss to Keith’s cheek. “It’s a good thing you’re cute.” He didn’t look at what Keith was drawing, knowing the Omega hated when he watched over his shoulder.

Keith sighed happily in response, but then his body tensed slightly. He sat up and looked around at him, a small chirrup of concern leaving his throat.

Not to be that person, but Lance found sounds like that absolutely adorable. Keith’s voice was naturally deep. Not in a super deep timbering way, but in a husky way that could make Lance shudder in the best of ways. The noises that were inherent to Omegas were pitched much higher, and were always just so cute to hear out of him.

“What’s wrong?” Keith asked.
“Nothing,” Lance asked immediately, but paused. He frowned as he realized that yeah, something actually was wrong. He felt weird in his skin. “Okay there is something. I just…don’t know what that something us.”

“Hmm.” Keith stood, his back cracking slightly. He leaned forward again to save his work.

Lance may or may not have taken the opportunity to look at his ass. What? Keith had a nice butt and he was allowed to look.

“You’re gonna mess up your spine,” Lance noted.

“I’m fine,” Keith replied quickly. He turned to face Lance again, slipping his arms to loop over his shoulders. “Why don’t you go get a bath or something? I think we still have a few of those bath bombs left you like?”

That did sound nice, but there was really one, glaringly wrong thing with that. “I wish we had a big enough one for both of us to fit.” He could picture them, curled up in warm water tinted a fun colour with soothing scents wafting around them. “That goes on the house wish list too.”

“Keep adding things and we’re going to have to sign a breeding agreement,” Keith noted.

Lance flinched at that, the good feelings gone. He groaned and dropped his head onto Keith’s shoulder. “Don’t joke about that. I would never do that to you.” He would never get Keith to sign a piece of paper saying that he had to carry however many kids. He was pretty sure that the minimum in those was three.

Yes, families that chose that route were compensated greatly, were praised publicly, and some even took advantage of it because they planned on having however many kids. Kudos to those people who wanted to play the system. Just the thought of putting a minimum number on their family made him sick. Many Omegas didn’t have a say in the process at all. It just really, really sucked hard.

“I know,” Keith assured him. “I’m sorry.” He pressed a kiss to the side of his head. “So, bath? I can cook something?”

Lance thought about that before shaking his head and tugging Keith close. “Could we just…lay down together for a bit? Then maybe order some pizza?”

Keith started moving, guiding Lance towards the bedroom. “Whatever you want.”

Already, they got over the idea of curling up all over one another while sleeping. It wasn’t as comfortable sleeping on a squishy mattress and pillow. It also made the moments they did curl up side by side all that nicer. Lance usually liked being the one to cuddle Keith close like a lanky koala, but sometimes it was just nice being held.

The Omega ran his hand up and down Lance’s back as the Alpha sighed and snuggled closer, resting his head on Keith’s chest.

People went on and on about how amazing Omegas smelled, normally in regards to just how appealing they were in a sexual sense. But really, there was absolutely nothing more soothing than a truly contented Omega. Keith wasn’t quite there, too much worry, but he was clearly trying to be soothing to comfort Lance.

He blinked his eyes to hide his tears. Keith caught them anyway.
“Lance…”

“I never thought I’d be happy again after Nyma,” he blurted out. “I thought that my life was over this time last year. Now I just…” Lance stared at him with eyes full of adoration. “I’m so happy I found you. What happened with us should have been a nightmare, you know?”

Keith did know. Waking up in Vegas with no memory, and a mate he didn’t know, really should have been the end of everything for him. Instead, he was freer than he’d ever been. What should have been a nightmare, what probably would have been a nightmare between any other Alpha and Omega, was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Lance was just so good. He could be a jerk at times, but he was just genuinely such a good person. Yes, Keith ultimately benefitted from Nyma not being in the picture, so in a sense he was kind of thankful for it. Pidge explained that going to Vegas wasn’t just celebrating Lance’s internship and graduating. It was because of her too. That said, Keith kind of wanted to fight the female Alpha. He wanted to fight everyone and anyone who dared hurt his husband.

Instead of saying anything about it though, Keith nuzzled his face into Lance’s hair and squeezed him close. “I’m so glad I found you too, Sweetheart.”

Lance keened at the nickname, his own scent lightening as he pressed closer still.

The Alpha truly had no idea just how much power he had him, not that he’d do anything if he did know. Keith would give him the world if he could.

All he could truly give him was love and comfort though, and that would have to be enough.

…

**December 29th**

Lance was the obviously dramatic one in their relationship. He was a theatre kid through and through, a man of action and pizazz.

That being said, Keith knew he had his moments too. He was a man on a mission, so maybe he stormed into Pidge’s house a little too dramatically for simply shooting a discussion episode of the Pidgeon Files that discussed the legitimacy of Nessie.

It might have been super rude, but Keith liked to think he was just being straight to the point when he said, “I want you to find Nyma.”

“Hi Pidge,” she replied sarcastically. “How are you, Pidge?”

“Hi Pidge,” he repeated in the same tone. “How are you, Pidge? I want you to find Nyma.”

“Explain.”

“Nyma. Lance’s ex. I want you to locate her.” It really wasn’t that difficult a request.

“I tried before,” Pidge admitted. “When she first took off. She went off the grid entirely. No tech at all. That or she just has some really good help. Wouldn’t surprise me since she is a con artist. But if there’s no tech, I’m not help. I can’t track smoke signals.”

“Look again,” Keith insisted. “I know you do off-the-book stuff for the FBI now. You have more resources.”
“I can neither confirm nor deny that.” She was already pulling something up on her computer. “But you’re right. I totally do. How could they not want me after Vegas?” She paused and looked up at him. “But I mean…why now? Lance told me to drop it. Why’d he change his mind?”

Keith fidgeted a bit. He’d stewed over the fact that Lance seemed to be relapsing into his depression at the one-year mark, which he totally got. A year after what happened to him, he felt almost just as bad.

Lance had no idea what he was planning, honestly. He didn’t want to sneak around behind him. “He didn’t. Lance…he’s not…it’s been about a year since then. Only a year. That’s it. I knew about her, and what she did, and I know he’s happy with me…but one years are the worst. Doesn’t she deserve to go to jail? Doesn’t he deserve the chance to confront her?” He stared at her seriously. “I also really just want to punch her. In the face. A lot.”

Pidge snorted at that. “You sure about this? Could piss Lance off.”

“I know. I’m sure,” Keith answered with a nod. He knew that Lance would likely get at least annoyed, but he wanted to help. He wanted to do something. He didn’t want his mate to finish this year as miserable as the last one.

“Alright then,” Pidge replied, and looked almost gleeful. “Let’s do this.”

…

**December 30th**

One hour. That was how far away Nyma was. Keith half expected Pidge to find her on the other side of the country, or maybe in a different one. But no, she was one hour away from them. That revelation rattled Keith. It was almost mocking in a sense.

When he told Pidge this, she simply noted, “You know, I knew pregnancy and STIs could be things that happen with sex, but I didn’t know being a drama queen rubbed off.”

Keith completely ignored that.

Nyma was only an hour away. So after dropping Lance off at work, Keith went to fetch Pidge, and they went on a little road trip.

The place that they ended up in was a very busy supermarket. That came as no surprise, since New Year’s Eve was coming up and people were stocking up for parties and the stores being closed. It was a bit of a surprise that Nyma, who was wanted, would be there.

“You sure she’s here?” Keith asked, raising an eyebrow, fingers tapping on the steering wheel almost nervously.

Pidge narrowed her eyes at the laptop in front of her. “Yup. GPS puts her phone in there.”

“Alright,” Keith said as got out of the car.

“Wait a second, what’s the plan?” Pidge asked as she scrambled out behind him.

He remembered to lock the doors, if only for all her stuff inside, and then kept going.  “I find her. I distract her to keep her here. You get the police here. Don’t dial the emergency line though. A tip line or whatever works.”
Pidge probably complained behind him, because it really wasn’t much of a plan, but that was kind of just how Keith did things. He was in his element.

It took him a few moments of wandering to find her, but when he did, Keith recognized her. He wondered what kind of arrogance someone had to have to not change their appearance at all.

Pidge had to be the one to find a picture of her so that Keith could see it. Lance didn’t have any pictures of her anymore. Not physical ones or on any of his social media. It was like the part of his life that included her was erased. The selfish part of Keith thought that was a good thing, but he wasn’t actually sure if it helped Lance heal, or was just a band-aid thrown on top of a broken bone.

That didn’t matter. Lance would get his chance to confront her if he wanted to.

“That’s her,” Pidge confirmed, bristling in anger. It was probably a good thing she had some of the strongest suppressants around, otherwise there would probably be a ton of people wondering what upset the young, unmated Omega. It was likely the reason she wore a shirt with a high collar on it, so no one would notice her collar during their escapades.

Pidge pulled out her phone and looked up the number to dial in that area. “How are you gonna keep her here?”

Keith scooped up a nearby jar of pictures and walked forward without answering.

Here was the thing about society. Though there were plenty of good people out there, the societal norms were that Omegas needed to be controlled and protected. That they were weak and vulnerable even outside of their heats. Those messages were drilled into the heads of students at schools, so it was no surprise that so many people thought that way.

Keith was absolutely one to rebel against that kind of image. He was also one to go with whatever plan gave him the best advantage when he wanted something. Sometimes, that meant playing with people’s expectations.

Let it be known that Keith was a really shitty actor, but there were a few scenarios where he could just land a performance.

On any camera, it would have looked like he simply tripped. No one would have thought anything better of it. To anyone watching, he looked like an Omega that tumbled, crashed into an Alpha, and sent them both spiralling into one of the displays.

Keith would have to help whatever employee was tasked to put them back later, if he got the chance.

“Watch where you’re going!” Nyma snapped at him quickly as she pushed herself up.

“I’m so sorry,” Keith said. He kept his voice soft and almost distressed. The jar of pickles that he’d been carrying with him smashed on the floor, the strong scent blocking out any potential deceit anyone might pick up from his tone, since he wasn’t smart enough to bring any scent blockers.

He very purposely made a show of a cringing away from the angry Alpha, arms crossing in front of him like he was protecting something.

Was he using the stereotype that pregnant people liked pickles to make people around him think he might be expecting without him actually saying that and lying? Hell yes, he was.

Sure enough, Nyma’s thunderous expression softened and she reached out to help him up, along
“Are you okay?”

“My Alpha’s going to be so mad,” Keith blurted out and looked around, putting all of his guilt and distress into the mess he was making for the poor, minimum wage employees to clean up, into the forefront. He turned his eyes to Nyma. “I just wanted some more pickles and to get some things to make a surprise dinner for when he gets home. Now I’ve embarrassed him!”

“I’m sure it’ll be okay,” she assured him. “If you want, I can talk to them for you? Tell him it was a genuine accident.”

What the hell? She sounded so nice and understanding. What kind of master con artist bullshit was this?

“Oh, I…uh…” Crap, what did he do now? His fingers curled unconsciously, and a stab of pain rushed through them. Keith looked down at his hand, and only just realized that he, somehow, managed to jab a piece of the broken glass into his hand. “Ow.”

As it turned out, a bleeding Omega that seemed to be pregnant was enough to make the people around him really worry. It was both a little pathetic, and really funny. Keith could see Pidge on the phone, who looked like she was about to crack up.

Too bad people just thought it was the natural way of things when an Alpha took an Omega that wanted nothing to do with them. If only they’d help out in those scenarios.

Keith did a fantastic job as a distraction to keep Nyma there. Act like a helpless Omega and she was the first one to notice? Apparently that was enough to keep her in one spot if only for appearances. Except, she was actually being nice and seemed concerned. It was very confusing.

“Nyma!” A tall man with dirty blonde hair rushed into the store, looking around with alarm. “Nyma, we need to go. Now.”

She blinked with surprise. “Why?”

Before he could answer, a couple of police officers walked into the store.

Everyone was watching with interest. This was probably the most fascinating thing to happen to some of these people.

Keith scooted out of the way a bit as they approached Nyma, and Pidge came up beside him. He wanted to stay out of the way for now. She looked incredibly confused as she was led away, and cast a glance over her shoulder. Her eyes went wide when she saw Pidge, and clearly put two and two together as she looked back at Keith.

“You weren’t supposed to hurt yourself, idiot,” Pidge muttered as she looked at the hand that one of the employees helped him bandage. Her nose scrunched up. “And you smell like pickle juice.”

One of the officers came back to them as they were leaving the store. “Are you Katie Holt and Keith McClain?”

“Yes?” Pidge answered reluctantly.

“We’d like you to follow us to the station, so we can take your statements.” He handed them a card with the address on it.

Keith felt stupid. That wasn’t part of the plan, but he knew that just taking off wouldn’t do any good.
So he nodded his head and they kept going to the car.

He had a bad feeling about this.

…

Their story was that they found Nyma over social media. As it happened, she did have accounts that the police were able to find, and she had posted about needing groceries, so it was believable. Even if it wasn’t, Keith doubted that these officers would believe that Pidge tracked her down by hacking satellites to track Nyma’s GPS.

These guys reminded him of the police back home, though not quite as bad. Those ones, in retrospect, were awful. Keith never would have agreed to push less charges when he was assaulted if it wasn’t for them insisting that no one would believe him. All Alphas, Keith hadn’t been able to stand his own against them at the time. How could he, when he’d very recently been violently assaulted in more ways that he would ever tell Lance? The room full of Alphas—including the lawyer on his side, was too much for him and he wanted out. He gave them whatever they wanted. Keith regretting that so much. It was the one single thing in his life that he wished he could go back and change.

Those Alphas treated him like an idiot child, and these ones were doing the same thing. This was different though. Keith wasn’t recently traumatized. He wasn’t afraid. He was riled up and ready to fight if need be.

The officers found the story of their internet sleuthing adorable. They found it hilarious how an Omega seemed to be fighting a battle for his Alpha. Keith really didn’t like where they were going with that.

After they gave their statements, Keith and Pidge couldn’t even go home on their own. They were made to wait for the Alphas they belonged to came for them. In Pidge’s case, it was her father. In Keith’s, it was his husband.

“I could have driven us back,” Keith muttered to himself.

“Can’t trust two Omegas to do that,” Pidge snarked sarcastically. Neither one of them were particularly happy. Keith already tried to get up to just leave once. It didn’t work out too well. He, in particular, seemed to be temporarily labelled as an at-risk Omega. Maybe Nyma said something about him being pregnant since that was part of the lie? Seemed likely. Fucker.

They were an hour away from home, and they had a perfectly good vehicle that Keith was allowed to drive. This was BS. Were these police just bored in liminal week? Was that it?

The door to the station opened, and both Sam Holt and Lance swept into the room. Keith knew that they were coming together, Sam texted Pidge as much, but he only got radio silence from him.

Lance hurried over to his side, blue eyes scanning him over, landing on his hand. He reached down and took it into his, brow furrowing. “Keith…”

“I cut it on a pickle jar,” Keith explained.

Lance mouthed the words ‘pickle jar’ before he narrowed his eyes. “What were you thinking?”

Uh oh. Even over the smell of pickles fermenting his shirt, Keith could pick up on how pissed Lance was. A few of the other Alphas around tensed as well in response to the scent.
“We’re supposed to be having a nice *quite* week,” Lance grumbled. He almost snarled when Sam Holt placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Their plan was rushed and bad at best,” the man said to him calmly, “but they did what they set out to do. Nyma’s behind bars. If you ask, they may even let you talk to her.”

Lance looked from him, to Keith, to Pidge, and back again. He huffed through his nose before looking to one of the officers. “Can I? Speak to her?

That wasn’t really how things worked, but Keith crossed his fingers that they’d let him. It was really why he set out to do this in the first place.

…

“Nyma.” Lance couldn’t help but breathe out her name. Not in awe, but rather because he felt like someone punched him in the stomach at the sight of her. She looked exactly like he remembered, smelled exactly like he remembered.

Not many Alphas could find the scents of other Alphas attractive, but he’d always been open to any dynamic really. It depended on the person. He used to get lost in her ginger scent. Now though, it made his stomach twist. He thought he loved her once, but all that he could feel was *contempt*.

This woman nearly ruined his life.

She blinked those big dark eyes at him, but didn’t look overly surprised. “You look good. Bulked up a lot.”

Lance didn’t know what to say to that. He’d been going to the gym more because while it was hot as hell that Keith could toss him over his shoulder and stroll away like it was nothing, he wanted to be able to do the same. Also good life and health choices, he supposed. He didn’t acknowledge that though. “You look the exact same.”

Nyma pursed her lips. “You got yourself a mate, I see. Keith, was it?”

Anger rose up within him so swiftly that it started even him. The *only* reason he was allowed to come in was because investigators were hoping she’d let something slip, that she’d get a bit rattled. He swore to stay on his side of the table and *not* strangle her. It was suddenly so very tempting, even though he wasn’t a violent person at all.

“You don’t get to talk about him,” he spat. Keith was rough around the edges, a bit closed off, a bit awkward, but he was the brightest star in Lance’s life, an enduring pulsar that lit up everything around him. Nyma was a black hole that pulled things into her shadows, crushing them.

That space documentary Keith showed him last night really left an impact.

“I don’t have much to say to you,” Lance realized. He thought that he’d scream and yell at Nyma for hours again. Yell about how she pretended to love him. How she broke his heart. How she stole every penny he had and then some (good thing he was able to stop those credit cards). Now though, there was just nothing to say.

“Why are you here then?” she demanded.

“You made me *miserable*,” he answered. “I need to know *why*. Why me?”

“It wasn’t personal,” Nyma answered.
Lance barked out a laugh. “The fuck it wasn’t. Was any of it real?”

They stared at one another before her gaze lowered. “We normally only targeted douchebag Alphas that deserve it. You came across that way at first. I realized I was wrong a little ways in, but we couldn’t stop at that point. I felt bad about it.”

She felt bad? Whoop-de-fucking-doo. “I fell in love with you. You almost ruined everything. My education. My career. My life. Because you conned me into giving you everything I had. You lied about who you were.”

Nyma’s gaze fell to the table. “I know.”

He bristled. “That’s it? That’s all I get. You made me fall for you, then you took all of my savings. Took everything I was worth.” His voice pitched uncontrollably. “I never thought I’d pull myself together again.”

“You seem better now. Better than when I first met you even.” She sounded relieved about that, but Lance didn’t care.

“I am,” he replied, because he was. Because in the end, she wasn’t enough to break him. It came close, and he needed help pulling himself together, but he did it. “What did you do with it? Everything you took from me?”

“We survived,” she answered. “For what it’s worth, I am sorry that I hurt you specifically. You didn’t deserve that.”

“You’re right,” Lance agreed as he stood up. “I didn’t.” He had nothing else to say to her. He got up and stormed out of the room. No one bothered to stop him as he headed towards the waiting area.

Keith looked up at him as he approached, almost shyly. Pidge and Sam already left, so it was just the two of them. “Let’s go,” Lance demanded. Keith hopped up and followed him away from the station, away from Nyma for good.

…

Keith wasn’t one to cower away from Alphas, not anymore. Especially not his Alpha. He knew Lance would never hurt him, but that didn’t mean he liked the odor that stunk up the car. He wasn’t afraid, he was just a bit rattled. No one liked when their partner was genuinely angry.

The drive was silent up to that point. Now, Keith could deal with silence most of the time, but then and there, it driving him crazy. Outside of sleeping, he’d never heard Lance be so silent before. Silent, pensive, and stewing in his anger.

“I’m not sorry,” Keith blurted out, unable to hold it in.

Lance’s fingers twitched against the steering wheel, but he stared forward, not even casting a glance towards his mate.

“You were so sad,” Keith kept going. “I don’t even think you realized how much…I just…and she needed to go to jail. Needed to. She’s a con artist and so is the other dude.” He wet his lips and fidgeted nervously. He wished that Lance would just freak out. Freak out and get it out of his system. “Are you going to say something?”

“What am I supposed to say?” Lance asked after a moment, his voice low and gruff. “You went
behind my back, got Pidge to find my ex…I don’t even want to know how but I’m sure how she did it was illegal…then drove an hour away to confront her. Without telling me.”

“I—” Keith was about to protest, but ended up yelping as Lance very suddenly pulled off to the side of the road. There was nothing else around them, and a few other cars paid them no mind.

