and the seconds just remain unchanged
by sleeplessmiles

Summary

Lance sees the rock thing swallow Jemma, and then kind of accidentally gets swallowed as well when he tries to help.

Whoops.

[Post-2x22]

Notes

I wrote this for the tumblr prompt, 'Jemmalance + "I can't believe I'm sitting in space jail with you of all people"' because it made me laugh and I think we could all do with a more lighthearted solution to that final scene.

Hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the work for more notes.

It’s Lance who works it out first.

Not because of any particular scientific knowledge or anything, of course. It’s mostly just an accident. By some twist of fate, he’s actually looking for Jemma at the time; Bobbi’s been getting
pretty bummed out about all the recovery and rehab she’ll have to do for her knee, so Lance figures he’ll get Jemma to talk to her. Share some of that natural enthusiasm, and all that.

When he’s almost to the room, he comes across Fitz heading in the opposite direction down the corridor.

‘Hey, Jemma still in with the creepy alien rock… thing?’

‘Hmm? Oh, um – yeah, she is,’ Fitz replies absently. Lance frowns, taking in the dreamy look on the Scot’s face.

‘You alright there, mate?’

Fitz blinks, as though he’s only just noticing Lance is there, and a small, awed grin tugs at his mouth.

‘Yeah,’ is all he says. Then he claps Lance on the shoulder, and continues on down the hallway.

Lance makes a face.

_Oookay then._

He’s just pushing the door open when he hears Jemma mumble something. Then, he hears a rushing sound, a gasp. Cursing, he gets there just in time to see a massive swell of grey drag Jemma along the ground, back into the case, and he doesn’t even get to cry out before –

It’s a rock again.

It’s a solid rock. It just.

It just swallowed her.

_What the hell?_

‘Jemma?’ he asks, uncertain.

There’s nothing. No response.

That’s when he starts to panic.

‘Jemma!’

Running into the room, he circles around to the front of the container and oh shit, oh _shit_, there are scratch marks on the ground. She’d been trying to grab onto something, trying desperately to –

His stomach drops.

God, she was just –

What’s he supposed to do here? Should he try to break it open?

‘Hey!’ he yells, banging an open hand on the glass. ‘Give her back! Give her – you _stupid alien_ – ’

He should smash the glass, right? Smash the glass, make the terrifying rock thing leak out, make it let Jemma back out, because _holy shit the rock just ate Jemma._

Looking around, he notices some big piece of electronic equipment. That’ll work. Grabbing for it, Lance holds it above his head.
‘Give her back, you – ’

The rock falls suddenly into a liquid, swelling against the sides of the container and knocking against the door – the door, he’s noticing now, that’s still unlatched.

‘Oh, sh-’

The last thing Lance registers is that it’s warm. The bloody liquid rock thing is warm.

And then, he’s gone.

- - -

But really, all things considered, he’s not gone for long.

- - -

There’s another rush of warmth, and the next thing he knows, Lance Hunter is being dumped unceremoniously on the ground. It’s hardly the first time it’s happened in his life, and he’s sure that it won’t be the last, and so he takes a brief moment to recover. The ground is rough against his face, all rocky and sandy, and it’s possible that he –

Rocky and sandy.

He’s outside.

Lance’s eyes fly open.

Shit.

Jumping back to his feet, he turns around to have a look for the other end of what he’s now guessing is some kind of portal.

But there’s nothing there.

Nothing but sand and desolation.
For miles.

The rock dumped him in the middle of a desert, and then just went ahead and disappeared.

Great. No, that’s great. Fantastic.

He spins around then, searching desperately for some sign of shelter in the distance, for civilisation, for something to break up the endless sand and heat, because he’s just noticing now that it’s hot, damn it, and why couldn’t the rock have –

His breath catches in his throat at what he sees on the horizon.

There are… there are three suns.

Lance blinks, his jaw hanging open in disbelief. Either this is a really vivid dream, he’s tripping out, or… or he’s genuinely on another planet.

Christ.

Three suns.

(If he ever gets out of here, he’s going to set fire to that bloody space rock himself.

Stupid space rock.)

‘Hey! You there!’ comes a harsh-sounding voice, cutting through his thoughts. Swinging around, he sees a group of four men on horseback only a few feet away. Distracted as he’d been – by, you know, the three suns – Lance hadn’t noticed them approaching.