Lance shut the engine off and turned towards him, nostrils flaring. “I got a call from the police. You know what they asked? ‘Am I speaking to Lance McClain, this is the police office yada yada’ and then they asked if I was your Alpha! Do you know what I thought? I thought you got into an accident!” He reached out and grabbed Keith’s hands, his eyes wide in both horror and anger. “Do you know how scared I was?

Keith hadn’t thought about that at all. It never occurred to him what might have been going through Lance’s head, especially if the officers didn’t exactly tell him what was going on. “I…I am sorry about that.”

“Fuck, Keith.” Lance shook his head, and Keith was startled to see that there were tears in his eyes. “I—fuck.” He brought Keith’s hands up and squeezed them, but not at all aiming to hurt, especially careful with his injured hand. It was most like he was grasping him to make sure that he was real. “I was so scared. Then I was pissed. I ranted to Sam the whole way there.”

“I wanted to help you.” Keith wanted to yell. Wanted to scream. All he could do was let his shoulders slump more. He was really stupid, wasn’t he? Just because they got away with bringing even bigger criminals down once didn’t mean that they were infallible. Sure, he might have been safer, but what about Pidge? She was unmated. It was hard to tell she was an Omega, but if someone saw her collar, they’d know. He put her at risk too.

“I know! I know you did.” Lance shook his head and laughed sharply. “I’m even pissed about the fact that a part of me is fucking swooning over that! I’m pissed that I actually do feel a bit better about confronting her and that she can’t hurt anyone else! Thank you! Never doing it again! Or at least tell me.” His voice went from even, to yelling, to almost whimpering, as he pulled Keith into an awkward hug. “Please. I was so scared. I know you’re strong, I do. I know you’re kickass and can take care of yourself, but I don’t think I’m strong enough.”

“You are,” Keith replied fiercely, and nope, his voice wasn’t wavering with tears. “You are.”

Lance tilted his head up and kissed him, Keith leaning into him, because he didn’t mean to hurt Lance, and he knew that Lance didn’t mean to hurt him by yelling.

They were still leaning, and as long as they kept trying, they’d be okay.

…

December 31

Every New Year’s Eve, for as long as Lance could remember, he went to some kind of big party. From his Tia’s, to the ones friends were hosting, and more specifically, the Holts’ party. He was used to a night of laughter, singing, dancing, and alcohol.

“You know,” Keith told him earlier, “I met Lotor at a New Year’s Eve party last year.”

“Really?” Lance asked, eyebrows shooting up.

“Yeah. Acxa made me go with her, and I guess once he realized who I was in relation to Shiro and
Allura, he zeroed in on me. I already knew who he was though. Already hated his scent. If I didn’t know though…he acted so charming that I might have overlooked that.” Keith looked troubled over that. “As soon as I realized he was after me, that he wasn’t going to go away, I thought the worst. I kept rejecting him, but he kept pushing harder. And I thought…I figured that I’d end up being Lotor’s bitch in the end.” He turned to Lance and curled up with him. “So my New Year last year sucked too for a different way. And I’m glad you saved me from that.”

“You saved me too,” Lance admitted. “I was wallowing. I probably would have let it overtake me this year. Do something dumb. So you saved me too.”

Maybe it was the knowledge that they both had awful experiences at parties last year, or maybe it was just the exhaustion for everything that happened since August rushing through them, but they agreed to stay in that night.

They didn’t turn on the television to wait for a countdown. They didn’t bring out any alcohol. They laid together. They kissed. They made love. They whispered to one another.

Keith rested on top of Lance, his entire body weighing down on him, but that was fine. It wasn’t confining or crushing, but rather, comforting. Lance’s hand gently ran up and down the bare skin on his back as Keith laid his head over his heart, drawing imaginary shapes on his chest.

Lance’s eyes darted to the clock. “You know, a lot of shitty things happened this year.” Keith tilted his head up so he could see him. “But…we helped take down a trafficking ring. We saved a lot of people, a lot of Omegas. We both gained new friends, new family. We’re both doing jobs we like.” He ran circles over his back. “So this year started bad, but…it’s pretty good now.”

A smile rose on Keith’s lips. “That’s true. And good things will come next year too. Well, this year. You know what I mean.”

The Alpha hummed in agreement. “I celebrate love every day, but I’m going to woo the shit out of you on Valentine’s Day.”

Keith chuckled warmly at that. He didn’t dare raise his voice higher. “I get to meet my nephew in a few months.” He paused. “Actually, two. Lisa’s due a month after Allura, right?”

Lance nodded. “Yeah. Oh! Rachel’s getting married. That’ll be fun.”

“I’m going to make sure you have an amazing birthday,” Keith promised. “Just like you did for me.”

“We should go somewhere for our anniversary,” Lance added thoughtfully. “Not sure where though. No where expensive.”

“Not Vegas,” Keith answered immediately.


Keith hummed happily and nodded his head. He too glanced at the clock. “I don’t make New Year resolutions, because people always forget that. I want to keep doing what we’ve been doing.”

“Making a life together?” Lance asked almost shyly.

A positively dopey smile appeared on Keith’s face. “Yeah.”

Lance leaned in closer, gently pressing his lips to Keith’s. That was absolutely what he wanted too.
January 1st

He pulled back so there was only a hair’s width between them and stared at Keith’s eyes. “I love you.”

“Love you too.” Keith answered with a smile. “Happy New Year.”

“The happiest one I’ve had yet.” He captured his lips again.

Everyone else might be out at rowdy parties, cheering as confetti fell and fireworks exploded, but in the darkness of their quiet room, Lance realized that there was really no place he’d rather be.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the great feedback for my last chapter and the experimentation I did with my writing format. I might try other things in the future, we'll have to see.

This chapter ended up being a lot about the Lance-Nyma thing, but that was by design. I wanted Lance to confront that before the New Year in the story.

Also, if you didn't see, I uploaded a story called Princes & Promises. It's a oneshot klance fantasy AU, and it was a ton of fun to write if you wanna check that out!

SO, two things: any suggestions for the names of the two future babies coming? Shallura baby, and another one for Luis and Lisa. And also, take a guess what's coming next!
Lance stretched out his arms over his head, his back cracking in the process. He shook out his limbs as he walked out of the room and towards the bathroom, casting a glance over his shoulder at his mate still sleeping inside.

Keith was sprawled out in their nest, a gentle purr audible from where Lance stood. He was relaxed and content, and given that his heat was slowly ending, he’d be fine without Lance for a bit. Suddenly leaving during the worst days was an absolute no-no. He had to give Keith a tiny bit of warning, or his anxiety would spike a lot. Even as it was, Keith wasn’t too happy to let him roam too far during those days.

Lance went about cooking a proper meal, not just premade things or quick sandwiches. He hummed a bit as he roamed about their tiny kitchen.

As far as heats went, he thought it was a pretty good one. No big drama or anything like in the telenovelas his Papá loved to watch. The closest they came to that was when Lance said that it should be called a sex-a-thon, and Keith kicked him out of the nest for an hour before calling him back. The fact that he waited so long actually kind of impressed Lance.

Well, there was the moment when Keith wildly muttered about wanting a baby, and a part of Lance wanted to lose it, but he held it together valiantly this time. That was just the hormones and instincts, not consent. He made sure that all their pills were taken on time.

In a few days they’d go through the whole ordeal of pregnancy tests to show that Keith wasn’t pregnant, because Lance was a good mate who made sure that all contraceptives were properly taken. He was also very proud of himself for holding his own personal thoughts and desires together better than the first time. Though he supposed that was something he’d get used to over time.

When he turned to grab two plates, Lance paused as he stared at the calendar. The 14th was circled in bright red ink with little pink hearts all around it to remind them of the day, like they’d forget. Not that Lance needed a specific day to show Keith he loved him, he liked to think that he showed that every day, but the day was there and damn if he wasn’t going to use it.

Not only that, but Valentine’s fell on the perfect day in February. Basically seven days after Keith’s heat would end, and seven days before he was leaving to go to Nevada.

The thought of that made Lance frown. It was probably the lingering protective feelings due to Keith’s heat that was making him really hate the idea right now. The thought of Keith going alone back there, where he’d been hurt so many times and so bad, made him bristle. Seriously, if he had fur, it would probably be all puffed up right now.

The soft sound of padding footsteps caught his ears, and Lance’s lips ticked up as he felt arms wrap around his waist, a solid warmth leaning against his back. “Feeling better?”

“A bit jittery,” Keith admitted, and that alone made Lance’s heart flutter. During his first heat, he always insisted that he was okay, but not he was being more honest.

“Don’t feel the need to continue the sex-a-thon?”
Keith squeezed him tightly, and not necessarily in a good way. “If you call it that one more time, you’re not getting laid again until my next heat.”

Lance twisted around and looked down at his mate’s scowl, delighting in just how adorable he looked with his bedhead and loose clothes. It wasn’t like Keith was high maintenance, but the way the large shirt dipped off one of his shoulders was just too cute. How was it fair for someone to be so handsome and gorgeous and hot, yet still make Lance want to coo?

“Don’t do that,” he protested with a pout, looping his arms over Keith’s shoulders. “That’ll make you suffer too.”

“I can do it,” he Omega protested with a shrug of his broad shoulders. Lance decided not to push that, because then he’d take it as a challenge, and Keith was just as competitive as he was. He’d go out of his way to prove his point in a case like this.

Luckily though, the putrid scent of burning reached him so he didn’t have to reply. Unluckily, breakfast was burning.

Lance squawked and lurched towards the stove to try and fix it. After a week of being surrounded by Keith’s heightened honey scent (the remnants of it still lingering on him), the burning was even worse than it normally would be.

His partner chuckled at his misfortune before coming to help him, because damn, beyond all else, they were a fantastic team.

He couldn’t help but admire his mate as the young man pulled his hair up into a very messy ponytail, and began to hum as he easily sliced through the fruit laid out before him. It was small moments like this that Lance truly appreciated most. The moments where everything was so simple and easy, not that their lives were too complicated at this point.

When they went over to the couch to eat, Lance decided that he really wanted to find a place with room for a table. Even if it was a small little bistro set or whatever. He didn’t really want to get them locked into a rental agreement for another year though, just in case.

Lance’s eyes turned back to Keith, who was quick to turn on some weird ghost hunting show, entirely engrossed by it. He worked from home, and when Lance asked about it, worried he felt cooped up or like he had to stay there, Keith assured him that he actually was pretty happy with bringing in a bit of cash from doing commissions, plus his little youtube stint with Pidge. It wasn’t a lot, but it was a bit to help, and more importantly, it gave him something to do that he liked doing.

Most Omegas had to settle for really shitty part-time jobs, three hours here, four hours there, that were considered ‘appropriate’ for them. Nothing labour intensive, since they were something fragile to be coddled and protected at all costs, even if they protested. Those just didn’t know what was best for them. Even then, those were the ones that were allowed to work. Most Alphas didn’t let their Omegas work.

It was really stupid. Lance was pretty sure Keith would have gone stir crazy already if he didn’t have something to do with his time. He admitted to as much before. It was why Shiro, who was once a PI, had Keith on the books as his bookkeeper (and the only reason Shiro kept the failing business in the end, since he was a noble person in a town with a severely corrupt justice system, and technically inherited Allura’s company when he married her).

“Pidge wants to go check out this creepy old hotel in a few days,” Keith noted suddenly.
“Uh, okay? Don’t let any ghosts follow you home?”

“I would never.” Keith looked so scandalized that Lance actually had to chuckle. “She wanted to go on the 14th, because of course she did, but we’re doing something, right?”

“Of course we are,” Lance insisted, now the scandalized one that Keith would dare question that. “I swore before that I was going to woo you so hard—a absolutely sweep you off your feet. And I’m still planning on it. Valentine’s Day is included in that package.” Then his shoulders slumped as another thought hit him. “You, uh, don’t mind doing stuff like that, right?”

“I thought Valentine’s Day was stupid for pretty much ever,” Keith admitted. “But, in high school, when I was in a relationship, I was a sucker for it, and those were just idiotic teenage boys who gave me chocolate and a card, and looked for an excuse to get laid. You though…it’s different.”

Lance laughed, because he understood that. With his first girlfriend, he wanted to impress her so much on Valentine’s, and between that time and Nyma, he usually managed to score a date around that time of year (partially for the exact same reasons that Keith mentioned).

He really wanted to go all out with Keith though, because his husband deserved the world, and damnit, he deserved the world with him.

Keith’s expression suddenly shifted to alarm. “You didn’t book an expensive restaurant or anything, right?”

Lance snorted at his expression. “Course not. We’re working on saving money. I have plans to make you swoon while on a budget.”

“A man after my own heart,” Keith laughed as he set his empty plate on the coffee table. He leaned against Lance’s side, still tired from a week of his hormones being wildly out of check. Heats could be crazy, but the end of them were usually lazy and filled with cuddling. Not that Lance was an expert, but two for two now, Keith was being cuddly, and when he got up to put the dishes away, his scent spiked with a slight bit of anxiety.

So if they went back to their room (Lance’s room…or was it theirs? It was confusing.) and curled up in the freshly cleaned nest together, no one could really blame them.

…

Lance had to work on Valentine’s Day. It was something that he planned for and expected, given that he was off on a mandatory ‘breeding leave’, something Alphas (and sometimes Betas) had when their Omega partners went into heat. It was a nationally mandated thing, so all businesses big and small had to offer it.

It usually meant a lot of catch-up and hard work his first week back. Not that it was bad work, he loved helping the marine biologists with the animals, while doing his own research as well. Lance was pretty sure that they were impressed by his work ethics so far, and it may have slipped that there might be some funding for an actual research trip in the future. A trip that just happened to coincide with his thesis.

He wasn’t going to get his hopes up too high for it right now though.

Working Valentine’s Day wasn’t even that bad. A small school came by for a trip, and though he wasn’t a tour guide or anything, Lance did get to talk to them about an injured baby dolphin that was recently rescued. It was pretty badly injured, but was a tough little guy and survived. Lance was
pretty sure that it wouldn’t be able to be reintroduced to the wild though.

Lance loved kids. He loved how curious they were. He loved how sassy they could be in funny ways. He didn’t like the little snots that needed manners, but that was the parents’ fault, not their own (most of the time). No child of his would be a rude brat. Well, they’d probably end up being sassy, and maybe a bit of a troublemaker.

As he finished with his logs for the day, Lance allowed himself to actually try and picture what that might look like. What a little Keith-Lance combo would actually be. Blessed with amazing genetics, of course. He’d love them however they came—brown skin, pale skin, black hair, brown hair, indigo eyes, blue eyes, or whatever throw-backs they got from recessive genes.

He wanted to teach them both Spanish and English at the very least. Lance knew that Keith didn’t know much or feel any kind of attachment to his own culture, but Lance’s was important to him and he wanted his kids to be a part of that (at least until they could decide for himself).

While Lance would accept any child, even if they were born with only one arm and unable to see or something extreme like that. He hoped against all hope that they wouldn’t have to struggle with any sort of prejudice through their life, but knew that even the shape of their eyes could rain assumptions and hurt down on them.

He would accept any child, love them no matter what, but he kind of hoped that they wouldn’t be an Omega. He saw Pidge’s life, how she had to basically hide who she was, how she was sometimes downright ashamed of that aspect of herself. He saw the way people treated his mother. He saw the way that Keith struggled so much with embracing all aspects of himself.

Keith wasn’t ashamed of being an Omega, but Lance knew he also hated it due to how people treated him, due to the laws that were slapped on him. Lance knew he hated the expectations—like they didn’t think he could be strong and masculine (which he was, and Lance really loved that side of him).

Likewise, Lance wouldn’t be ashamed of an Omega child, but he’d be terrified for them. There were a lot of awful people in the world that would prey on them even from a young age (if they even thought they were Omegas).

Lance froze when he was about to put his logbook away. It just hit him that no matter the risks, he wanted a future with one, hopefully more, little people running around the house. Not a shitty apartment. A house that maybe wasn’t perfect but they could fix it up. They’d have a dog, cause Keith loved dogs and he knew he wanted one even if they had no room.

He really, really wanted that. It was almost a physical want within him.

“A year,” he muttered to himself. They promised that they’d wait for about a year to truly discuss it, because he did still want time with Keith himself. It was fair on both of them to want to experience everything a single year brought—to see how they handled everything themselves—before bringing an innocent life into it all. He did still wanted that. He did. He just also wanted a baby.

He allowed himself to think about it on the way to his first stop(and realized that, no, it actually wasn’t a year at this point, it was six months), but as soon as he got home, it was game time, and Lance had something else to focus on.

A baby was out of the question for now, but a romantic Valentine’s date? That was doable.

He bought a single bright red rose, glad that there was anything left at all. He only wanted one
anyway. Then he set out to buy a simple pack of chocolates. It was nothing fancy, but he wasn’t trying to be. He knew that Keith would appreciate it.

Unfortunately, on the way home, the clouds parted, and a chilling rain poured down. At first, it made Lance scowl a bit, but then he realized that the rain was fine. It could make for nice cuddling-atmosphere, after all.

His opinion of rain swiftly changed. He liked water, he really did. He lived for it. What he didn’t like was tripping out of his car and face-planting directly into a puddle, crushing the box of chocolate beneath him.

Lance groaned and scowled as he pushed himself up, arm stinging a bit from where he prevented his head from slamming into the cement. He hauled himself up, growled at the car, because what the hell?

Needless to say, he slammed the door. Everyone was right, it was a stupid piece of junk.

He stormed inside, still determined to have a good day, even if it didn’t involve chocolate now. It seemed that the world was out to get him that day. His wet shoes slipped on the old stairs, and he fell back down, flailing as he attempted to grab onto the railing. He thankfully didn’t hit his head, though the rest of his body ached horribly. One of his hands stung, and he realized that the thorns from the rose that he crushed.

Lance groaned and let go of the railing that saved him from cracking open his head. He flopped down onto the stairs dramatically and just laid there.

Unsure of how much time passed (it was likely only a minute or so even though it felt like years), Lance heard the sound of footsteps come down the stairs, stop at the platform just above him, and quickly retreat back up. That’s right, avoid that disaster that he is. It’s what he deserves.

Two pairs of footsteps reached his ears a moment later. There was a pause, and then the sound of scrambling as someone ran down to him. “Lance? Lance! Are you okay? Did you hit your head? Is anything broken?”

Oh. It was Keith. Of course it was Keith. He looked up at him glumly. “Leave me here to die.”

There was a pause and Keith sighed. “He’s okay. Just being a drama queen. Thanks, Norman.” Yeah, he was definitely annoyed.

Lance looked up to see Neighbour Norman pass by them. He was likely the one that saw Lance sprawled there, and then went to get Keith.

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” Lance said grumpily as he showed Keith the crushed rose and chocolates. “Life hates me.”

Keith’s annoyed expression softened a bit as he sighed again. He rolled his eyes towards the ceiling. “So dramatic.” Lance tried to protest that, but all he could do was squeak as Keith lifted him up.

This was…actually kind of nice. He didn’t plan on being carried around like a princess that day, but damn if it wasn’t fun. Keith might have an ass that wouldn’t quit and hips and thighs to match, but he was broad shouldered and damn, his arms. Lance liked those quite a bit. Especially since it meant that he could be carted around like royalty he deserved to be.

“You’re getting heavy,” Keith noted as he pushed through the partially open door.
“Uh, rude. I am not getting fat.” Lance squawked as he was dropped onto the couch unceremoniously. His mate was a jerk.

“I meant you’re getting more muscular, asshat.” He pushed Lance’s legs off of the couch and sat down. “What was that about?”

“Like I said, Happy Valentine’s Day.” He pushed the ruined rose and chocolates into his arms. “I fell out of the car onto the chocolates. Then I fell up the stairs onto the rose. Life hates me.”

Keith set the chocolates down on the coffee table and looked at the rose thoughtfully, twisting it in his hand. He then stood up, and Lance watched as he treated back down into his room. He came back a moment later with a slim class vase that held a single flower in it. A single blue rose.

Lance sat up. “Where did you get that?” He stared in awe at the flower, because he’d never seen a blue rose in real life.

“I have sources,” Keith replied with a shrug. He placed his own, crushed rose into the vase beside it, and Lance grimaced at the comparison. Then he lifted up the blue rose.

For a moment, Lance thought that Keith was going to hand him the rose, but that wasn’t at all what happened. Instead, Keith dropped it to the floor, and stamped on it with his boots.

Lance squawked loudly. “What are you doing?” Was he insane?

Keith scooped the rose off of the floor and set it in the vase. “There, now they match.” He held the vase out to Lance.