He notices them now.

Namely, how many eyes they all have.

Widening his own eyes innocently, he checks behind himself for a moment before looking forward again. ‘Who, me?’

‘Where did you come from?’ the guy demands, unwilling to play along.

Lance just stares back. It’s pretty hard not to, in his defence. This guy has a lot more eyes than most people he’s encountered in his life.

‘Uh… the room with the space rock?’

The man rolls his eyes. His many, many eyes.

‘Grab him,’ he orders the three officers with him, sounding bored. Lance puts up a brief fight, but it quickly becomes apparent – from their bruising grip on his arms – that these guys are a lot stronger than him, so he finds himself surrendering instead.

Alright. Fine then. It’s fine. He’ll just have to regroup, figure out a way to find –

Crap.

‘Jemma,’ he realises quietly, before turning to the head guard. ‘Wait! I’m looking for a friend.’

‘Aren’t we all.’
LANCE: Roll his eyes. ‘A specific friend, you idiot. She’s about this tall,’ he gestures with his chin, since his arms are restrained, ‘short hair, kind of curly – ’

‘Oh, so it’s a lady friend!’ the head guard says, all mocking false enthusiasm. ‘You didn’t tell us it was a lady friend.’

The other guards chuckle. Lance grimaces, offended.

‘Now you’re just being rude.’

‘Take him back to the rest of the expedition,’ the head guy says, effectively dismissing him. ‘And see if you can do something about shutting him up.’

One of the guards grabs him from behind without warning, roughly shoving some sort of gag in his mouth, before tying his wrists together in front of him with a length of rope. They tie the other end to the saddle of one of the horses – which, great. Honestly. Just what he wanted.

(Lance spends the entire journey speaking through the gag anyway. Purely out of spite.)

---

By the time they make it back to the “expedition,” the guards have already deemed Lance’s gag ineffective and done away with it – a move he greatly appreciates, really, after having been trekking through the bloody desert for about an hour. It had been drying out his mouth, a fact about which he’d been complaining loudly. At length.

The expedition, as it turns out, is what they’re calling some kind of dig site right on the edge of – oh, thank God, right on the edge of some kind of town. There’s a group of about fifteen or twenty people milling about, digging at the ground and cutting sections off this weird plant thing.

To be perfectly frank, Lance doesn’t really care what they’re doing so much as the fact that there’s actual civilisation nearby.

He’s just wondering idly at the weird fashion sense of these alien things – the woman heading up the project is wearing jodhpurs and lace-up boots, as well as some sort of tiara thing – when the head guard dismounts, calling out across the small camp.

The woman turns around.

Lance’s mouth drops open.

It’s Jemma.

It’s Jemma conferring with a group of people and pointing out where she wants them to be, clearly giving them orders. It’s Jemma striding about the site, two people following her around and holding a makeshift shelter over her head to protect her from the suns.
It’s Jemma with her hair braided intricately back off her face, dainty tiara resting atop her head.

She’d been gone a minute. Tops. And here she is, dressed like some kind of space-royalty-slash-Indiana-Jones and somehow leading a whole group of aliens.

How on earth did she –

‘What the hell?’ he squeaks. At the sound of his voice, Jemma stiffens, and then turns to look at him. She glances at the people around her, as though she’s evaluating something, before she speaks to him.

‘Oh. Hello, Lance.’

He gapes.

‘Yeah, nice to see you too!’ he whines. ‘What the hell are you doing?’

‘Wait. You know this guy?’ the head guard asks Jemma. Her eyes widen sweetly at the guard.

‘Hmm?’ she asks, and she’s the very picture of naïve innocence. Lance is almost impressed. Almost.

‘Hey!’ Lance yells, getting the guard’s attention. ‘Don’t interrupt!’

The guard responds by shoving him in the back of the head. Hard.

‘Ow, what the hell are – ’

‘ – Lance,’ Jemma chides. ‘Stop talking.’

He splutters. ‘What?’

The head guard speaks up again. ‘Dr. Simmons, you know this guy?’

Jemma winces. ‘I do, actually.’

A hushed silence falls over the group.

‘Do you know where we found him?’

Jemma brightens considerably at that – probably because she thinks she can’t possibly be found culpable here.

Big mistake, Jem.

‘I don’t, no. You see, I was just informing Dr. Blake here that these specimens are quite remarkable, unlike anything I’ve ever seen, anyway, and so when you…’ She trails off at the expression on the guard’s face. ‘What?’