The Alpha stared at the flowers for a moment before hysterical laughter bubbled out of him. He couldn’t believe that Keith just did that, but at the same time it was such a Keith thing to do. Now he looked so confused in that adorable way where he looked borderline pissed off. That just made him laugh more.

“God, I love you so much,” Lance said with a laugh. He pressed a kiss to Keith’s cheek, who still seemed confused, but he was smiling too, so that was a win.

“Come on,” Keith said, exasperated but amused. “Let’s get your hand cleaned and go out to see if any sit-down place has any room.”

Their original plan was to cook something together, but after his little ordeal, Lance felt like treating himself a bit. “I guess we could try that Chinese place down on Third…”

“Oh, we could try Olive Garden and try to eat as many break sticks as possible,” Keith suggested, because he knew that though Lance’s true love was garlic knots, he was a sucker for breaksticks too.

Good god, Lance truly loved this man.

…

Lance always loved the concept of, well, love. He could appreciate the people that had no desire for a romantic relationship like Pidge, but he never felt that way. He’d always wanted to fall in love with someone. Hell, he’d done it twice in his life in a romantic sense, and planned on falling in love over and over again with Keith, because hell yes he was.

There were different forms of love, and they happened in different ways. Heck, even romantic love was different for every person. For Hunk, it was the slowburn of skype calls with Shay where they
decided that they really did want to give the whole long-distance thing a shot, and not just as friends. For Pidge, it was something that she didn’t want, proclaiming love for only her robots. For Matt, it was being super gooey with his girlfriend. For Lance, it was falling hard and fast with no end in sight.

The first time, it ended badly. He fell and crashed and the results from it were emotionally devastating. The second time, Lance felt like Keith gave him wings and he learned to soar instead of fall.

It happened so quickly. The feelings were there the day they wandered around Vegas, trying to figure out what happened to them the night before that resulted in them becoming mates. Outside of their time in the hospital after that, the two of them saw one another every single day since.

Tomorrow would be the first time in six months where that wasn’t the case.

Perhaps it was Lance’s Alpha instincts, but he really didn’t want to let Keith go. Not because he couldn’t take care of himself, but because Lance would miss him. It was only now that they were standing at the airport that Lance realized just how much he was used to waking up to his mate every morning and seeing him every night. He was used to stealing kisses, anywhere from sweet little pecks to all-consuming passionate ones. He was used to hugs and laughter. Now it was going to be like the old days where it was just him.

He didn’t much like that.

“The asshole part of me really wants to tell the airport security that I changed my mind and you’re not allowed to go,” Lance muttered into Keith’s neck. Security was strange when it came to Omegas traveling alone. Lance had to go with him through this halfway point, where Alphas could go through one door to go out front again, and the Omega would go through one last security check. It was super weird, and Lance was pretty sure an unaccompanied minor could get through an airport on their own easier.

“If you did that—not that you would, you’re not that type of person—I would kick your ass,” Keith said honestly. That was fair. He pulled Lance’s head from his shoulder so he could stare into his eyes. “It’s only a week.”

“A lot can happen in a week,” Lance whined. That was true. They knew that more than most.

“A lot will. We’re going to be Uncles,” Keith reminded him. That was right. That was why he was going. Allura was due to have her baby this week. Who was Lance to stop him from going to that? In fact, he’d be on the plane with him if he could have gotten the time off work. He loved babies, and yeah he had a niece and nephew already, but this was the first one from Keith’s side! The first one that would grow up with Uncle Keith and Uncle Lance as mates, not Tio Lance, and Tio Keith came later on.

“I know, I just…I’m going to miss you.”

Keith’s expression softened. I’m going to miss you too. He leaned up and pressed a kiss to Lance’s lips. Lance tugged him close so they were pressed against one another, taking in the sight and sound and taste and feel and smell of his mate.

It was only a week. Lance would be busy working for the most part. He and Hunk were going to have a movie marathon together. Later on, they were going to go out with Pidge to their favourite buffet and eat until they felt like puking. Just like the old days before adult life started catching up with them.
That said, Lance still made a noise of protest as Keith pulled away just enough so he could speak. “I need to go. I’ll text you every day.”

“Promise?” Did he sound desperate? Probably. He didn’t particularly care.

“I’ll text you updates all the time. Pictures too,” Keith promised. “And I’ll definitely call every night. Well, night here. If it gets late, give me a call since time difference might mess me up a bit.” He looked down almost bashfully, playing with the collar of Lance’s coat. “I’ll miss you too.”

Lance cooed a little bit at that, and kissed him again. He knew that Keith would miss him, he did. It was why he packed a few of Lance’s shirts, so he’d have the smell with him. It was nice to hear though. To be reminded that though Keith was going back to the place he grew up, he was going to come back because he wanted to. Because they had a life here together now.

They exchanged a few more kisses before Keith stepped away. “Time to go.”

“Text me when the plane lands?” Lance asked, his stomach twisting. He felt like he was going to throw up.

“I’ll alphabetize my complaints of the flight,” Keith replied, earning a laugh in response. The Omega darted forward one more time for a quick kiss before he headed over to security.

Lance watched him go. He didn’t like this, but Keith needed to do it. Keith needed to go home and meet the baby when they came. A week separated wasn’t a bad thing for them either. A week to remind themselves of who they were outside of one another, though they strove to do that anyway with their different interests.

“Lance.” He looked up to see that Keith turned to face him, past the first part of security. “I’ll see you in a week! Love you!”

He smiled brilliantly at the fact that Keith wasn’t at all trying to be quiet. “Love you too!” He called back and waved. The Alpha at the first part of security looked at him, clearly amused. It was better than the skeptical looks some people gave him when he confirmed that yes, Keith was traveling alone, and yes, Lance knew.

He walked back out the other door and headed to the windows to wait and watch the plane take off.

His phone chimed a little while later, and Lance looked down curiously.

1 New Message From Hubby’s Mullet <3

Lance laughed loudly at the selfie Keith sent him. He was stuck in a middle seat between two old ladies who looked far too pleased with the situation, both smiling at the camera. There was a caption that read ‘they want to adopt me’.

He giggled at that and sent a selfie back. They were a package deal, so they had to approve of both halves.

Keith didn’t text back, but that was okay. Lance’s mood was already lifted just a little bit with the proof that Keith wasn’t just going to disappear on him. Things were going to be okay.

Still, as Lance watched the plane take off, he couldn’t want for this week to end.

Chapter End Notes
I won't lie to you, I'm not proud of this chapter at all. I got half way through it the day I posted the last chapter, and then I just...lost all inspiration. Not because I don't care about their Valentine's together, but because my mind was already jumping ahead to the next chapter.

The next chapter is definitely going to go into Keith's head more. Lance confronted his past. Time for Keith to confront his.

I'm excited for the next chapter. This one was okay, but you know...NEXT CHAPTER! :D
Healing

Chapter Notes

Please note that this chapter dives into what could be a lot of triggering topics. There are specifically two scenes that do this. I will summarize both at the end.

To be clear, nothing bad happens to Keith or anyone around him. He does get a bit more descriptive about what happens to him years before. So triggers could include talk of rape, assault, technically kidnapped (held against his will), self-harm, very unsafe abortion.

To be clear though, this chapter is called Healing for a reason. I do not go into flashbacks. I do not depict these things.

They start after a text conversation with Keith and Lance that ends with this line:
Hubby’s Mullet: Why are you like this?

This is the first line after it ends: Keith told Lance everything over video chat that night

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hubby’s Mullet <3 > My Loser

Hubby’s Mullet <3: Landed.

My Loser: Pics or it didn’t happen.

Hubby’s Mullet <3 sent a picture.

My Loser: Aww there he is! You look so grumpy!

...  

It felt odd being back in the dry desert air of Nevada. Keith grew up in this place, and he used to thrive in this kind of environment. His father’s house was even a bit out of the city, surrounded by mostly sand. He learned how to survive in that kind of environment if he needed to. At the time, Keith didn’t realize that his father was giving him the skills to run into the desert and survive on his own if he had to. IF things got bad.

Keith thought about it, at one point. Instead, he ended up at the ravine not far from his house.

He stared around the room that he called his home for nearly 23 years. It didn’t look the exact same, because his mother sent him a lot of his own personal things. There were new blankets on the bed, and small trinkets and important things were now gone. They moved on.

A part of Keith honestly feared the thought that he might end up wanting to stay. That he would hug his mother, step into the house, see his room, and decide that it was where he actually wanted to be and nothing else could change his mind.

He didn’t feel that at all. He knew this was his home at one point, but it didn’t feel like home now. It
was big and open, and there was actually a table! But there wasn’t Lance. There wasn’t laughter and
kisses and a scent that relaxed and riled Keith all at once.

Keith let go of his small suitcase that he brought with him. Normally, he would have been good with
a backpack, but he wanted to bring a few of Lance’s things with him to be able to scent.

It was so weird being back. Not back home, this wasn’t home, home was in Florida, but just there.
He was so happy to see his mother and Acxa again. They picked him up at the airport to bring him
home. He was honestly even more excited to see Shiro and Allura again. That was kind of it though.

“Everything okay in your room?” Krolia asked as he came back down stairs. She was concentrating
on the steaming pot in front of her.

“Yeah.” He frowned. “What are you doing?”

“Cooking.”

“Why?”

“I thought you’d like a nice homemade meal.”

Keith stared at her, and Krolia stared back. The steam turned to black smoke behind her. Needless to
say, she tossed it out the door and they decided that they were going down to the diner they
frequented with Keith used to live there.

“Well I’ll be,” the man that worked there since what seemed to be the beginning of time, said. “Keith
Kogane. Heard an Alpha up and carted you away.” Mr. Jones was an Omega, and technically, he
owned the small establishment. It was in his Alpha wife’s name, but he was the one that ran it.

Keith snorted. “Yeah, I live out in Florida with my husband. He’s ridiculous, but he’s mine. Came
back to visit everyone.” It didn’t at all surprise Keith that people knew he left, and why. It would
have been pretty obvious to the people that knew his family that he left to Vegas, and never came
back.

He was going to make sure that any person that assumed he was in a dangerous or bad situation was
proven wrong. Though the fact that he was there without his Alpha should have made that obvious
(he made sure to keep the form with Lance’s permission to be there on his body at all times).

Mr. Jones seemed to catch onto that easily enough, if the way he relaxed said anything. His face lit
up a bit. “Ah, that’s right. Miss Allura is going to have her baby, isn’t she? Your brother came here
quite frequently for her cravings.”

That made both Keith and Krolia laugh. His mother looked at him with a smirk. “Perhaps we should
take something to her as well after this?”

Keith lit up, because yeah, they were going to see Shiro and Allura that night, and having a gift of
food she liked probably was a good idea.

…”

Keith > This Chat Needs A New Name But I’m Too Lazy To Think Of One (by fallout boy)

Keith sent a picture.

Lance: You leave me alone and get the most delicious looking food ever? Unfair.
Hunk: Lance.

Lance: Sorry bud. Yours is the best.

Hunk: That does look pretty good though.

Keith: It’s awesome! I grew up on this food.

Pidge: How are you not fat? I’d eat that every day and no one could stop me and my heart would explode from salt

Keith: Exercise.

Allura: KEITH!

Allura: YOU DARE SHOW UP AFTER MONTHS OF ABANDONMENT

Allura: AND GO TO MY PLACE OF CRAVINGS

Allura: AND POST ABOUT IT HERE

Keith sent a picture.

Hunk: Does that box say Allura? That’s like, really fancy calligraphy.

Keith: Yeah. He signs all boxes like that.

Allura: Keith you are my favourite :D

Shiro: Uh…

Allura: F a v o u r I t e

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Hubby’s Mullet <3 > My Loser

My Loser: Having fun?

Hubby’s Mullet <3: I don’t like my room

Hubby’s Mullet <3: I grew up in it but I don’t like it. It’s not right

My Loser: All your blankets, pillows and stuff are here so makes sense

Hubby’s Mullet <3: well yeah but

My Loser: ????????

Hubby’s Mullet <3: It doesn’t smell like you.

My Loser: omg

My Loser: I’m crying Keith, you made me cry
Allura’s house was a little intimidating.

With the Garrison and her company there, the city actually was pretty big. Keith just tended to stick to the less populated area that puttered out into the desert. Allura, on the other hand, lived on the exact opposite side of the city where they were a few massive houses. It was behind closed iron gates with beautiful fields and flowers and gardens. There were even fountains. They could probably fit like ten of his and Lance’s apartment inside of it. Minimum.

Keith was glad that Shiro got to live there. His brother deserved the best.

On the way there though, they passed another mansion behind iron gates. It was just as beautiful as Allura’s home, and for this area, it didn’t particularly stand out as anything odd, but Keith knew what it was and it made him shudder.

That was the Galdara mansion. From what he understood, it was raided not long after they got proof that Honerva was in charge of the trafficking ring and was searched thoroughly. They found some pretty horrifying stuff in hidden flower levels there, just like a horror movie.

“It’s for sale,” Krolia explained.

“Why would want that that?” Keith wondered, but he knew. There were plenty of rich people out there who would buy it to glorify the things that had been done down there.

Lotor was an awful man, but time and space let Keith objectively see that he was easily a product of the world they lived in. Someone that grew up with the likes of Zarkon and Honerva didn’t really stand a chance. He was an awful man that would have gladly bitten Keith against his will. Hell, if Lotor got his way back in Vegas, Keith knew for a fact that he’d be six months pregnant right now (which was a completely terrifying thought that almost made him want to vomit). All because he grew up in an environment that treated Omegas like idiots. All because he saw himself as the only person that could save the world from the population crisis.

He still murderer that other woman that worked for him, Narti. He still kidnapped and assaulted Keith, even if his allergic reaction stopped it from turning into rape. He did horrible things to Allura in the past as well.

Despite that, he wasn’t as bad as his parents. That’s how sick and disgusting they were.

“Where is he?” Keith asked as they drove by. “Lotor?”

“He made bail,” his mother answered bluntly. That was one thing Keith could always count on: the fact that his mother would never mince words. “The situation around him is still strange. He has agreed to testify against his mother for a lighter sentence.”

“A lighter sentence?” Keith perked up a bit at that. “What does that mean? He’s admitting to what he did.”

“Not all of it.” She shook her head. “Kolivan has kept me up to date. Lotor staunchly denies the murder charges. The rest, he’s letting sit for now. It does have me a bit worried though.”

Keith thought about it in confusion, but then it hit him. Without the murder charges, Lotor could twist all the other ones around as misunderstandings, or Omegas being a tease and so on.
His stomach twisted. “He’s going to take it to court, and I’m going to have to testify,” Keith realized.

“If you want.”

“It’d be that or dropping the charges,” he snapped and crossed his arms in front of him. His fingers twitched, aching to grab his phone to text Lance. He didn’t though. Not this time.

He wasn’t going to do that again. He wasn’t. Keith refused to let another guilty man walk free. Sure, Lotor’s charges would probably just be a slap on the wrist to him, but it was the point of the matter.

Keith let a monster go once, because some corrupt cops got him to change his statement, to not press the worst charges. Keith knew now that due to the condition he was in, the asshole would have gone to jail for sure.

Except, they would have found out he was pregnant at the time. They would have forced him to keep it. That monster legally still would have had the right to mark Keith, to demand visitation and control over them. And that was with the more intense charges. Without them, well, Keith definitely wouldn’t be sitting beside his mother, driving up to Allura’s obnoxiously huge house.

Keith knew monsters. Lotor was an awful man, there was no doubting that, but he wasn’t a monster. He deserved to be locked up, but monsters, they should be put down.

If he could go back to where he was freshly graduated, he would stop himself from showing interest in that man who was older than he seemed. He would stop himself from going to his house that November night just a few weeks shy of his nineteenth birthday.

Or at the very least, he would stop himself from letting a monster walk free.

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“Keith!” A tall man with orange hair and an impressive moustache called out. That was the only warning he got before the Beta actually swooped him up into a hug. “It’s good to see you, my boy!”

He laughed and patted his back. “You too, Coran.”

Coran was Allura’s guardian, of some sort. Keith wasn’t exactly sure how it worked. An uncle or godfather or something. He was the one that legally took over Allura’s company (and was now sharing responsibilities with Shiro since they were both Betas), and was the one that raised her after her parents passed.

He was one of the most genuinely nice people Keith ever met. Even if he was clearly a few crayons short of a box.

“Allura’s kept me up to date with your life our in Florida, it sounds like you found yourself a good one!”

“I did,” Keith agreed, a smile on his face. “How’s Allura? You must be excited.” For all purposes, Coran ad Krolia would both be the grandparents to the baby. Allura and Shiro both made sure that they knew that, since Coran looked after Allua all her life, and Krolia helped Shiro in his time of need even if she had no obligation to.

“Come and see for yourself.”

Coran guided them into the house, which was polished and beautiful, but that was just the surface level. Keith knew that Shiro was a disaster, and Allura personified chaos when she wanted to.
Right now though, Allura was propped up but a mountain of pillows, blankets twisted around her in elegant, comfortable waves. Grand would be the only way to describe her nest. She wore a plain, pale pink t-shirt, and her belly was absolutely huge. Considering the last time he saw her, her strong abdomen muscles kept her bump small, it was quite a shock. It didn’t compare to pictures.

Her dark brown hair faded down into the silvery white she used to die it on the regular, and it didn’t at all surprise Keith that she managed to find a way to make it a gradual change so she didn’t have an obvious line of two very different colours.

Keith, personally, would have looked like a disaster. Allura looked like a Queen.

Her eyes went wide at the sight of him, and she pushed herself up a little more. “Keith! Come here!” Even when he got to the edge of her nest, she waved him in more. It wasn’t the first time that he climbed into a nest with Allura, and it was common for pregnant Omegas to allow trusted family into their nests.

She wrapped her arms around him as best as she could, nuzzling him briefly. Keith returned the polite gesture and settled beside her. It was so nice to once again smell her warm, flowery scent.

“I’m huge,” she noted when she realized that Keith kept glancing at her belly. “A whale.”

Keith snorted. “You’re not a whale, you drama queen.” His expression softened. “It’s really nice to see you.” He handed her the to-go box he brought with him.

Allura’s eyes lit up excitedly. “Thank you! Coran wouldn’t go get it because ‘it’s not healthy’ Allura.” She rolled her eyes and deepened her voice when she mocked Coran. “I’m aware. I eat healthy for my baby, and my cravings are pretty much gone but I’m about to push a bowling ball out of a straw so I should be allowed to have what I want.”

“Amen,” Keith agreed. If things went according to plan, it would be something that he’d experience in a few years.

“Oh!” She set the food down beside her and grabbed her phone instead. She threw an arm around him and said, “Selfie to send the chat!”

Keith snorted with amusement, but let her do as she wanted, smiling at the camera. He was still leaning against her slightly as she sent the selfie to the group chat when he felt a small bump against his arm.

His eyes widened and he straightened up. Allura set her phone aside and reached to grab her food with one hand, the other soothing over her stomach where Keith felt the bump earlier. She was silent for a moment before her head shot towards him. “Feel!” She grabbed his hand and pressed it to her stomach, where he felt more thumps. “That’s your nibling.”

Keith couldn’t help but feel choked up. There was a baby in there. A living person that was small and helpless, and full of all the potential in the world. Something that Allura and Shiro created together. A bit of both of them, yet entirely their own person.

“Doesn’t that freak you out?” he asked her.

“A bit,” she admitted. “At first, it felt just like little bubbles and taps on the inside and I was both terrified and exhilarated. Now though, they need to stop playing football with my rips.” She sent an unimpressed look to her stomach. “Only a few more days until you’re vacated though.”

“Doesn’t that scare you?” he wondered. The thought of something living inside of him was super
weird. The thought of pushing that out through some kind of small organs was terrifying. Omegas were a bit luckier than female Betas. Things down there tended to adjust and heal a bit easier. Labour was by no means a walk in the park for anyone though.

“Terrifies me,” Allura said with a straightforward nod. “It’s rare for Omegas to die in child birth. Exceedingly rare. Of course, no one likes pain or anything. And then I’ll be responsible for an actual person. Yes, I’m terrified. But I’m also very excited.”

Her smile was brilliant and reached her sparkling eyes, so Keith couldn’t help but smile back. “Is Shiro excited? I know what he says over the phone and in text, but still.”

“He cried when he first felt the baby kick,” she whispered conspiratorially as she picked at her food. Keith snorted in amusement. He could see that. He could also see Lance doing the same thing, and wasn’t that a strange thing to think about.

Keith knew what those first few weeks of pregnancy felt like. The feeling that something was off. The soreness. The crippling nausea. The way his scent changed even to him. This was something else though. The idea used to give him nightmares, where he’d wake up and find himself like Allura, except instead of excited and with someone who cared for her, he was trapped with a monster in a hell unique to Omegas.

Suddenly though, he could see himself this way with a super excited Lance babbling beside him. The image was sweet, and it didn’t make a spike of terrifying fear pierce him. It actually made his lips curl up slightly. It still didn’t sit completely right with him though, which was honestly a bit of a surprise to Keith. They were waiting a year to truly discuss it, and he loved the thought of having kids with Lance, but the thought of actually being pregnant? That still made something dark squirm inside of him.

“Are you alright?” Allura asked, her brow furrowing with concern.

Keith smiled at her warmly. “I’m okay.”

She chose to believe him and not pry, something he was thankful for.

Shiro didn’t come back until a few hours later, since his brother coming back wasn’t a reason to not be at work (which was still funny to think about, because he was a PI with a failing business when Keith left and now he was helping run a massive company). When they heard Coran greet him, Allura smiled and pushed him out of the nest. “Go. I see him every day.”

Keith didn’t need to be told twice. He nearly tripped on the blankets in his excitement. He pointedly ignored her laughter as he hurried out the door.

He didn’t even get around the corner before Shiro came into sight. The Beta looked up at him, and a huge smile spread across his lips. “Keith!”

It was more common for Keith to push away a person instead of holding them close, but he’d always spared his brother a hug here and there (Acxa was more like him and didn’t like hugs much). So he didn’t at all hesitate to throw his arms around Shiro and hug him tightly.

Shiro laughed as his arms wrapped around him, squeezing him until it kind of hurt, but that was okay. Keith honestly felt like crying. He missed his mother and his sister a lot, but he had seen them a little more recently. Shiro though? It’d been over half a year! Sure, he missed Allura too, but this was Shiro.

“Missed you,” Keith muttered to him.
“I missed you too, baby bro,” Shiro replied in kind. He leaned his head on the top of Keith’s head, because he would forever be a giant who was way taller than him (kind of like Hunk), but Keith didn’t mind. He found it comforting.

This was one of the reasons he was glad to be back.

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Keith felt bad for his sister. He really did. Yeah, she tried to basically pawn him off onto a really bad person, and she didn’t at all listen to him when he protested that, but she wasn’t a bad person by any means. Some people might have said that it was karma or justice that she went from being Lotor’s right-hand woman with a highly successful job, and an equally successful mate, to being a bartender at a seedy pub with no mate at all.

The whole thing with Ezor was a complete mess. It really, truly wasn’t a natural thing for humans to leave their mates once they had them, at least on an instinctive, biological level. When that happened, unless they were rich Alphas, they were really looked down on.

Keith didn’t think his sister deserved it.

“You’re not going to that bar,” Shiro insisted when he voiced wanting to go see where Acxa worked. Before he could protest, Shiro held up his hand. “Listen, I’ve still got all my old PI contacts. Ever since the Feds busted open the trafficking ring, a lot of people have gotten desperate around here. Apparently the corruption went pretty far, and if the rumours are true, Honerva wasn’t one to think of leaving things in place to keep everything going if she was gone. She set things up to take everyone down with her. So a lot of desperate people who just might do something to an Omega, mated or not.”

“Do they know who was involved with that?” Keith asked, his breath hitching slightly at the thought.

“No,” Shiro answered. “It’ll all come out around the trial though. That’s going to be too highly publicized for it not to. That’s still pretty far away.” His expression darkened. “It’s a good thing that all these rats are getting caught. The police force is going through quite a few changes.”

Keith’s breath hitched at that. “You mean those ones that…they were involved?”

“I think more people than we realized were involved,” Shiro admitted.

Keith was stubborn, and fierce, and he didn’t like being told what to do, but this time, he decided to listen to his brother. He was here to visit his family and to meet his new nibling that would be coming in a day or two. He wasn’t here to start any kind of drama.

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Hubby’s Mullet <3 > My Loser

My Loser: Hunk and I are watching movies and it’s fun and all but I still miss yooooooou :(

Hubby’s Mullet <3: loser

My Loser: D:< I spill my heart to you and this is what I get

Hubby’s Mullet: You love me.
My Loser: I doooo. It’s not fair. And you’re so mean. Make it up up to me?

Hubby’s Mullet: How?

My Loser: ;)

Hubby’s Mullet: I’m not sending nudes, Lance.

My Loser: :( Normal selfie?

Hubby’s mullet sent a picture.

My Loser: :D :D :D

My Loser: Wait!!!!!

My Loser: YOU DON’T HAVE A SHIRT ON

Hubby’s Mullet: I’m going to sleep?? I have shorts on???

Hubby’s Mullet: Also it’s like 2am there! Go to bed!

My Loser: No can do. Gotta finish marathoning HP. Gonna die. :D

Hubby’s Mullet: Why are you like this?

…

Keith got used to the familiar roads near his mother’s house again. He got used to seeing Acxa grumble in the morning as she set off to work. He got used to his mother’s cryptic calls to whom he was sure was Kolivan and the FBI because if they were paying Pidge under the table, there’s no way in hell his mother wasn’t involved in some way.

Yes, he was used to it all again, but it wasn’t right. He wanted to come back some time and bring Lance with him. Show him where he grew up.

Allura’s due date passed already, and Shiro was such a wreck that it was actually really funny. He managed to record one of his little freakouts to send to Lance because it made absolutely no sense.

That aside, things were going good. So good, in fact, that Keith should have known what was coming. He should have seen it.

He was walking towards the diner, looking at his phone, when Mr. Jones suddenly came out of the door, his eyes wide in what looked like terror. Keith frowned for a moment, but then everything froze when he heard a voice from behind him. A terribly, horrifically, spine-chillingly familiar voice. One that haunted his nightmares for years.

“Huh, I thought I recognized that ass.”

Keith instantly felt like he was going to throw up as panic welled within him. The harsh, acidic scent hit him, and it took everything he had not to start shaking. He could see Mr. Jones trying to motion for him to get inside, and he was about to, but then he heard something else that made him freeze.

“Who’s that, father?”
Keith whirled around, indigo eyes meeting those sickly brown ones that were etching into his mind for so long. He knew this Alpha. Of course he did. How could he not.

This was the man that raped him four years ago.

Keith couldn’t help but notice the people standing around him. There were two young pups, both boys, and a short, tired female Omega who stared at him regretfully. Her stomach was round, not quite as much as Allura’s, but enough for her to be pretty far along in her pregnancy.

Four years ago. Four years, and this Omega was on her third child.

Then Keith realized, he knew this woman. He knew her, because she went to the same school as he did and a lot of the courses Omegas had to do overlapped across grades. Very suddenly, he remembered her in vivid detail. She used to smile a lot. She used to laugh and comfort people.

Now she was a mere wisp of who she used to be. This monster made her into this. The monster that he could have put away, but he didn’t.

She was actually living the nightmare that plagued him. The fears that made his pulse spike? They were her reality.

Keith didn’t know what it was, but in that moment, staring at her, at the little children that clung to her and hid behind her, away from the Alpha, his shock of fear started to fade. They weren’t safe. If they were Betas, they’d be ignored. Alphas, turned into monsters themselves. Omegas, sold off.

Then, he was pissed.

Keith took a deep breath and started to turn away, because if he didn’t, he was going to do something he’d probably regret. Or maybe he wouldn’t. He didn’t know. Keith had no idea what he was about to do.

“Unless you’re planning on bending over—again—don’t turn your back on an Alpha.”

19-year-old Keith pushed him away, because he had to go home. A small kiss was one thing. A small kiss on the cheek was okay. He was getting a bit too handsy though. 19-year-old Keith walking towards the door. 19-year-old Keith being violently pulled back by his hair and slammed into a wall.

The memories, the feelings, the fear, the helplessness, the pain, the anger, the shame, all of it, welled up within him. Or maybe it was there all along, even as he tried to move on.

“I have a restraining order against you,” Keith spat at him. “Take a step closer and give me a reason to call the police.” Or he’d do one better. He was sure his mother could get the FBI here quickly.

The Alpha bristled and narrowed his eyes at him, not at all happy with the fact that Keith wasn’t cringing away. His scent was heavy and oppressive, making the woman and children all cringe. “You think you can tell me what to do? After what you took from me?”

What the ever living fuck? Keith bristled a bit at that. “Excuse me?” He felt like a stick of dynamite, wrapped up in one spot, watching the fire get closer and closer.

“You think they didn’t tell me about it? About my pup you killed?”

A wave of terror hit him, and it must have showed through his scent, because the Alpha was
smirking. Oh god. He knew. He knew. Keith purposely ended the pregnancy that came from when he assaulted him.

But wait, that didn’t make sense at all. The only people that knew were Acxa and Lance. That was it. No one else knew, and he knew for a fact that neither of them would tell a soul. Acxa never told their mother, Shiro, Ezor, no one. Lance kept it to himself too.

Keith stared at him, and he stared at him hard. This was the man that haunted his nightmares with his pale skin, greasy blond hair, shit-brown eyes (nothing at all like Hunk’s warm ones). He was everything that Keith feared about this world. Entitled. Emotionless. Monstrous. Everything.

Except, the more he stared, the more he realized that this man didn’t tower over him. Actually, Keith was pretty sure that he was broader (he did hit the gym a lot after that…in part so he’d never feel helpless again). Lance was definitely taller and stronger now, and that was just after a few months of ‘trying to catch up’ and ‘I want to be able to carry you too’. Not only that, but this man, who shouldn’t have looked like a balding, wrinkling thing yet, was starting to show signs of aging.

This monster was still a monster, but he was pathetic. Keith felt almost angry at himself. He did everything that he could at the time to try and save himself. There was nothing he could have done. It wasn’t at all his fault. These were things that Keith did know. There was always this picture in his head though. The picture of something almost inhuman that Keith would never be able to overcome.

The fire finally reached the dynamite. “Fuck you! I came to your house to watch a fucking movie with you! That’s it. The only thing I let you do was kiss me on the cheek when I was leaving. I tried to leave. You attacked me. Do I need to tell your kids what you did to me? What you’d do to their mother without a second thought? A concussion, broken ribs, broken fingers, broken arm…that’s just what you did trying to keep me there when I tried to leave!”

Keith’s fingers curled into fists and he took a step towards him, not bothering to quiet down even though there were people looking at them. People in cars, people from the diner. Mr. Jones had a phone in his hand.

Keith didn’t care. He was shaking. He couldn’t remember being this angry in his life. “Then you tied me up, pushed me down, and raped me. Not once, not twice, over and over again. Do you remember that? Do you tell yourself I was willing when you had to use me as a punching bag any time I tried to get away while you were waiting to get it up again? You kept me tied up in your fucking house for days until you decided that you broke me enough so I wouldn’t run, but you were wrong, weren’t you?” He took a step towards him, and the Alpha actually flinched back. Good. “I never once took my collar off no matter how much you tried to pry it off, no matter how many times you threatened me. I got away from you the second I could.”

There was a bit of fear in the air. The kids were scared, and Keith did feel a bit bad about that. The mother though, she had an odd expression on her face.

Somehow, that riled him up even more. “You think I owe you something? Because part of the mutating cells in me came from your dick? You think I owe you because, oh wow those cells happened to die when I nearly killed myself because of you? Fuck you!” The Alpha took a step towards him, and Keith instantly lashed out, shoving him away. “The only thing I ‘owe’ anyone, is an apology to you.” He turned his head towards the woman. “I’m sorry I let the police talk me into agreeing to lesser charges. I could have put him away but I was too scared. If I could go back, I would slam him with every charge I could.”

She stared back, blinking a few times before something twisted on her face. The Alpha stepped
between them, but Keith saw her slowly nod over his shoulder.

“Don’t talk to my Omega or children,” he snarled, very clearly using his Alpha voice. Keith could feel it, but he also knew how to fight it. He’d been training himself for years to do just that, even before the incident. Now that he had a mate, who only used it in completely safe, consensual situations to help him get used to it, it was even easier to overlook.

“Fuck you,” Keith snapped. “You used to be the one thing I feared most, but you’re pathetic. A pathetic piece of shit who doesn’t deserve her or those innocent children. A piece of shit who should be behind bars at best. You don’t deserve my fear.” He ended in a hiss. “If I could go back, I would slam ever charge I could on you.”

There was a yell as the Alpha raised his hand up in the air, and for a split second Keith wanted to cringe back and hide, his mind reminding him just how many times he saw that same hand rise up in the air to slap him when he was trying to escape or fight back.

It was like slow motion, watching the hand come towards him, but then Keith acted. He grabbed the Alpha’s arm, and completely flipped him over his shoulder. Keith has his arm twisted behind him.

“You bitch!” the Alpha screamed, his voice making his mate cringe back. “You psycho slut!” He struggled, but Keith wasn’t going to move. He kept his arm twisted behind his back, not caring how much the Alpha struggled.

He didn’t even let go when he heard the pop of his arm dislocating.

It was only when another hand was placed on his shoulder that Keith jerked up. A tall, unfamiliar man in a police uniform stood beside him. “Let go of him, son. It’s okay now.”

Keith did what he said and backed up. There was another officer talking to Mr. Jones, who seemed to be explaining the situation to him. That man also wasn’t familiar. These weren’t all the corrupt cops that convinced him to let this pathetic piece of trash go in the first place.

Everything else happened in a blur. At some point, Mr. Jones called his mother, who came to lead him away after he was done talking to the cops. The only thing Keith was really aware of what that the Omega, the one that the Alpha got his teeth into after he walked free because of him, kept looking at him. She had the oddest look on her face. Not at all reproachful or anything, which he expected because he said some awful things in front of her children. It was just, odd.

The Alpha was led into a car to head to the police station. He wouldn’t be there for breaking the restraining order (he should have walked away when he saw Keith), but it was enough for that exact moment.

Keith wanted Lance. He really wanted Lance. His hand didn’t go to his phone though. It felt a little too numb. He didn’t answer any of Krolia’s questions. He simply went to his room and laid down on the somehow unfamiliar, familiar bed.

He breathed in and out heavily, pulling one of Lance’s shirts to him. The scent of his mate calmed him. Lance, who was everything good and amazing. Nothing like that monster. Lance, who would never hurt him. Who took his requests to stay on birth control and not risk a pregnancy very seriously.

Everything hit Keith all at once. He didn’t just stand up to his rapist, he confronted him. He proved that he was stronger.

Laughter exploded out of him. He pulled Lance’s shirt as close as he could as he laughed to the point
of tears. It was bitter and happy and sad and everything all in one. Keith didn’t know what to make of any of this.

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Hubby’s Mullet <3 > My Loser

Hubby’s Mullet <3: I love you.

My Loser: <3 Love you too bby

My Loser: Not complaining but why?

Hubby’s Mullet <3: Something happened. I’m ok.

My Loser: Want to talk?

Hubby’s Mullet <3: Later. I just need a bit of time to myself. Talk in a few hours?

My Loser: Of course! Whatever you need.

…

There was a ravine not far from his home. In fact, it was still possible to see the old house and shack in the distance. There was only a bit of water at the bottom, barely enough to cover the heel of a shoe, but there were big rocks and boulders down the steep slopes, and one spot seemed to almost have a sheer drop-off. It wasn’t too deep, but still, it was dangerous enough. He and Acxa were warned never to go there as kids, and whenever he wandered off into the desert, it was always his mother’s fear that he’d wind up there.

That was probably why he got the idea to go there.

Keith knelt down on the edge of the flat ground, staring down at the slope and the rocks below him. He ran his fingers along the dry ground and he remembered the last time that he was there.

It was only a couple days after Acxa stole those pregnancy tests so they couldn’t be traced back to him. Only a couple days since he found out about the very unwanted thing growing inside of him. A thing the rest of the world would expect him to grow and care for, even if he knew he never could.

Those people who forced their beliefs, their decisions, on others, didn’t care about babies or life. Why else would they basically ignore them after they were born? They just wanted control.

The last time he was there, he downed a bottle of pills in the same spot that he was sitting now, and threw himself down the ravine, his sister’s screeches being the last thing he heard.

Keith knew that the assessment that he was suicidal at the time wasn’t completely wrong. He never wanted to die, but he didn’t much care if he lived at the time either. At the same time though, he waited until his sister knew what was going on so that she could help him.

Keith knew that if people knew what he did was entirely on purpose, that he would have been seen by many as a monster himself. That was okay. They could have their opinions. Keith didn’t think that way about himself.

It wasn’t as if he hated the fetus that was once inside him. He hated that it was there, how it was made, and how it’s sheer existence was going to imprison him for the rest of his life. It was hard to
He took a deep breath and tilted his head upwards a bit. “I’m sorry.” His voice cracked. “I’m sorry you couldn’t live, but I’m not sorry for what I did. I wouldn’t have been able to be what you needed, and we both would have been bound to that monster. He never would have let me give you to a better family. We would have been trapped with him. Abandoned if you were a Beta, turned into a monster if you were an Alpha, sold off if you were an Omega. This way was mercy for both for us, for any other siblings of yours he would have made me have.”

Tears slipped down his face, and somehow, it felt like a weight he didn’t even know had been lifted away. He probably could have loved the child that would have formed. If things were different, and that Alpha wouldn’t have had a single say in anything he did (which he would have even if he was incarcerated), Keith might have reconsidered his actions. He would have been nowhere mentally able to be a mother at the time though. That child’s life would have been miserable.

He was sorry that they didn’t get a chance, but he knew. Keith was sure he did the right thing for himself, even if he did it in a really wrong and risky way. To him, children should be wanted. They shouldn’t be a consequence or a burden. Even if unexpected, they should be the choice of the parent one way or another.

Keith breathed in and out as he let himself cry. He’d been told time and time again that it was cathartic and a good thing, but he fought all his life for people to not look at him like this weak little creature that needed to be coddled. He couldn’t let people pity him.

But now he just wanted to cry. He wanted to get it all out.

He was thankful that Acxa let him have his space. He heard her come up behind him, her familiar scent tinted with a combination of anger and fear. She hovered not far from him, as if not sure what to do with herself.

Finally, when he calmed down some, she asked, “Are you okay?”

“Mom told you what happened?” he replied, though it was more rhetorical than anything else. Of course his mother told Acxa.

His twin shifted forward, kneeling down beside him. Her face was even more serious than normal. “I’ll kill him if you want me too.”

“You would, wouldn’t you?” Keith said, a bit amused but also touched in a way.

“I wanted to back then,” she answered seriously. “Shiro was willing to help me cover it up too.”

Keith didn’t quite know what say about that. On one hand, he was glad they didn’t do that because he wouldn’t have wanted them to chance going to jail, but on the other, it would have taken out a genuine threat to people.

He thought on that for a moment before making a decision. “I’m glad you didn’t.” Her eyebrows shot up. “I’m glad, because you guys are better than that. And I...earlier today I realized that he’s a pathetic, weak asshole. I realized that he can’t hurt me anymore in any way. And I think I needed that. If he was just gone he’d be that...boogeyman from my past.”

“Still, you shouldn’t have to deal with all of this again.” She motioned to the area around them.

“I needed to,” he said, certain of it. “Maybe not everyone would heal the same way, but I think this
was how I had to do it. The shit with the Galdara family is going to go on for years cause that’s how it works, but this…I think I needed to confront this to be able to let go. I thought I would be mentally, emotionally okay if I got pregnant by accident, ‘cause I love Lance and I know he loves me too. I was wrong.”

Keith understood now. He understood why he still didn’t really like to picture himself with a child even if he did want that future with Lance. Pieces of him were still trapped back here both in that Alpha’s home, and in the ravine before him. Pieces that he didn’t even realize were missing until he reclaimed them back for himself.

“I can’t say I agree with what you did,” Acxa admitted, fiddling with the ring she still wore on her left ring finger. “Definitely not the way you handled it. I was terrified when I saw you fall. I was terrified when I saw you kneeling here right now.” She shook her head. “If there was ever a possibility of me carrying a child like those new studies say female Alphas might be able to do, I don’t think I would do it. It doesn’t seem right. But at the same time, that’s me. That’d be my choice.” She put a hand on Keith’s shoulder. “If you think the choice you made for yourself was the right one, don’t let it weigh you down. If you still think it was right years later, it was for you.”