The guard clears his throat. Loudly.

‘We found your friend wandering over in the restricted zone.’

Lance makes a disgusted face. Wandering? That’s a bit of a stretch. He’s more worried about Jemma, though; she looks distinctly terrified at the revelation, the fear washing over her face in a wave before she covers it with another bright smile.
This doesn’t bode well.

‘Is that so?’ she asks eventually, voice strained.

The head guard sighs. Lance can relate.

‘Alright, I’m going to need you to put your instruments down and come with me, your highness.’ Lance thinks his brain might have short-circuited.

‘What?’ she breathes, horrified.

‘Your highness?’ he hisses.

Two guards walk towards Jemma. She immediately starts backing away, hands up in a placating manner.

‘No – no, wait, I can explain.’

They grab at her anyway – a lot less harshly than they’d grabbed Lance, granted, but rough enough to have him straining at the rope on his wrists.

‘Hey!’

‘Put them both in lock-up,’ the head guard orders.

Jemma gapes, indignant fury sparking in her eyes.

Uh oh.

‘Lock-up?’

‘Jemma,’ Lance says warningly.

‘Do you have any idea who I am?’

The guard starts to look a little uncertain – something Jemma notices too, apparently, because she squares her shoulders and lifts her chin.

‘If you truly respect my claim to the throne, then you’ll unhand me at once.’

Lance’s ears must have disconnected from his brain. His eyes, too. That’s the only logical explanation here. The whole thing is ridiculous.

(Although, it does explain the tiara.)

‘I’m sorry, your majesty. No one is exempt from the law, not even yourself – you know this.’

‘You clearly haven’t met my boss then,’ she mutters under her breath. Lance barks out a laugh, and she shoots him a small grin, briefly pleased.

But then someone’s tying her wrists just like Lance’s, and the horses start moving, and the smile is quickly replaced with a rather venomous glare instead.

Well. This is going to be fun.
Alien lock-up, as it turns out, is a lot like lock-up back on Earth. Stinky. Unclean. Weirdly lit by fluorescent lights.

At least they’ve got their own cell.

After about an hour of pointed silence on Jemma’s part, Lance figures he’s given her enough time to stew.

‘Still not talking to me, your highness?’

‘Oh, shut up,’ Jemma snaps immediately. ‘I can’t believe you got me thrown in jail.’

‘Me?’ he splutters. ‘How the hell is this my fault? You’re the one who got eaten by the rock!’

She whirls around to face him. ‘An accident, I’ll remind you! And nobody asked you to follow me.’

‘As luck would have it, princess, neither did I. The blob decided that all on its very own. I was just trying to make sure you weren’t dead, so, you know. You’re welcome.’

‘Well,’ she sniffs. ‘Clearly I had things under control.’

‘Oh, clearly,’ he repeats. After a moment, he just shakes his head, scrubbing his hands over his face. ‘Okay, well, sorry to get in the way of your political aspirations – ’

‘Scientific,’ she argues. ‘It was for science, Lance.’

‘It was – whatever, we’ll discuss it later. Right now, we need to work on busting the hell out of here.’

Jemma falls silent then, as though she’s thinking something over.

‘You said something about the time,’ she begins slowly.

‘What?’

‘On the way back from the dig site. You said, “how did you do this so quickly?” and then the guard hit you again.’

She’s not wrong.

‘And I’ll admit that my rise to power happened with a rapidity that even I hadn’t believed myself capable of possessing, but I get the feeling that’s not exactly what you were getting at.’

‘Your rise to – you were barely even gone! I followed you through the rock thing straight away, and you’re already royalty? You’re good, Jemma Simmons, but nobody’s that good.’

Her eyes widen as he speaks, before she purses her lips.
‘How long?’ she demands.

‘What are you –?’

‘How long was it, Lance? Before you followed me through the portal.’

He shrugs. ‘I don’t know, a minute?’

A strange expression crosses her face.

‘Oh.’

‘Oh, what?’

Jemma clears her throat a little, shifts on her seat.

‘Time must pass differently here, that’s all.’

For the first time, Lance notices how her usually pale skin has a little bit of a tanned hint to it, her brown hair a little more highlighted than he’s used to seeing. Worried, he leans forward. ‘Differently how?’