A smile appeared on Keith’s face as he put his hand over hers. That actually meant a lot to him. He knew so many people would see him as a monster for very purposefully harming himself with the intent on ending his pregnancy. He knew that. He was still so sure that he did the right thing for himself.

That was what it all came down into in the end though, what all Omegas should have: a choice. A choice to keep a child they desperately want. A choice to say that terminating a pregnancy isn’t the right thing for them. A choice to decide to go through with it. He wasn’t ashamed of his choice, but Keith could acknowledge that how he went about it was awful and stupid. People would judge him if they knew. People would come after him with all kinds of charges because that was the world they lived in. That was why he’d never tell anyone else.

Shame wasn’t a part of that though.

“I did the right thing,” he said to his sister. “I know I did.”

She slowly nodded her head in agreement and looked down at the ravine. “Like I said, if you still think so, then you did. I guess, sometimes it takes facing your past before you can let go of it.” She paused and looked down at her hand. Slowly, she slipped the wedding band off of her hand and looked at it. “Then again, maybe sometimes you just have to let go all on your own.” She pulled her arm back and threw the ring so far that Keith didn’t even see where it landed.

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Keith told Lance everything over video chat that night, even though he knew it would make his mate worry and fuss. He was okay, Lance could see that for himself, and Keith didn’t want to hide anything. He didn’t tell him about his personal revelations, that could wait until they were face to face, but he wanted to tell him about what happened, because he had nothing to hide.

The urge to hold Lance close rose up within him the longer they talked to the point where it was a physical feeling. He hands twitched and he felt odd not being able to do just that.

That was when another revelation hit Keith. He absolutely made the right choice when he decided to go with Lance, when he decided to make things work between them even though Lance gave him an out to come back home.
Except, this place wasn’t home anymore. The only way it ever would be was if Lance came back to live with him, and he didn’t want that. Being able to let go of the past was one thing, but there were still so many bad memories there. Sure, there were good ones too, but those good ones felt pale in comparison to the good ones he had recently.

“I can’t wait to come back home,” he admitted to Lance.

The Alpha smiled brightly. “I can’t wait for you to come back home too.”

…

Shiro called him at two in the morning the day before he was supposed to leave. Given that he’d gave to get up early the next morning in order to catch his flight home, Keith wasn’t too impressed. Not until Shiro muttered out, “Allura had the baby.” His voice caught on the words, and it sounded like he was crying.

Keith immediately jerked up in the comfortable, but not-right bed, completely awake. “What? Why didn’t you tell us she was in labour?”

“Honestly, because I didn’t know,” he admitted. “She trooped through what she says was probably about 12 hours of labour without telling anyone. Said it was because the contractions were so far apart that a hospital wouldn’t even take her, and she didn’t want anyone to freak out.” Shiro paused. “I freaked out, so good call on her part.”

“Is she okay?” Keith urged, blearily looking around his room for something. Socks. Did he need socks? That was important to go to a hospital, right?

“They’re both exhausted,” Shiro said. “But in good spirits. It was rough and just... people who give birth are amazing. It’s nothing at all like the movies show.”

Given that movies always portrayed Omegas (always Omegas, because movies never wrote pregnant Betas for ‘some’ reason) as hysterical and screaming messes during a very quick labour, while everyone around them remained perfectly calm. Of course, once the baby came, everything was fine and the world was how it should be.

“Do you want me to come?” Keith asked. “Wake mom up? Coran?”

“No,” Shiro answered quickly. “I’m sorry I called you so early I just—I’m kind of freaking out cause I’m a dad now. How is that a good idea? I just needed someone to talk to and you were the first one I thought of.” Keith’s heart leapt at that. “I never thought it’d be possible, you know? After the fallout with Adam, I never thought…and when I helped Allura after she got away from Lotor I didn’t expect anything like this to happen and now…now I’m a dad. And you get that. Not the dad part, but the not expecting something good thing.”

Keith’s eyes watered slightly, because that was entirely true. He remembered Shiro’s breakup with his long-time boyfriend who grew tired of Shiro constantly putting his job first (which was a fair assessment in retrospect, because Keith didn’t like that week when Lance was only about his job and that was only a week, not years like Adam dealt with). He remembers his surprise when Shiro and Allura decided to be together.

He got it.

“We were hoping you could come visit tomorrow,” Shiro added. “During the day time. Allura and I talked about it, and we decided that we want everyone to wait until she’s home to come and see the
baby. The hospital time is ours to figure things out, you know? But you’re leaving tomorrow, and you came all the way here to see the baby, so we want you to.”

It must have been because it was early, but Keith was going to cry. It had nothing to do with his emotions. Nope, not at all.

Keith understood the idea about not wanting visitors. While doing an essay in high school, Keith came across many articles that suggested new parents shouldn’t have visitors in the hospital after having a baby, but rather, wait until they were at home, because being at home was when new parents needed help the most, and being alone with their pup in those first few days let them settle down and bond more. It let them live those moments they’d never get back together. In fact, that was the way Keith wanted things to go too.

It would be hard to keep the McClains away, but he was sure it would be possible. Alphas, even the good ones like Lance, were notably territorial and protective when their mates gave birth. His mother told him loads of times just how protective their father was of him and Acxa when they were born, and he was one of the best people Keith knew. If Keith voiced the opinion of not wanting anyone else there, he was sure Lance would agree.

He was honoured that Shiro and Allura would let him in on that precious time.

It was only after he hung up with Shiro that he realized the baby was born on February 28th, technically the day before Shiro’s and the day that they were going to celebrate, since there wasn’t a February 29th until next year and Keith was leaving on March 1st.

He got the feeling the party wasn’t going to happen, but that was one hell of a birthday present.

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Babies, Keith knew, were small and kind of strange looking. Parents were usually flooded with all kinds of hormones and ancient instincts that told their pup was the most perfect one in the world and must be protected at all costs, but outsiders could be slightly more objective.

That being said, Keith nearly melted at the sight of the newborn snuggled up against his mother’s chest. The tone of his skin was the same rich brown as Allura’s, and the small wisps of hair that he could see were more black than brown.

“If he needs to eat, I’m going to feed him,” Allura informed Keith almost immediately. “Just a heads up for when I whip part of my shirt off.”

He snorted and shrugged. “That’s what they’re for.” He turned his attention to the baby. “He’s beautiful, Allura. You did good.”

She preened at the compliment. “I did, didn’t I?” That was kind of admirable. Though a partner could help during pregnancy and be there to support them during childbirth, the person that was carrying said child did the vast majority of the work. “Would you like to hold him?”

Keith almost cried as Shiro took the baby from Allura and handed it to him. And sure, he had to learn how to hold babies and stuff in school (because of course Omegas did), but holding a doll and holding the warmth of his nephew were so very different.

The baby fussed a bit, eyes cracking open just slightly enough that Keith could see a bit of blue that would either stay blue like Allura’s eyes, or change to grey like Shiro’s (or whatever other genes they had farther back in their families). “Hi buddy. I’m your uncle Keith” He secured the baby in one
arm and carefully brushed his finger over his very tiny hands, grinning as the baby squeezed his finger. “Wow, you’re going to be strong just like your parents. Like your grandpa was too.” Sometimes it was easy to forget that his dad had been Shiro’s as well, even if they didn’t get to meet one another. Other times he looked into his brother’s face and all he could see looking back at him was his pa. With that in mind, he looked up at Shiro, who was watching him with a very fond expression and his camera out. Was he taking pictures? “Pa would have loved him.”

Keith quickly turned his attention back to the baby, unable to look at the way Shiro’s eyes began to water lest he begin crying as well. The baby yawned, and Keith decided that he’d do anything he could to help him, even from afar. The motion was so sudden, fierce, and strong that it was almost startling.

Another image came to mind. An image of himself in a bed like Allura, holding a baby that looked startlingly similar to this one, because that was a possibility with his black hair, and Lance’s brown skin and blue eyes. He had vague thoughts and images of it before, but this was the first time a complete, full-blown image came to him. This was the first time he could see himself, in detail, in this position.

Allura had gone through a lot of crap too, but here she was, strong, proud, and so happy to have a baby of her own. A baby she chose to have, loved, and wanted very dear. A baby Shiro wanted, and already cared about so much. They were the people that should have kids. The ones who genuinely wanted them.

And Keith…Keith wanted this too. He really did. There were things to be afraid of, but he knew that any baby between him and Lance, planned or not, would be wanted and loved. Though Lance assured him before that, if Keith got pregnant before they agreed on it, he’d sign those abortion papers, Keith knew without a doubt that he would not do it. That was his choice as much as any other choice was.

“What’s his name?” he asked as he looked up, a smile on his face. Shiro snapped a picture while he was looking at the camera, but Keith didn’t care.


“Haru,” Keith repeated, smiling as he started to purr while rocking his nephew.

Terrible things happened, but Keith didn’t have to let himself be defined by that. He didn’t have to let himself be defined by the fact that he too had the organs to carry a child and went into heat when he was fertile. At the same time though, he could embrace those things as much as he wanted. That was his choice too.

This baby, Haru Shriogane, would be so, very loved, and in that moment, Keith knew that the children he would have with Lance would be too.

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Shiro > This Chat Needs A New Name But I’m Too Lazy To Think Of One (by fallout boy)

Shiro sent a picture.

Shiro: Meet baby boy Haru Alfor Shirogane (held by a rare super smiley Uncle Keith).

Hunk: Oh mY GOD
**Lance:** !!!!!! IS THAT My NEPHEW? HE’S ADORABLE! HE’S SO CUTE I’M GOING TO CRY!!! TELL HIM UNCLE LANCE LOVES HIM!

**Hunk:** He’s not lying, he’s crying.

**Lance:** SO ARE YOU

**Pidge:** I’m not one to go gaga over babies but he’s adorable.

**Pidge:** Also, it totally looks like Keith could be holding his and Lance’s kid. Just saying.

**Lance:** osfndgidfpgnifgnfdoins

**Hunk:** Look what you’ve done. You’ve gone and broke him. He’s laying face down on the floor muttering ‘so cute’

**Pidge:** Good thing Keith’s coming home to deal with that.

**Lance:** <3<3<3<3<3<3<3

…

**My Loser > Hubby’s Mullet <3**

**My Loser:** Hunk’s right I am crying he’s so cute!!!!!!

**Hubby’s Mullet <3:** I love him and would fight the rest of the world for him. You couldn’t stop me.

**My Loser:** Stop you? I’d help you! You and me against the world!

**Hubby’s Mullet <3:** You and me against the world.

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Chapter End Notes

Summary of the middle spots: Keith ends up encountering the man that raped him, who happens to be with his family. Keith recognizes the Omega as a girl that he went to school with and she looks miserable, and he kind of just snaps. He makes sure everyone around him hears a description of what the Alpha did to him, and also ends up flipping him over his shoulder. The second part, Keith is in the spot where he forced a miscarriage to happen, and though he acknowledges that many people would think it was the wrong thing, he decides that the choice saved not only him for suffering, but the child that would have come from it.

So it’s a lot of heavy topics, but it’s all about healing.
Rut

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sea World sucked. Really, Lance couldn’t properly portray his hatred for Sea World. He loved the thought of it when he was little, because who wouldn’t love to watch amazing animals play and frolic in their big tanks? It was only as he got older that he realized those big tanks weren’t so big, and that playing wasn’t necessarily fun. So yeah, he hated Sea World and any place like it that extorted any kind of animal. He also hated how places like that gave places where he worked a bad rep. It really made him burn from the inside out.

Well, it wasn’t just that, but that required a little bit of a backstory.

From the moment Keith went through security at the airport, Lance missed him. He knew he’d be back in a week, but driving home alone felt so long and quiet. It wasn’t like he didn’t drive alone to and from work some days, but he was used to Keith dropping him off so that he could have the car to go to the gym, do errands, go to Pidge’s, or other things that came up.

It felt even weirder being at home without Keith. His scent was still very present, and that was a very welcome reminder the first morning Lance woke up without him and almost thought that their entire relationship was a dream. The scent reminded him that it wasn’t, and the text messages he got a few hours later when Keith woke up made him smile a lot and assured him that his mate missed him just as much.

It wasn’t like he dwelled on his mate every moment of every day or anything. When he was at work, he still focused on his work because it was important and he loved working with the animals.

Still, it was odd going home to no mate. If Keith was home, he tried to cook something around the time Lance came home (“I’m not a housewife, Lance. I’m hungry so I might as well be nice and make you something too.”), or he was hunched over his tablet working away at whatever thing he happened to be doing online. He seemed to be doing a lot of wild life drawings, and what looked to be tattoo designs. Lance would absolutely get a tattoo that Keith designed on him, no hesitation.

Hunk coming over for their movie marathon was an absolute blast. It’d been a while since he spent some long, quality time with his best friend, because that was how life worked sometimes. Hunk worked steady hours as a mechanic, and also helped with his Tinā (who was a professional caterer that worked from home). Not to mention he spent a lot of time talking to Shay.

Pidge also seemed to just be busy. He knew that she had an under the table gig with the FBI, and spent a ton of time filming, recording, and researching, especially since her and Keith’s little youtube channel had a following now. Not a huge one, but it was growing, and they were both proud of that.

Lance went to work, the gym, and he even hung out with his siblings a little more. It made him realize though that, before, so much of his time had been dedicated to school and work, that he never really did anything that he liked just for fun. He loved his job. He did like going to the gym. More often than not though, his free time was spent with Keith.

Sometimes, when Keith was with Pidge or busy with his work, Lance would do his face masks and things like that for fun. He’d also read. There were other things he used to like to do though. He used to go to the shooting range because he was an awesome shot. He used to do archery. Huh, maybe he could volunteer somewhere with kids to do different activities.
That was for future Lance to decide. Current Lance was still sad that his husband wasn’t there. Spending time with his partner was a good thing. There just had to be a balance.

“It’s pathetic that I miss Keith as much as I do?” Lance asked Luis and Veronica when he was hanging out with them after work one day at the diner. “I mean, I’m glad he gets to see his family, but I miss him.”

Luis chuckled and shook his head. “I feel the same way with Lisa and the kids when I have to go for a bit. I know they’ll be okay, but it’s both in our instincts to protect our families, and it’s natural to miss someone you love when they’re not there.”

“So you don’t think we’re too co-dependent on one another?” Lance wondered.

“Do you still go to work and actually work?” Veronica asked him while she looked over the menu even though she knew everything there and always got the same thing. “Or do you just mope the entire time?”

“I’m fine at work?”

“Do you eat normally? Go out and do things? Or do you mope?” Luis questioned.

Lance blinked. “I eat fine, and I’m here aren’t I? I…maybe mope a bit.”

Luis smiled at him. “Sounds to me like you just miss him. It’s okay.”

Veronica placed a hand on his shoulder. “It’s the first time you’ve been apart since you became mates…well…since you met. It’s okay to feel that way.”

It didn’t take much for Lance to believe his siblings. Especially not when he went to his therapy session that week, and his therapist assured him that it was normal. In fact, he was impressed, because most Alphas only six months after bonding with an Omega, tended to be much clingier.

So the beginning of Lance’s week was okay. He missed Keith, but it was fine. They could get through it.

Then Keith sent him a message saying that something happened. Lance was a mess for the rest of the day, waiting for Keith to work things out on his end. It was a good thing he had work to do, because it gave him something to focus on.

When Keith finally called him and told him exactly what happened, Lance felt her stomach drop. The first night he spent alone after Keith went out west, he had a nightmare of the shadowed figure of a man with no features except glowing red eyes. The man attacked Keith and there was nothing he could do about it. Now Lance understood what fears his mind played on that night. Keith being hurt again by that monster that he knew he’d never get a description of (and didn’t want one honestly—because he didn’t deserve a face or a name). Lance was half way tempted to get on a flight and go out there, job be damned.

Except, Keith told him how he felt free now. How he realized he was so much stronger than the monster. How he defeated him in more ways than just standing up to him and physically tossing him away. He sounded almost optimistic.

“I could have gone my whole life without seeing him again,” Keith clarified. “But if it had to happen, I’m glad it happened this way for me. I’m glad I was able to do what I did.”
Lance trusted him. Trusted that Keith was okay. He was still worried though. Still unsettled. He tried to focus on work to shrug off the aggression that rose up within him at the thought of that Alpha.

Keith may have been a little prickly around the edges, with his temper, his awkwardness and misunderstandings due to that, and okay yes he had loads of flaws too, he was only human, but he was just so inherently good. Keith didn’t see himself that way, but Lance did. Once someone gained his loyalty, he was loyal to a fault. He loved so fiercely and with everything that he had. The thought of anyone hurting him to the point where someone so brave and strong was traumatized was unthinkable, and yet, it happened. It happened years before Lance ever met him. It happened when Keith was open and hopeful that he might be on the cusp of a new relationship.

Thinking about it pissed Lance right off even if there was nothing he could do about it. So yeah, he was already in a very sour mood.

Then those little fuckers who thought that they were true activists helping animals, who leapt at face-level information on internet posts, those assholes broke into the aquarium and spray painted profanities all over the outside of the tanks in protest of their ‘mistreatment of animals’.

They were a research and rescue center first and foremost. The dolphins and animals they had in their care that were permanent residents couldn’t go back to the ocean. They would literally die. All the other animals? They rescued them and released them back into the ocean. Okay they did have fish and stuff but they were well cared for with lots of room.

Security and then the police caught the people who did it. They were only young, younger than Lance was, but he had no pity at all for them. No sympathy.

Needless to say, when Lance got home late because he was trying to help clean the tanks along with everything they normally do, he was in a foul mood. He buried his face into Keith’s pillow and inhaled the scent. It didn’t calm him like it normally would. It just made Lance’s stomach twist more, fingers digging into the pillows.

Keith was coming home tomorrow. He couldn’t make everything better, but Keith would still listen to him rant, would hug him and kiss him, and help him find out ways to get out his frustrations. God, Lance couldn’t wait for Keith to come home.

He fumbled for his phone when it rang, knowing who it was. His spirits lifted when he saw the number.

Despite everything that happened, Keith was in a positively glowing mood as he talked about his, their nephew. About how Shiro and Allura was. About some man named Coran. About his mother and sister. He didn’t talk about a single bad thing, and not because he was avoiding it.

It was because he was genuinely upbeat and only looking at the good things. God, Lance couldn’t wait for him to come home. He knew it’d technically only be a few hours now, Keith’s flight was landing at 10 in the morning, but it still seemed like it was going to take forever.

He didn’t sleep well that night. Lance was excited and restless and just…a bit of everything. It was hard to explain. The past week went by so slowly, yet at the same time, he couldn’t believe that it was over because so much happened.

Soon, he found himself waiting at the airport, in the exact same parking spot that he managed to get when he dropped Keith off. Then he went to wait by arrivals. He was early, but that was okay. Better than being late.
He waited impatiently until, finally, a familiar head of raven black hair caught his attention. Keith looked around, and when he caught sight of Lance, his face lit up and he hurried towards him.

Lance laughed happily as he tugged Keith close and buried his face in his neck, crooning a bit at the wonderful scent that hit him. God, he missed him so much.

Neither of them said a word, but silently squeezed the life out of one another. It took Lance a moment to get over the euphoria enough to hear a quiet, deep sound coming from Keith. He was purring! In public! Keith never did that. In fact, some people considered it a tiny bit inappropriate to do in front of others. That was ridiculous to Lance though, because it meant that he was truly happy and content. Given that they were in public, and Keith was purring, that spoke a lot about just how happy he was.

Keith leaned back enough to meet his gaze briefly before kissing him and howdy, yes, Lance missed this a lot too. It was only a week, but it felt like forever.

“Missed you,” Lance muttered when they separated.

“I can tell,” Keith replied, clearly amused. He scented the air, and looked a bit confused for a moment before his eyes widened. “Huh.”

“What?” Lance looked around, immediately on guard. If he could have held Keith closer, he would have, but they were already pressed right up against one another.

Keith smiled and shook his head. “Let’s get something to eat and go home. I’m starved. Plane food really sucks, and I couldn’t say no to the little grandpa that was sitting next to me when he kept offering me his chocolate mints.” He lowered his voice. “I hate chocolate mints.”

Lance laughed loudly and threw an arm over Keith’s shoulder, pulling him close and nuzzling his face into his hair before they started walking. He didn’t want to let go of him ever again, even if he knew that wasn’t practical.

He’d been so frustrated with so many things over the past week, so worried, but the sight of his mate’s smile, the easy scent of comfort and happiness, like all the right in the world. He almost had emotional whiplash that left him feeling a bit euphoric and excited. Keith was home and life was great.

Keith hurried them to the car, which was fine with Lance, because getting home sounded great. It sounded amazing really. Going home and hanging out, just the two of them, for the rest of the weekend since he wouldn’t have to go into work until Tuesday, though Monday he’d have to talk to his thesis advisor and that wasn’t going to be much fun.

The thought of going somewhere that Keith wasn’t really bugged him right now.

“Let’s go through a drive thru,” Keith suggested. “Then we can just go home and not worry about cooking anything.”

That was fine by Lance too. Anything his mate suggested sounded amazing, as long as he was close by and got to cuddle him and hold him close.

Everything just felt better with Keith there. The absolute garbage food that they ate was better (they ended up eating in the car). Talking was better. Every little touch sent a shiver up Lance’s spine.

Okay, no, not everything was good. Lance just wanted to be home with Keith, safe and sound in their apartment all tucked away from the world. It got to the point where Lance felt like he was about
to crawl out of his skin if they didn’t get back inside.

Everything felt right again with Keith back home. Well, it’d be better if they had a nicer home to come back to. One with lots of room for their pups. He wanted those. Seeing Keith with Shiro and Allura’s baby was honestly the sweetest thing ever and he wanted that.

Once they were in their apartment, Lance leaned forward for another kiss, only to be met by Keith’s backpack. The Omega put it between the two of them, forcing a bit of distance between them. Lance huffed, annoyed by this unexpected turn of events. “What gives?”

“Sorry, I just…” Keith shook his head and stared at him with the softest look ever. “You don’t know, do you?”

“Know what?” Lance asked.

Keith regarded him for a moment, dilated eyes scanning his face as if there were answers there. Finally, he said, “You’re going into a rut.”

“What? No I’m not!” That was his immediate response. Lance knew what a rut felt like. All adolescent Alphas went through them pretty frequently, a mess of hormones and changes, but he almost lost himself during both of Keith’s heats (though kept it together much better the second time) where he felt like he needed to hold his mate, to kiss him and take care of him, and make sure the rest of the world didn’t hurt him or the family that they would—

Son of a bitch. He was going into a rut, wasn’t he?

“Uh, I can leave?” Lance said, feeling horror creep up in him. Oh god, this couldn’t be happening. It couldn’t. He held it together so well through the heats, and it was actually super rare for adult Alphas to go into ruts outside of that.

“Hey.” Keith placed his hands on Lance’s cheeks. “It’s okay. It’s fine.”

“It’s not,” Lance choked even as he brought Keith to him in a crushing hug. He shuddered a bit at the brush of their bodies. It was like now that he knew (or more likely, now that they were in a private safe spot), his mind was turning to goo. “Lock me in my room.”

“And let you be miserable?” Keith shook his head. “It’s okay. I’ll help you.” His stern glare cut off any protests Lance tried to splutter out. “You’re not him. You don’t smell anything like him. You will never hurt me.” He leaned forward and pressed a light kiss to his lips. “He’s not going to shape our relationship.” A small chuckle escaped his lips. “I dunno if it’s because we’re mates or what, but right now, you actually smell really good.”

Keith spoke with such sureness, such confidence, that Lance couldn’t help but swoop forward to kiss him. This time, he wasn’t blocked by a bag or anything like that. This time Keith kissed him back with equal fervor.

At some point, Lance started walking Keith backwards until they made it to their room, falling back in a tangle of limbs and lips.

God, Lance really missed Keith when he was gone.

…

Real ruts, Keith realized, were nothing like they were commonly portrayed. Alphas were shown as aggressive, sex-driven beasts that would take anything and everything that they wanted within
seconds of it falling over them. Even the good ones would have to be restrained or they’d jump their Omega companions.

It wasn’t just media, that depiction was so ingrained that Keith was warned about ruts in his health classes at school. That it made Alphas hyper aggressive and violent unless they got what they wanted.

It was something that Keith genuinely believed because he had no reason not to. He didn’t actually remember seeing his father in a rut, though his mother never feared him. He had seen some of his foster fathers man-handled their Omega husbands or wives before vanishing into their room, where he heard things he’d rather not, and escaped the house with Acxa.

Keith always assumed that Acxa was different because she was his sister, his twin. It was common for ruts to happen to adolescent Alphas at random, since their emotions were heightened and their hormones were wild. She always seemed wildly uncomfortable, but Keith knew his scent calmed her down quite a bit, though she was always on edge and incredibly protective.

Then Keith experienced an Alpha in a rut in the most brutal way possible, and it was enough to make him terrified and repulsed by the scent of any Alphas outside of his sister for a long time.

It was actually more of Pidge’s research that made him stop and think about it, and the aggression, that made absolutely no sense. Why? At their core, ruts were all about procreation.

Pidge had noted that ruts outside of an Omega’s heat were actually incredibly rare. When that happened, Alphas were usually in a heightened state of distress or aggression, and then were introduced to an Omega’s scent their mood shifted incredibly quickly that it basically gave them a baby brain, and the best way to have a baby? Lots of sex. So they actually entered their own little subspace where they were more vulnerable too, so they got even more protective over their mates and partners. That, combined with the fact that Alphas often experienced negative emotions prior to their rut, was likely where the association with aggression came from.

Sure, Alphas could be a bit rough and desperate in the middle of it, but that was different than the common depiction of an Alpha in a rut. The depiction that the worst aggressors, the rapists, molesters, and abusers, used was an excuse for their own greed and disregard to others. Heightened emotions and libidos could be handled and ignored.

Of course there were also Alphas that seemed like good people, but did act aggressively, but Pidge theorized that it was likely they were acting how they thought they were supposed to. The entitlement that many Alphas had, even if they were awful people at their core, was very real. Society made Omegas nothing more than breeding mares, but in nature, they were more equals than anything else.

Keith wasn’t sure what to think of all of that at first, but now he was pretty sure that Pidge was onto something. That was until he actually experienced Lance in a rut, and everything she said made sense. Lance absolutely was aggressive, aggressively cuddly and clingy. Sure, he was a horny bugger at the time, and he definitely was in his own little world in the midst of things and could be a little rough, but the second Keith voiced any discomfort he immediately stopped because rut-brained or not, he was still Lance. It just made it so very clear that the pathetic pile of shit that hurt him before was genuinely rotten to the core.

He sliced through some baby potatoes, the kitchen a mixture of the sounds of a sizzling pan, the television playing the show he put on earlier for background noise, and the shower running. Keith could honestly say that yeah, he felt a bit sore in places that he’d rather not be, but it wasn’t a bad experience at all. Really, from what he knew about how he acted during heats, it was actually very
similar. Just shorter (unless it was during an Omega’s heat, ruts lasted for a day, tops). Lance helped him through those, so he felt good knowing that he could do the same in return. He wasn’t going to break down.

That, in and of itself, was more freeing than anything else.

The only thing that he felt kind of weird about was Lance’s mutterings about babies. Personal revelations and forgiveness or not, he definitely wasn’t ready for that yet. That was future Keith’s problem.

He was so lost in his thoughts and going through the familiar motions of cooking, that he didn’t notice the shower turn off, or Lance go into their room to get changed. He didn’t even notice him blow-drying his hair (because of course Lance would insist on that, squawking like a chicken when Keith let his air dry).

So when Lance came up behind him and wrapped his arms around his waist, Keith flailed and nearly smacked him with the hot, oil-covered spatula. “Lance!”

The Alpha chuckled, not at all perturbed by the fact that he almost got hit by burning grease. He nuzzled his face into Keith’s neck and inhaled before pressing a couple gentle kisses against it.

Keith sighed and turned the heat down before turning around to face his husband. “I’m trying to cook.” He thought he was getting pretty good at making things.

Lance pouted in response. “But cuddles!”

“Don’t tell me you’re not hungry.” The Alpha’s stomach grumbled, and Keith smirked triumphantly.

“Fine.” Lance shifted away and immediately went to help.

Keith liked doing things like this. Cooking together, just being together. It was really nice, especially after being gone for a week.

Together, they managed to get things done quickly and sat on their couch to eat. Keith once again lamented over the fact that he wished they had a table, even just a tiny one. Not that there was any room for one.

Someday. Someday they’d have that kitchen table.

Keith spoke to Lance about his trip, focusing on only the good things for now. They’d have to talk about everything else that happened eventually, but he didn’t want to bring any of that up just yet. It could wait.

Where his week was good with a few dark clouds hanging over it, Lance’s seemed to be the opposite. He listened to his Alpha rant again about the idiots that vandalized the tanks, a bit worried that he might go off on a rut again if he got too agitated and was then reintroduced to Keith’s scent. He didn’t think that would happen this time, since he and Lance had that fight months ago and it didn’t happen. Likely it was his absence and then being reintroduced to his scent again that made it happen.

So they were probably good at this point.

Once they were finished eating and their dishes were left on the coffee table, they turned the tv on and Lance curled up on top of Keith. The Omega grimaced slightly, and shifted until he was comfortable again.
“You okay?” Lance asked, looking up at him.


A silly smirk spread across Lance’s lips as he adjusted himself so he could more easily see Keith’s face. “Oh, really?”

It took Keith a moment to realize what he was doing, and snorted. He put his hands on Lance’s cheeks and squished them together so it looked like he was making a fish-face. “You stop that.” Did Keith mind rough sex? Nah. It was kind of fun at the time as long as boundaries were still listened to. Did he want the fact that he was still aching a bit to boost Lance’s ego? Fuck no.

Lance pulled back, his face going normal. “Seriously, I’m sorry about that.”

Keith rolled his eyes before his husband could go off on some big apology. “Listen, ruts are natural, and honestly, I’m kind of glad it happened when I wasn’t in heat? Now I know for a fact what rut-Lance is like, and he’s not so bad.” He poked him. “Insatiable and then like a kicked-puppy when told no, but not a bad person.” Lance spluttered at that and Keith snickered. “My sister held herself together in her ruts. Mom says dad did too. Has Veronica, Luis, or your Papá ever hurt anyone in a rut?”

The Alpha paused to think on that. “No. Never.” He shrugged.

“I think Pidge is right,” Keith noted. At Lance’s curious look, he clarified what he meant. “I think that Alphas who do attack people and say it’s because of a rut are either just entitled monsters to begin with, or act that way because they think they’re supposed to and don’t want to be called out on it. Toxic Alpha behaviours.”

“That’s so stupid,” Lance groaned, flopping down so his weight rested on Keith again, his head on his chest. “But that might be right. It never even occurred to me try and jump you when you said no.”

He ran his fingers through Lance’s hair. It was starting to grow a bit, and would soon be more like a mullet than he could ever hope to claim Keith’s would be. “I mean, someone had to get us snacks and water.”

“And I love you for that. I think I’d be a shriveled raisin.” He felt Lance’s flirty grin against his throat. “Cause, you know, used a lot of—“

Keith’s hand shot up and he pressed the palm to Lance’s lips. “Why are you like this?” Lance licked his hand, and he pulled it back. “Gross! Get off me.” He shoved at his shoulders.

“Oh so it’s gross now but when I—“

Keith grabbed the pillow from behind him and smacked the top of Lance’s head. “Why?”

Lance laughed wildly as he swatted the pillow away. “No one else is here, you doof!”

“That doesn’t mean I wanna be called out!” Keith tried to squirm away, but Lance held onto him in a tight hug. A playful struggle ensued, and as they both laughed loudly, they rolled sideways and Lance crashed into the coffee table. It cracked under his weight and fell to the floor.

“Oh my god!” Keith scrambled to get off of the groaning Alpha. “Are you okay?”

Lance blinked up at him and laughed again. “We broke our only table.”
“Our ta—I’m worried about you, not the coffee table.” He helped pull Lance up and grimaced at the sight of their cracked plates under him. “I don’t think any of it cut you, but let me check just in case.” He yanked him the rest of the way so they were standing.

Lance leaned on him and sighed. “God, I love how strong you are. Like, please always man-handle me.” He put his hands on Keith’s shoulders and used that as leverage to jump up.

Keith flailed and nearly fell over while trying to steady them. He grunted and muttered, “You’re getting heavy.”

“You calling me fat?”

“No more diner food for you.” He carried him out of the room. “Ridiculous Alpha.”

He’d check Lance’s back to make sure no pieces of the plate got stuck in his back, and then go out to clean up the disaster that they left in the other room. God, his first few days home were so dramatic.

Keith loved it and wouldn’t change a thing about it.

Chapter End Notes

Reminding everyone that this is a zero smut story, and always will be.

So, we have 7 chapters left, and while I do know what the basic theme around those will be, I’m a bit curious to see what anyone else might want to see? I can’t guarantee I’ll be able to work it in, but I can try!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When asked where his favourite place was, Lance always cited the ocean. He loved the water and the creatures within it so much. He wasn’t exactly a poetic guy, but Lance felt like he could wax poetics about the sea until people got bored of him.

Now though, he was really, really tempted to change that answer. What place could be better than where he was now, in bed with his husband, trading languid kisses, bare skin gently brushing against the other, with nothing but their incredibly soft, warm sheets surrounding them? There was no intensity, no heats or ruts, or even sex for that matter. It was all just so soft, like they had all the time in the world to just relax together.

Keith looked up at him through his thick lashes, and Lance felt his heart thump in his chest. Maybe he was a bit biased, that was entirely possible, but he was fairly certain that Keith was the single most beautiful and handsome person that he’d ever met. How did he get so lucky?

(Keith would argue this point, saying that the description better fitted Lance. It was a debate that they had before until Pidge interrupted and said that they were average at best and just biased. Rude as fuck.)

He curled up against Keith, forehead resting in the crook of his neck. He nearly shuddered and the sweet, content honey scent that surrounded his mate. A soothing, low purr rumbling in his chest.

Yeah, Lance really wanted to stay there that day. Work and his thesis and everything else was stressful, and this was the exact opposite. “I wanna stay here.”

Keith chuckled and ran his fingers through his hair. “I have a few commissions I need to finish, and Pidge wants me to finishing altering the design for the pins she wants to sell.”

“But I wanna snuggle,” Lance whined without a care as he squeezed Keith around the middle, fingers brushing against his sides.

The Omega twitched at that, ticklish on that exact spot (which Lance full-well knew). “We gotta eat too. I can feel your stomach rumbling.”

“I’m purring.”

“If your purrs sound like gurgles I’m a bit concerned.”

The laughter that burst out of Lance’s lips was so loud that it shattered the soft moment. Keith took the opportunity to scoot out from under him, much to Lance’s displeasure. He reached for him with grabby hands, but Keith swatted him away as he went to grab his clothes.

Lance groaned and buried his face in Keith’s pillow. “Moment ruined. You’re a moment ruiner.”

Keith laughed at that, and left the room with his clothes to go and get a shower. Lance laid around until he heard the water turn on, and then literally rolled out of the bed with a groan. It wasn’t nearly as nice without his husband there.
Pants, Lance decided, were things that just shouldn’t exist some days. So he grabbed a pair of his underwear, his robe, and decided that was good enough. He had zero plans of going anywhere. He’d probably end up vegging in front of the television while Keith worked, or maybe play some games.

His stomach gurgled loudly. Right. Food first.

Lance blasted some music to dance around to as he cooked breakfast for them. Well, brunch more like it. He was half way through making omelettes (made of literally anything he could find, minus cheese on Keith’s), when he realized he forgot chili powder, and that was a no-no in his book. He scrambled around to look for it, finding it in the junk drawer for whatever reason (the one they shoved things in haphazardly).

What he found right under the chili powder instantly had him forgetting about the omelettes and the music. His happy morning mood was completely erased by the papers that were shoved in there.

Keith coughed as he came out of the bathroom, dressed with his wet hair dripping across his shirt like a heathen. “Lance? Something’s burning.”

“What the hell is this?” he held up the papers to a very confused Keith. Indigo eyes scanned over the papers, and widened slightly. He quickly looked away, and went to the stove to get the eggs off before they could catch fire. He didn’t say anything, and Lance’s ire rose. “Cause to me it looks like a Breeding Agreement.”

“It’s just information,” Keith said quickly as he scrapped the burned food out of the frying pan and into the garbage, his back to Lance.

“And why do you have this?” Breeding Agreements were disgusting. Simply put, the government paid people to have children. Once an agreement was signed, the couple had to produce at least as many children as was listed, otherwise they were likely to lose not just any funding they were given, but the children they already had. It was an awful thing that preyed on the poor more than anyone else. An Omega didn’t even need to sign it, their Alpha could sign it for them and they’d have no choice but to go through with it.

Maybe it was research for one of their youtube videos, but from the way Keith didn’t meet Lance’s gaze, he doubted that.

The tension in the room was thick and heavy, bitter scents stinking up the room. Finally, Keith turned to face him. “Have you looked at our bills, Lance?”

Given that Keith used to balance the books for Shiro’s PI business (before he moved on to working for Allura’s company), he took on that responsibility. Lance admittedly didn’t look into it all that often, but he knew it was generally tight. After all, he was only an intern, and Keith worked off of commissions for the most part. It wasn’t like they were rolling in money or anything.

Keith didn’t wait for him to answer. “I’ve been trying to get a part-time job, but less and less places will hire an Omega now. Veronica said they’re starting to slowly roll out more and more restrictions on hiring Omegas that makes it much less likely any employer would bother to try. I don’t make that much money off of anything I do online, and I’ve basically been freeloadng off of you. That’s not fair on you. Especially since you have your thesis and everything to deal with on top of that.” His shoulders slumped.

Lance stared at him, fingers twisting around the papers in his hand. They could use more money, he knew that, but he also knew it wasn’t Keith’s fault. Not only that, but Keith would only be able to get part-time at best, and corporations sucked at paying their employees as a general rule. One of
them would have to get a bus pass, or pay for ubers or something along those lines, plus more gas.
All of that stuff was so expensive those days that it would probably cancel out any hours Keith worked.

“That,” Keith said and nodded to the papers in Lance’s hand, “that’s a way I could help. That’s something I could do. We could live in a place that isn’t falling apart. And don’t tell me it’s not, I heard old Ms. Bran complaining that someone’s foot went through her ceiling or something like that.” Their landlord tried so hard to keep the place going, but trying and succeeding were two different things.

Nausea crept up within Lance. This is why he hated these things so much. Well, beyond their sheer existence in the first place. The agreements preyed on people who needed help. Sure, everyone got a baby bonus for every child they had, but signing a breeding agreement guaranteed not just a decent home, but a nice one. It guaranteed more monthly income. The more babies, the more income.

“No,” Lance said sternly.

“We’re going to have kids anyway,” Keith shot back, his face serious. “Haven’t you seen all those rich Alphas protesting birth control, saying it should be limited to only Alphas with children?” Or with money, but they always went without saying, “They’re going to get that, Lance. They are and we both know it, because things just keep getting worse. If we get ahead of it though, maybe we can take advantage of it and do things our own way.”

“That’s not the point,” Lance argued with him, his ire rising. “Do you know what could happen if it leaked out that someone in my family signed one of those? What people would say about Veronica? None of us would ever do anything like that!”

“Are you fucking serious?” Keith burst out angrily. “That’s the exact same argument everyone else used to us getting together the way we did and you protested that then! Newsflash, Lance, we wouldn’t even be the first in your family to do it!”

The made him come to a complete stop. “What? What are you talking about?”

“Why do you think Luis and Lisa had to have a third kid despite the fact that she really shouldn’t? Despite the fact that they’d like to adopt but can’t yet? Why do you think that is? Huh? Where’d they get the money for their diner?”

Lance’s brain felt like it was going to explode, because all of that made so much sense. It really did. In fact, he accepted the idea so easily, because a part of him always knew that. Knew but didn’t want to admit it.

That part of him rose up again, ugly and not wanting to accept what he already knew. At the same time though, Lance really didn’t want to fight with Keith. Like, that was on the bottom of the list of things he’d like to do that day.

Instead, he said, “So what you’re saying is that you’d be cool with signing a contract even if we end up like them? Even if you get sick and struggle to carry. Miscarriage after miscarriage. You’d be fine with that because we’d have to do it or lose everything. You’d be fine with potentially dying and leaving the child we had to have behind, or both you and the child dying? You’d be fine with our kids knowing that they were—were obligations. That they’d know if you didn’t sign that contract, you wouldn’t have chosen to have them?”

Keith’s face did an odd thing. He looked ready to fight, ready to run, but at the same time, he looked so concerned about…something. “Lance…did your parents…?”
“Yes,” he choked out, because he was so, so ashamed of that. “Yes, they had one too and I was an obligation baby, and it sucks.”

“Your parents love you,” Keith shot back. “And I would love every single child we had. You’re an Alpha. You get to alter the contract. You can add shit in that voids it if something happens to one of us. And you wouldn’t be forcing me to do anything because I know you’d go over every little thing with me first.” He took a deep breath. “Look, it’s not like I’m saying we have to do it. Or we have to do it now, but it’s a legit option, Lance. We’d be basically playing a corrupt system.”

“And we’d go down as another example of how that system works,” the Alpha argued back. “Data on how it’s right and another number to add to it that gives them a backing to make things worse.”

“You think I don’t realize that!” Keith all but yelled. He took a few deep breaths and then seemed to collapse in on himself. “Lance, you’re a student, and I do digital art, we’re not going to be making any kind of money for a long time. I’ve been looking at our budgets and it’s…not looking great right now. And I know you plan on teaching while doing research too but that won’t be for a while. And just…fuck I’m useless.” He put his head in his hands.

The fight drained out of Lance, though he still chose to be a bit wary. Something wasn’t adding up here. Yeah, he could see where Keith was coming from about using the system to their advantage, he just didn’t get why.

Slowly, he reached the couch and sat down beside his husband. He lifted an arm, and was a bit surprised when Keith shifted close to him, hiding his face in his shirt. Lance ran his hand through his hair. “Hey, what’s wrong? Really wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Keith admitted, his voice and scent honest. “I just feel restless. The bills are piling up. I dropped my gym membership so we’d have that for something else. Our coffee table is broken.” He took a deep breath. “And I’m sorry, Lance. I didn’t realize how…personal those things were to you.”

Lance hugged him close, reveling in the comfort that Keith gave him in return. “My parents never wanted us to know, but we found their copy of it once. Four kids. That’s what they agreed to. For little obligations.” He was young when they found that and grew up knowing what that meant for him, and he didn’t like it in the least. He never wanted his own children to feel that way.

Keith pulled back and stared at him with narrowed eyes. “Lance…did they make that agreement before Luis was born?”

“Yeah, they made it before Mamá was even pregnant the first time,” he noted.

There was a long pause. “You’re their fifth child.”

“What?” Lance stared at him oddly.

“Lance,” Keith chuckled. “You’re the fifth child. They signed up for four and had five. If anything, you’re the one that they actively chose to have on their own.”

The Alpha opened his mouth to protest, but froze, because holy shit, Keith was right. Their agreement was finished with Rachel. He was like a bonus they chose to have despite that.

“And, it doesn’t make them any less horrible, but back then, the agreements only defaulted to two kids. Meaning that your parents put down four. Maybe you should talk to them about it.”
“Maybe,” Lance agreed. “But I still don’t like it.”

“I don’t either,” Keith admitted. “I don’t at all. I don’t want to have to write down ‘yeah I’ll have this many kids’, but…I do want a family in the future, and my pride is not going to get in the way of me getting every resource I can to give them a good life.” He leaned in a little closer. “Fuck the government, we’ll raise the little heroes that’ll topple it.”

Lance let out a watery laugh and hugged Keith close. He didn’t like the idea at all, and he definitely wasn’t going to sign anything anytime soon, but he could see where he was coming from too. Maybe he should talk to his parents, even talk to Luis and Veronica about it. Get all the information he could.

He looked at the empty space where their coffee table used to be. Then around the apartment. Lance wanted a family too. He wanted a bunch of bright and cheerful kids who grew up with love in their lives, both biological and adopted. He wanted that so much that he could almost taste it.

Those agreements were wrong. They enticed and trapped people the exact same way that it did to Keith. That it was doing to him. Wouldn’t it be selfish of them to reject the resources though if they wanted to have kids anyway? To wonder where they were going to get money for food when they knew exactly how to get it but wouldn’t?

He really, really hated this. Hated that the world pushed people like Keith aside so much that they couldn’t make money any other way. Basically screwed them over into this exact position. The system was playing them perfectly.

In a fictional book, that would be the moment a hero rose up to stop the nonsense. Reality was though, there was no chosen one. No single person was going to rise up and spark a fire to end all of this.

All they could do was endure it and make their lives the best that they could.

…

Hands down, without a doubt, the most important thing to Lance was his family. His biological family, his found family, all of it combined. He’d do anything for the people he loved.

That said, he kind of wanted to toss his sister out the window. Just full-on pick her up and toss her out the dodgy window that they struggled to get closed every time it was opened.

Lance had been told many times that he and Rachel were a lot alike, and that’s why he tended to actually argue with her more than the others. Sure, Marco knew how to get on his nerves, but it was usually Rachel that was the worst.

He still wasn’t quite sure why his sister was in his apartment. She’d come in, a whirlwind of motion and noise, only to pause at the sad sight of their couch with some little tv tables to replace the coffee table.

Instead of telling them whatever it was she showed up to tell them, Rachel started planning out how to fix their apartment and make it less ‘university-bachelor-esque’. That was actually kind of fair. Ever since Keith brought it up the other day, it’d be on Lance’s mind. This wasn’t the kind of place he imagined living in when he was married. Maybe it was giving into pushed stereotypes, but he wanted a nice house with his husband, a place that they could get used to together before kids became a thing.

Still, this place was filled with mostly good memories and he wouldn’t trade those. It was their life
for now, and he didn’t appreciate his sister ripping it apart. It didn’t help that Keith had his arms crossed and looked uncomfortable, no doubt thinking back to their argument the other morning.

“We get rid of your choice—“

“We’re not getting rid of the couch,” Keith replied to Rachel. He looked ready to physically fight her.

“Get a small love seat instead,” she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. “And if you get a little bistro with folding chairs, you might be able to squeeze it in.” She put her hands on her hips. “Really though, you guys need a better place.”

“You have your own business,” Lance interjected a little more sharply than he meant to. “Bella is a stylist. You have money for a nicer place. We don’t.” Behind Rachel, Keith grimaced. “Keith brings in extras with his art and shared stuff from Pidge’s youtube channel and I get some from work but like, it’s not like it gives us much more means than this.” Another grimace. Shoot, he hadn’t meant to make it worse.

A frown marred his sister’s face as her eyes flared with worry. “Are you okay though? Like…you’re eating and stuff, right?”

Lance bristled a bit at that. “Of course we are.” They really didn’t think he was that much of a failure, was he? He didn’t even know where Marco was living at the moment and swore his brother lived in a hippie van or something. “Why are you even here?”

He looked over the bills with Keith, and yeah, they were really, really tight. Both of them had no intention of renewing their gym memberships, and instead worked out a nice, safe route to run.

“Marco wanted me to remind you about the St. Patrick’s Day party. You didn’t tell him if you were coming or not.” She glanced at Keith. “It’s always a fun time, so you should! I also wanted to give you guys this.” With a flourish, she reached into her purse and pulled out a smooth, ivory envelope and held it out to Lance.

He blinked and took it from her. Carefully opening it, because it felt like the most expensive envelope he ever held, he saw a beautifully decorated wedding invitation. “Rach, of course we’re coming to your wedding. We don’t need one of these.”

“Keep it anyway. It’s the point of the matter.” She flipped her hair over her shoulder. “It’s coming up fast, but I wanted to do everything right. You know, gotta make up for the last wedding in the family.”

“Yeah—hey.” Lance scowled at her, good mood gone. Why were siblings like that? Sure, they could be there for you if someone else got on your tale, but why did they all feel the need to rip him a new one at any given time?

Rachel left nearly as abruptly as she showed up, there one minute and gone on her way the next. Lance wasn’t quite sure he’d ever get used to that.

He looked towards Keith, a bit worried that he’d find him brooding, but the Omega just looked confused. “Since when is your family Irish?”

Lance snorted. “We’re not. Gramps was Scottish, but it’s just a good excuse to go and have some rowdy fun. You up for it?” He knew Keith wasn’t too keen on bars, and he absolutely knew why.

He hummed thoughtfully, his eyes searching Lance’s face for something. “Yeah, I guess. Just…no
bar fights. I don’t want to have to take you to the hospital.”

“Listen, Hunk wildly exaggerated that story!”

“Sure he did.” Keith gently flicked his nose. “I don’t want to drink anything though.”

Lance completely understood that. Keith hated going to places with alcohol because drunk Alphas didn’t always understand what no meant (then again a lot of sober ones didn’t either). Of course, people tended to not bother him that much now when they realized that he very clearly had a mate, but anyone would be uncomfortable with someone eyeing them like a piece of meat for the entire night.

Not that non-Alphas were exempt from that. He and Keith were walking by a bar once late at night from a quick run to the convenient store and an Omega teetered out of it and was instantly all over Lance until their friends got them off of him. Keith looked about ready to throw down at the time.

If he was honest, Lance wasn’t too keen on going to bars or anything like that anymore, not when any kind of drinks were involved. Not after what happened to them in Vegas. He was so, so paranoid about them being spiked to the point where if he was still at a table and turned away from a drink, he would have to throw it out. Sure, sometimes he knew it was safe, but that still didn’t matter.

This would be a good test for him. A safe environment at a home of a trusted family friend, rather than a bar. He could do that.

…

Keith came to the very firm conclusion that he hated St. Patrick’s Day. Maybe some people liked it, that was fine. There was probably some legitimate reason people celebrated it in the first place. He didn’t know.

What he did know was that he hated alcohol. Well, no. He was okay with sipping at things on occasion at home, or when he was in a safe space like Pidge or Hunk’s homes. He didn’t like the feeling of being drunk though. Hated the idea of giving himself any kind of handicap that way. He didn’t like how others acted when they were blind drunk either. Despised it.

And he was surrounded by a bunch of drunken idiots right now. Even the people that he liked were being a bit annoying.

Though he did laugh when Marco face-planted on the ground and chose to just stay there. He was okay, just preferred the ground over anywhere else.

Keith was pretty sure that none of these people around him were even Irish.

He ducked underneath Veronica’s flailing arm in search of his husband, whom had wandered off to go to the washroom earlier. He was a little bit tipsy, but Keith knew that he wasn’t exactly comfortable with drinks either.

Despite the general lack of sobriety around him, Keith actually felt pretty safe. Not a single person tried to hit on him because he was an Omega (no one did that needless flirting with mated Alphas, which was totally double standards), which was really refreshing. He actually found that he didn’t mind mingling with people a bit in that case (before they got too drunk). Of course, once the soberness levels plummeted, people started being more vocal. And they were pretty vocal about the fact that they assumed Keith wasn’t drinking because he was pregnant.

He corrected them, of course. To which he just got blank stares or questions of ‘well why not’.
It was actually pretty uncommon for an Alpha-Omega couple to *not* have a pup on the way after the six-month mark in their marriage.

Keith didn’t give a fuck about that. What he *did* care about was the fact that he kind of wanted to go home, and he needed to find his mate, who was very likely sidetracked by his siblings.

Sure enough, he found Lance with Rachel, and several small, empty plastic cups in front of them. He froze at the sight of them, and groaned when he watched both of them down their drinks. Lance’s dislike of drinking largely had to do with his paranoia of someone spiking his drink. Shots with his sister, who would sooner attack someone than let them hurt him, would alleviate those fears a bit.

Unfortunately, that also meant that Lance was now wasted too. Keith could *tell*. Yup, it was time to go.

Even if Lance was having *such* a good time with Rachel.

He sighed and walked forward. Lance must have seen him out of the corner of his eye, or smelled him, because he turned to face him with an adorably big smile on his face.

*Jesus,* Keith was weak to that smile. He’d fight anyone to see it.

“Babe!” Lance cried out happily. “I found Rachel!”

“I see that,” Keith noted, eyeing all the empty cups. “You guys are wasted.”

“Nah,” Lance shook his head and reached out for Keith, hauling him down so that he was in his lap. He nuzzled his face into Keith’s neck. “You smell good.”


“I think I saw her over by the food table,” Keith told her, and blinked as she shot up and stumbled off in that direction.

There was a slight vibration against his back, and a soft, gooey feeling welled up within him when he realized what it was. Lance was purring, and it was adorable.

He twisted slightly to put an arm around Lance’s shoulders. “Come on, we should go.”


“Wouldn’t you rather cuddle at home in bed?” Keith asked. He meant that innocently, but Lance smirked up at him and wiggled his eyebrows. “To sleep, Lance.”

“But fun times!” Lance whined.

Keith rolled his eyes. He very much doubted that Lance would be up for sex when they got back home, but hey, if it motivated him to move, that’d be awesome. He stood up an stared down at his husband. “Gotta get to the car first.”

Lance practically jumped up from the spot. He teetered forward much quicker than Keith anticipated, and all he could do was hold out an arm and make a strange sound as Lance tripped over Marco, flailed, and slammed his head on one of the picnic tables before hitting the ground.

Panic erupted in Keith’s body, and he didn’t remember moving, but he must have because he knelt against Lance’s side. Lance’s Papá appeared at his other side, her brow furrowed with worry.
The Alpha groaned and looked up at him. “That was sobering.” Already, there was a nasty bump and bruise on his head, the skin scraped a bit, leaving dots of blood.

It was quickly decided that Lance should go to the hospital, just to get checked out, and perhaps get some good pain killers on top of that. Given that Keith was one of the only sober ones there, he drove him. Everyone else stayed behind with the assurance that Keith would keep them updated in the family chat.

Keith allowed Lance to lean on him. He brushed his fingers through the Alpha’s hair gently, knowing that he usually found it soothing. Lance wasn’t allowed to sleep yet, but he did have his eyes closed to help with the headache the lights only worsened. He played with Keith’s hands to show that he was still awake.

Honestly, Keith probably would have nodded off if it were him, so good on Lance.

The triage nurse cleaned up the wound, patched it up, and gave Lance some ice to press against it. The melting water dripped down onto Keith’s shirt, but he didn’t complain.

Surprisingly, the ER wasn’t completely full of drunk idiots. Not yet, at least. That was a good thing. Patients were moving fairly quickly, so it was likely that they’d get in and out fast enough.

A man stumbled into the ER, muttering something about his wife. At first, Keith ignored him, but then he caught sight of the two shaken children with him and had to do a double take. “Sylvio? Nadia?”

Both kids looked around at him, and Lance opened his eyes and sat up straighter. The two children made their way towards them, in their pyjamas and looking like they were yanked out of bed.

“Tio!” Nadia gripped Keith’s shirt. “Mami wasn’t feeling good, so Papi called the ambulance to check on her just in case.”

Keith’s stomach dropped. Lisa was extremely pregnant. Her due date was in about a week or so, and her pregnancy was anything but kind to her.

“Lance…what happened?” Luis asked as he came over to them, his eyes locked onto his brother’s head.

“Drunk and tripped over Marco,” Lance muttered, but his once foggy gaze was completely focused. “Where’s—” He stopped himself, eyes darting to his niblings.

“Sylvio, Nadia,” Keith spoke up, both kids instantly looking at him. “I need you guys to do me a favour. It’s really important that Tio Lance stays awake. He’ll get really bad headaches if he doesn’t. Can you guys keep him away for me? You can’t yell or be loud though.”

“It’ll really help me a lot,” Lance agreed, jumping into action.

Keith looked up at Luis, who was confused at first, but then relieved. He got up and left Lance in the care of the kids (they’d keep him awake), and walked a little bit away with Luis. “What happened?”

“There was so much blood,” Luis muttered once he was sure the kids weren’t listening. “She was conscious and everything. Insisted on hiding it from the kids. I couldn’t just leave them and I knew everyone else was out, so I couldn’t go with her and I just—“

“We’ll watch them,” Keith assured him. “Even if it means they come home with us, we’ll watch them, okay? Go with Lisa.”
Luis genuinely looked like he might cry. Keith let out a surprise squeak as he was given a hug that rivalled one of Hunk’s, and his brother-in-law hurried away.

He turned to Lance, who fought through his own pain and the alcohol that was still in blood to take care of the kids. Keith took a deep breath to calm himself and his scent, and went back to them. The best thing they could do for Luis and Lisa right now was to take care of the kids.

…

Lance got in to see the doctor, who confirmed that he had a mild concussion, but he was okay otherwise. The doctor gave them painkillers, and prescribed rest in an environment Lance found comfortable, preferably dimly lit and quiet. Which wasn’t a hospital at all.

After discussing it with Luis, the two of them decided to take Sylvio and Nadia back to their apartment for a ‘surprise sleepover’ that had both of the children super excited to the point where they didn’t notice their father’s wariness.

They stopped by their house for Keith to run in and grab some of their toys and clothes, since he didn’t want them wandering around just in case. Luis said there was a lot of blood, but the kids seemed oblivious to that, and Keith wanted to keep it that way.

Through all the excitement, it was very easy to get Sylvio and Nadia to fall asleep in Keith’s room at opposite ends of the bed.

Keith felt frazzled honestly. He expected to come home hours ago, curl up with his intoxicated mate, and go to sleep. He’d help him deal with his hangover in the morning cause he was good like that.

One thing on top of the next was completely sobering, and it was impossible to tell that Lance was once a giggling mess of drunk Alpha. He was up pacing, when he should be resting. Keith knew that if it was Shiro and Allura going through this, he would have been doing the same, but he also didn’t have a head injury.

“Lance,” Keith reached out and put a hand on his shoulder. “Go at least try to lay down. We’ll keep our phones on.”

“I just…” A growl escaped Lance’s lips as he turned to face Keith. There were tears built up in his eyes. “This is Lisa. She was always so nice to me, and she’s a great mom who loves her kids a lot and takes no shit from my brother. She’s not afraid to go head-to-head with Mamá. And I—her kids might lose her because she had to have another baby because of that fucking contract.” He stared at Keith with an intensity that almost made him shutter. “And as much as I love her, and I really, really want her and the baby to make it through okay, all my stupid brain keeps thinking is what if we sign one of those things and this happens to you no matter how selfish that is.” His voice wavered. “I don’t…I don’t think I could…”

Keith’s fingers curled into Lance’s sleeve, because he knew that he was right to be worried. “It’s not selfish, Lance. You can’t help what you fear. There are ways around it though, ways you wouldn’t think of unless someone else is in that situation and you learn from them.” He reached up and ran a finger underneath Lance’s bruised forehead. “You’re going to make yourself go around in circles with worry though, so I need you to take your medicine, and at least lay down, okay? You won’t be helping anyone if you stay up and hurt yourself. We can talk more about it later.” He wasn’t going to dismiss Lance’s worries, not when it was playing out in their lives right now. It wasn’t time to talk about that though.

It took a little bit longer for Keith to cajole Lance into bed, where he made sure his pillow was
fluffed, the curtains were closed tightly, and their phones were plugged in with the ringers on. The Omega wrapped his arms around Lance’s middle, spooning him to his chest despite the heavy, bitter scent that radiated from him.

All they could do was wait.

…

Keith didn’t like hospitals. He didn’t like them when his father died. He didn’t like them when he needed casts and a rape kit for when he attacked him (though he did appreciate the nurses that believed him when he said he hadn’t experienced his heat at the time, which was a blatant lie, because a part of him knew already what was happening inside of him). He didn’t like them after the incident in Vegas. He didn’t like them when he took Lance there a few days before.

That said, he knew that people needed him. Without the doctors, it was very likely that Lisa and her baby would have died.

That didn’t happen though. They were both alive, though not perfectly healthy. The baby was full term, but the doctors wanted to keep an eye on him for reasons Keith didn’t know. It’d be explained to him eventually, he was sure, but he wasn’t going to pry right now. Lisa was pretty sore and miserable at the moment too.

They were standing at the window overlooking the beds with the pups in them. Lance cooed at them, excited to see all of them, not just his own new nephew.

“Javier,” Lance sighed as he caught sight of the boy with Luis’ dark complexion and Lisa’s brown hair. “He’s so cute!” He actually cried when Luis told them his name. “Our baby is going to be 100 times cuter, so we need like 50.”

Keith chuckled and ran a hand up and down his back. “A year for serious talks.” He paused. “Well no, less than that now.”

“I know, I know.” Lance wrapped his arm around Keith’s shoulders and tugged him close. Keith’s eyes wandered over the infants in there, warmth bubbling up in his chest.

Yeah, he wanted that too.

Chapter End Notes

I know I took a while for this one, but I have my reasons. I’m working on a few other projects right now. I highly recommend you check out my other social media to see if you haven’t already!

This chapter started as one thing (St. Patrick’s Day themed), but completely shifted so this is what we ended up with instead. Oh well. We’re almost to the end!

My Tumblr: storiesbeyondthestars
My Instagram: storiesbeyondthestars
My Twitter: storiesbeyond1
No one in Keith’s family was especially religious. Actually, no one was period. The holidays they celebrated were the popular ones that went commercial more than anything else. That said, Keith had very fond memories of Easter as a child.

His father would sit with him and Acxa, and they would paint and design eggs together, giggling and laughing every time they broke out without meaning to. At least until their mother shared the idea of hard boiling them first.

He remembered going to community egg hunts where he was kind of amazing at finding them. Small and fast, Keith always ended up with a ton. He also had fun finding them in his house with his sister. They didn’t get a ton of stuff, but it was always more fun than anything else. Not that Christmas wasn’t fun, but he always preferred being out in nature when possible.

He had a lot of good childhood memories, so maybe that was why he had absolutely no issue when it came to helping out with the neighbourhood egg hunt around Lance’s parents’ house. The kids were going to go crazy over that in a couple hours, and for now, he was with Sylvio and Nadia, painting some eggs for fun. Rachel and her fiancé, Bella sat with them. Both of the women were as crafty as Keith was, and were only happy to join in the paint-filled mess.

Keith probably could have done a better job if he could actually focus, but really, it was Lance’s fault, not his. Really, who gave his husband the right to be so adorable?

He sat not far from them, baby Javier in his arms. He cooed at the small boy, and Keith was glad that he took after Lisa more than Luis, because if that baby would have looked at all like Lance, he probably would have melted from cuteness.

Keith always knew that Lance was good with kids. It was obvious that his niece and nephew adored him. It was another thing to actually see him interact with a baby though. It was just too much for the Omega. It made him want to collect fluffy things and make a nest, and all kinds of stuff like that. Normally, he only got like that when he was in preheat, and that wasn’t coming for a while.

To be clear, Keith never minded being an Omega. Some people would call them weak, but he knew that he wasn’t. He didn’t mind those instincts that led him to nesting and cuddling. He didn’t mind that sometimes, all it took to put him in a good mood was a warm bath, soft blankets, and a hug. That said, he also would rather not gush about how cute Lance looked with baby Javier. He’d never hear the end of it.

It was actually extremely rare for an Alpha and Omega in particular to be mated for over six months and not have a pup on the way. Keith was still sure that though he accepted his past now, he wasn’t quite ready for it, but damn if Lance wasn’t making his waver unintentionally.

He forcefully turned his eyes back to the half-finished egg in front of him. Yes, Lance was cute as
shit as he cooed at Javier and wiggled his fingers up in front of the baby, but he had to focus. His pride as an artist was on the line.

Lance wasn’t making it easy though.

“Who’s the cutest baby in the world? That’s right, it’s you!” he said happily to the baby. “For now.”

“For now?” Rachel asked, her tone amused, though Keith didn’t look up. He couldn’t look up, dammit. He’d get completely distracted.

“Uh, yeah. My kid’s going to be the cutest one ever.” Rachel snorted at that. “Uh, excuse you. Can’t make fun of my looks, because we look alike. Can’t make fun of Keith’s looks cause, well, look at him.”

“That…is fair,” Rachel agreed, and Keith had to look up at her, eyebrow raised. “What? I’m pan and I’m allowed to think you’re hot. Not like I’m going to do anything about it. That’s not how I roll.”

“Bella, my man’s stealing your woman,” Lance teased her. “Guess that leaves me and you.”

The other woman looked up at them before glancing at Keith. “She snores really loudly. Good luck with that.”

Keith laughed loudly. “Lance leaves dishes around everywhere.”

The siblings spluttered at them, and even Sylvio and Nadia found the entire thing amusing. Not that they really cared about the goings-on of the adults around them. The easter egg hunt was going to begin soon.

They cleaned up the paints and left their eggs to dry. Lance reluctantly returned Javier to Lisa as he went with Keith to where they were going to be stationed during the egg hunt. The neighbourhood set up a starting line, and had little signs here and there for barriers so the kids knew when they went too far. Along with that, there were trusted adults stationed around to keep an eye on them as they played. Keith actually loved the idea. There was something about watching kids play outside like that, like they weren’t in a harsh world with strict rules, like their dynamics didn’t matter.

Keith busied himself unwrapping a little chocolate egg that he had with him when Lance leaned his head on his shoulder, hands wrapping around his waist. “So.”

“So?” Keith repeated, eyebrow raising. Lance smelled playful and teasing, which was alluring in so many ways but also made him just a little wary.

“It’s the time of fertility.” The Alpha wiggled his eyebrows dramatically. “Not one year yet, but we can always plan. 50 is good.”

“50 what?” Keith asked as he struggled to get out of his arms. Of course his mate was being clingy and ridiculous, which made a couple kids that ran by them giggle.

“Um, pups, clearly.”

He snorted loudly. “Unless you’re shoving them out, that’s gonna be a hard no.”

Lance whined dramatically, and Keith knew he wasn’t being serious. “Out of where? I don’t have the junk for that like you do! My ass? Do you understand how unsanitary that would be to have all of that connected together?”
“We’re in a public park,” Keith hissed at him. If some kid heard that and repeated it to their parents, they could never come back again. “And that’s not my problem if you want to go into double digits.”

The Alpha immediately perked up. “So what I’m getting is that nine is on the table.”

“No.” Keith didn’t know how many kids he wanted. More than one, that was for sure, but definitely less than nine. Unless they won the lottery and adopted a bunch of kids too. Actually, no, it was still too many.

“Yes,” Lance replied playfully. He had that look on his face, the one that let Keith know he was about to kiss him. He leaned down, and Keith brought his hand up and shoved the unwrapped chocolate egg in his mouth while he leaned out of the way, a broad smile across his face.

“Keith!” Lance protested even as he chewed the candy. With a dramatic flourish, he pounced at Keith who laughed loudly and ran from him. They couldn’t go far, because they were supposed to be supervising, but the little kids that passed by them seemed to find it funny all the same.

Tears of laughter streamed down Keith’s face as he was finally tackled to the ground. He rolled in the grass, positively wheezing as Lance hugged him close, his own amused giggles shaking his body.

He didn’t know what brought out this silly side, but Keith was glad for it. There were so many things to worry and fret over in the world, and it made moments like this even more precious.

As much as Keith loved being outside, he was really glad sometimes to be in. He stared out the window, watching the rain crash down outside, barely able to see a couple feet away it was so bad. He supposed he could have worked on some of the art that he needed to finish, but he’d been at that for hours and his mind felt numb.

The storm came out of nowhere, and as he glanced at the clock, Keith couldn’t help but worry. Lance took the car that day since he had to travel to a few places himself for research, and he should have been on his way home. Keith really, really hoped that he stopped somewhere safe to wait the storm out.

A chill ran through the apartment from the strong winds. He had no idea where the draft came from, but it drove him crazy, and Keith swore that he was going to find it one of these days and patch the stupid thing up himself.

He wandered around to grab a big, fluffy blanket, and curled up on the couch, the smallest of purrs escaping him from the soft fabric against his skin. Lance once said he was tough as nails, and that might be true, but he would always love soft, warm things.

Without giving it much thought, Keith dialled a number on his phone and pulled up the video chat option. It only occurred to him a moment later that Shiro might be at work, but he was proven wrong when his brother answered the phone.

Wow. Keith couldn’t help but stare. Shiro’s eye bags had eye bags, and he looked like he forgot what a brush was for his floof. Haru was screaming in the background. “You look like shit.”

“He doesn’t sleep, Keith.” Shiro ignored him, his eyes desperate. “All he does is cry, and if Allura’s not here, he screams. Screams and cries and shits everywhere.”

Keith’s eyebrows rose up. He couldn’t really remember the last time he heard Shiro swear outside of
a really awful situation. Everyone knew that Keith was the one with the foul mouth. “Where did Allura go?”

“She went out. She’s been home pretty much the entire time so I insisted that she go out shopping or something with Romelle and—”

“Romelle?” Keith interrupted, eyebrows rising with surprise. “The girl that helped us in Vegas?”

Shiro paused and stared at him oddly. “Oh! Right! You didn’t know that! Yeah, they got in touch with one another. They’re basically besties now.”

Keith had so many questions, because how that made sense, he didn’t know. Instead, he said, “Lemme see my nephew.” He could still hear the baby crying, and it tugged at something in Keith’s chest. No one liked the sound of a screaming baby, whether from annoyance, or some deep innate desire to soothe them. He very quickly realized that it was the latter in his case.

Why did he have to have two adorable baby nephews right now? It was screwing with his omega-programmed mind.

Shiro set up his phone on some kind of stand so that he could hold Haru while still talking to him. Keith lit up at the sight of the small boy. “Wow, he’s getting big.”

“He is.” Shiro almost looked like he was about to cry at that. “Isn’t it hard to believe that any of us were ever this small?”

It was. It was such a strange concept. Just as strange as to think that one day they’d be old and wrinkly and there was really no slowing down time on that.

He talked to his brother for a while, and wondered if he even realized that Haru stopped screaming at one point, likely at Shiro’s soothing tone and the tumble in his chest. It was an adorable sight, not that Keith would ever admit that.

The lights suddenly flickered, and he looked up at them as if insulted. “Shiro, I’m going to go.”

“Everything okay there?” he asked.

“Just a storm, but it’s cold and I want a hot meal, so I gotta do that before the power goes out,” Keith explained. Hot heal sounded fancy, but they had a ton of chicken soup and that was pretty tempting. They had some carrots he could cut up to add to it.

Assuring Shiro that he’d call him later, Keith got to work scouring through their kitchen to make something edible. Lance didn’t expect it when he came home, but honestly, Keith was sitting around doing nothing anyway, and he was getting hungry too.

While he let the soup simmer, Keith went around to hunt for the candles, lighters, and flashlights. The lights flickered again, accompanied by a thundering boom. This was complete and utter bullshit. Wasn’t April supposed to be like the driest month or something like that in Florida? And why was it thundering too?

It was silly, but Keith felt rush of victory overtake him when the power went out just as he finished lighting the candles (some really nice macaroon scented ones they found on clearance with the rest of the Easter stuff). That was short lived though as the door flew open in perfect time with a flash of lightning.

He blinked several times as he met Lance’s tired eyes, not quite sure what he was looking at. Not at
first glance. He was soaked from head to toe, spots of him covered in mud. Keith didn’t understand how Lance could be such a big klutz for someone who could be so graceful, but his mate didn’t even have to tell him that he tripped. That much was obvious.

“Come on,” Keith said as he urged him in farther to close the door. “Go get some warm clothes on.”

Lance dug his heels into the floor, holding his soaked backpack that he carried his stuff around in gingerly. “You gotta go get me a towel.”

“Or you could just go get changed.”

The Alpha’s eyes bugged out. “I can’t just go through the house like this, you heathen!” Lance motioned to himself. “Papa would smack me over the head if I even thought about it.”

“That said, he still went and grabbed one of their fluffy towels and retreated back. He came to a stop as he watched Lance, who was full-on stripping right beside the closed door. Good fucking god, Lance was a dirty mess right now and should not be so attractive.

Lance put his shirt directly beside the door so that the mud and water wouldn’t get anywhere else, and glanced up at Keith. Something must have shown on his face, because his lips tipped up into a teasing, alluring smirk. “Like what you see?”

Keith flushed and tossed the towel at him. “No.”

“You’re lying,” Lance replied in a sing-song voice. He put the towel over the top of his head, and it really looked like he was about to try and give Keith a strip show. Only to get tangled up in his pants and face-plating into the floor.

A laugh burst out of Keith’s chest as he crouched over him. “You okay?” He couldn’t stop the amusement from shining through.

Lance twisted around so that he was laying on his side, wet pants half way down his legs, and propped his head up on his hand. “Hey they’re baby. You seduced?”

Keith laughed so hard that he fell onto the ground beside him. He couldn’t stop his amused chuckles even as Lance started to pout. “Sorry, sorry. Are you okay though?”

“Were you seduced?”

He snorted. “Nope. Not a bit.”

Lance flopped onto the floor dramatically. “No. My pride’s been shattered. Fix it for me?” He looked at Keith with pleading eyes.

The Omega laughed again and shook his head. “Come on, drama queen. You’re going to get sick if you stay in this. And sick Lance is a lil bitch.” Oh, Keith would absolutely take care of Lance if he got sick, but that didn’t mean he’d be happy about it. Lance got whiny and clingy over common colds and small scrapes when they were home. He was one of those types, where if he went silent or tried to hide it, that was when it was bad.

Holding his arms out, Lance made grabby hands and batted his eyelashes. “Carry me? I’m wounded.”

Keith laughed loudly. He reached out to grab his husband, but instead of carrying him bridal style
like he knew Lance expected, he tossed him over his shoulder. Lance squawked loudly. “Keith!”

“You never said how to carry you.”

“I’m not a sack of flower.” He slumped a bit and Keith stumbled a bit to keep them both upright.

“Actually, you know what? This view is fine. Carry on.”

He eyed Lance’s side. “Are you staring at my ass?”

“It’s a nice ass.” Then, because Lance was Lance, he lifted his hand and slapped him.

Keith should have seen it coming, but he didn’t. He squeaked with surprise (and would forever deny it) and tossed Lance over onto the bed. Before the Alpha could say anything about him getting riled up or something ridiculous like that, Keith pointed at him and said, “Get dressed and dried. I made food and we need to eat it while it’s warm.”

He quickly retreated the small distance back to their combined living room and kitchen. His stomach grumbled, and as sexy as his mate could be, Keith was genuinely hungry.

As he spooned the soup into bowls, Keith felt Lance come up behind him and wrap his arms around his waist. Since he tugged his hair up into a ponytail that morning, his mate easily swept it aside as he pressed his lips to the sensitive gland there. Keith’s eyes fluttered a bit as Lance nuzzled into him. Keith snorted with amusement. “Cause I made soup?”

“Cause I’m freezing and cold and you made soup,” Lance confirmed. His fingers moved to his sides, under his shirt, and too late Keith realized what he was doing.

“You fucker!” Keith yelped as cold fingers brushed against his skin. Lance cackled dashed away from him. The Omega couldn’t help but laugh in response as he followed, because it was rare that Lance came home in such a good mood. It wasn’t that he came home in a bad mood, no, he loved his job most days. He was always just tired.

They almost knocked over the candles, which was enough to settle them down, because the last thing they needed was to set their apartment on fire because they were running around like idiots.

The soup was barely lukewarm by the time they got to it. With the power off, there was no television, no

“Good day?” Keith asked him. He settled into the couch more comfortably as Lance’s face positively lit up in the dim candlelight. Though the wind whipped wildly outside of their window, he couldn’t help but feel warm at just how excited Lance was over his research.

Keith didn’t particularly get the appeal behind marine biology. Though he’d been in a land-locked city for all of his life prior to moving to Florida with Lance, and he just learned how to swim. There was something a bit unsettling to him knowing that you could be in the water and something massive could just pop up out of nowhere. So he didn’t get it, but he appreciated it because of how excited Lance was about everything.

Once their empty bowls were put away (to be washed when it wasn’t dark and stormy), they curled up together under the blankets, picking at the Easter chocolates they still had left.

“There is one thing,” Lance added, almost as an afterthought to follow his riveting speech on Whale Sharks. “I applied for a small research project. If I get it, it means I’ll be a bit busy later on in the
“That’s good for you though, right?” Keith asked. Omegas were allowed to do much for post-secondary education, late alone a masters like Lance was trying to do. So he never really thought to look up exactly what it was that Lance had to do in the first place.

He nodded his head. “Yeah. If I get it, it pushes all my research ahead a lot, and that’s a good thing.” Lance suddenly seemed to bounce on his seat. “So I want to make the most of our free time leading up to it! Hunk told me about this place where we can go and paint pottery and stuff! That sounds like a ton of fun. Wanna go this weekend?”

“Huh, that does sound fun,” he agreed. There was a crack of thunder that prompted Keith to glance over at the window. The lights flickered on again before going off. “Ugh. This sucks.”

“I dunno, it’s kind of romantic.” Lance lowered his voice a bit and leaned closer to Keith. “All this soft light. Cuddling. No other distractions. Kinda nice. And you know what they say about April showers!”

“This isn’t a shower, Lance, this is a monsson,” Keith responded ryly. Lance wasn’t wrong though, it was nice sitting there with him.

“What did you get up to today?”

That was one thing Keith liked. Lance always seemed interested in his day too, even if he didn’t to much on some days. So he talked about the commissions he worked on (“God it’s so hot when you tell people to fuck off and pay you the price you laid out.” “Lance, what?”), and of course he told him all about Haru and Shiro, and everything that was going on over there!

“Oh!” Lance straightened up a bit. “I forgot to mention. I was talking to Shiro a bit the other day too, and he mentioned that you seemed a bit bored? And I might have mentioned how we’re not able to afford the gym. Apparently that insulted him on a personal level? But yeah, we’re both getting year-long memberships to our gyms.”

Keith stared at him blankly for a moment. Yeah, he was upset that he couldn’t go to the gym anymore due to their budgets, because he genuinely liked working out. He didn’t much care for it as a social setting, but he liked being strong and fit. He also knew that Allura (and therefore, Shiro) were loaded. That didn’t mean he wanted to go to them any time money got tight, even if they were both always insisting when he spoke to them (which goes to show how tired Shiro was earlier, since he hadn’t brought it up at all).

So he was grateful, but at the same time he felt a little bit like he was failing. Having to go to his brother and sister-in-law for money.

“I swear, I didn’t ask for them,” Lance added quickly, prompted by Keith’s silence.

The Omega shook his head. “No, I know. I just…don’t like asking people for things.” Still, it would be really nice to get back to that again. He was feeling a bit lazy lately. He worked from home, and while he liked going at his own pace, it was a bit dull at times. He didn’t really come across exciting things like Lance did every day.

That was when he remembered something. “Wasn’t your application for that project due today? You get it in?”

“I did,” Lance agreed. He applied for a small research project that would hopefully help him along
with everything. “I really hope I get it.” There was no guarantee, but it was worth a shot.

Keith scoffed. “If they say no, they’re idiots.”

Lance chuckled at that, eyes bright with amusement. “I think you’re a bit biased.”

“Why’s that?”

He poked his nose. “Because you love me. You think I’m the sexiest, smartest person around.”

“Pidge is smarter than you,” Keith pointed out without hesitation.

A disgruntled whine escaped the Alpha’s lips. “Okay, yes that’s true. But I win for sexiest.”

“I dunno, Hunk’s pretty good looking.”

“Keith!” Keith laughed loudly at that as Lance shoved at him. The power flickered again, the lights coming back on.

They both looked up at the ceiling light, and Lance pouted. He flailed a bit and Keith leaned off of him, allowing him to scramble to his feet. He resituated himself so that he was leaning against the arm of the couch instead, watching as Lance practically flew across the room.

Keith’s lips ticked up as Lance turned the lights off, returning the room to the same calm, soothing atmosphere it was earlier. He then braced himself as Lance ran back at him and practically threw himself on top of him.

“Lance!” Keith growled as he shoved at him. “Your bony ass is digging into me!”

He gasped dramatically. “It is not bony. You take that back! And tell me I’m the sexiest person ever!” Keith shook his head, a broad grin across his face. Lance growled slightly and wiggled his fingers. Keith tried to get away from him, he really did, but Lance was surprisingly heavy when he wanted to be, so he had him pinned as he started to tickle him.

The storm outside raged on, but the only thing heard in the dim light of their apartment was loud laughter.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! It’s been a while! I apologize for the slow updates, but I can assure you that I will finish this story!

If you’ve been following along with any of my social media stuff you know that two of the projects I’m a part of (both of which originated in my very strange brain). If you haven’t, check out the art of my pin designs on my tumblr, twitter, or instagram! I’m very proud of how they look so far! Also check out the pictures for Once Upon A Time: A Klance Fairy Tale Zine! These projects are going to be a ton of fun to work on and are two of the bigger projects I’ve been hinting at!

If you have any questions about my stories, or any of my pictures and designs, don’t hesitate to ask here or on any of my social media!
End Notes

Surprise! It's sequel time! How long will this fic be? No idea. My intention for it is to take place between them coming home, and their one-year anniversary. Despite all those tags up there describing bad things, this is largely going to be about fluffy klance bonding, along with some other things as we go.

So buckle up and call your dentists, this is going to be a fluffy, sweet ride!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!