‘It’s been two weeks,’ she confesses quietly, after only a brief moment’s hesitation.

Lance’s eyebrows shoot upwards.

‘Whoa.’

‘Yeah.’ She nods.

‘Wait. So you’re telling me this is like Inception?’

Jemma rolls her eyes, effectively breaking the seriousness of the atmosphere. ‘Is everything a movie reference to you?’

‘You tell me, Indiana Jones.’

‘Lance,’ she groans in frustration. He bites back a grin. ‘Just. How long was it precisely?’

‘It couldn’t have been more than a minute,’ Lance swears.

She sighs, longsuffering. ‘You’re going to need to be more assured than that, Lance. I can’t do a proper conversion unless you –’

‘ – Yeah yeah, alright. Uh.’ He thinks about it for a moment, mentally retracing his actions and guessing at how long they took. ‘No, I’m going to stick with a minute. I yelled, it got pissed, and then it ate me. One minute.’

Excitement sparks up on her face.

‘Oh, but that’s plenty of time! If two weeks here is only a minute on Earth, then it’s only been a few seconds since you got here!’

‘There’s – wait,’ he tries, his brain only just catching up. ‘You got them to think you’re royalty in just two weeks?’

‘I can still make my date!’ she says, looking up at him and grinning breathlessly. He frowns – or, he
tries to, anyway. Despite himself, he can’t quite stop the corners of his mouth from quirking up at the sheer joy on her face.

(Seeing Jemma Simmons smile these days is something of a rarity.)

‘You’ve got a date?’

Jemma scoffs, but there’s less bite in it than usual. Lance feels his eyebrows creeping upwards.

*Interesting.*

She tucks a lock of hair behind her ear, averting her gaze. ‘Is that so hard to believe?’

‘Didn’t say that,’ Lance replies, leaning back on the bench and stretching out. He’s enjoying how flustered this is making her. Immensely. ‘So. Who’s the lucky date?’

A dusting of pink spreads across her cheeks at that, and his grin only broadens.

(That explains Fitz’s behaviour earlier.)

‘Shut up,’ she mutters.

Taking pity on her – for now, anyway – he claps his hands a couple of times. ‘Alright. How do we get out of here, then?’

Jemma looks back up at him, tilting her head. ‘You want to break out?’

‘Well I’m not just going to sit here and rot away in space jail, am I? Besides,’ he grins widely at her. ‘Gotta get you back so you can get all dolled up for your date, right?’

She rolls her eyes, but she’s smiling herself, now.

He can work with that.

---

For someone who claims to love rules and order, Jemma Simmons sure likes to break free from them an awful lot.

That’s all Lance can think about, really, as she tears her belt off with an excited grin, laying it flat on the cell bench before grabbing two small vials out of the belt’s little in-built compartments. She crouches down before her makeshift lab space, biting her lip as she sets about mixing the two liquids together.

Just like that.

Unbelievable.
‘Where did you even get those?’

‘These?’ she holds up the bottles enquiringly. ‘Oh, they’re just part of the standard field kit. The horses are venomous, and you’d be surprised at how many are running wild out –’

‘– I’m sorry. Did you say the horses?’

Jemma glances up at him. ‘I did, yes. But don’t you find it more intriguing that there are so many horses living in such an arid climate?’

‘Not as intriguing as venomous horses.’

‘It’s quite an interesting venom, I’ll give you that,’ she murmurs, narrowing her eyes as she tilts one of the little bottles up, enough so that only a single drop falls onto the edge of her belt buckle. As it makes contact with the metal, it lets out a soft hiss. ‘Neurotoxic and necrotising, from what I can gather. It’s almost reptilian, actually, which is why my current hypothesis is that the horses are not entirely mammalian on this planet.’

Re-fastening the lid on the bottle, she slips it back into the compartment on her belt and grins up at him.

‘Wouldn’t that be something?’

It sounds terrifying, actually. So he changes the topic.

‘You gonna kiss him?’ he asks abruptly.

‘I’m sorry?’

‘Fitz, I mean.’

She rolls her eyes. ‘I know who you’re talking about, I’m just –’

‘You should. Just plant one on him.’ He grins, watching as she becomes flustered again.

Ah. Young love.

‘I… we have a lot to discuss before – that’s not…’

‘Trust me, it’ll make things much easier.’

She smiles faintly. ‘Funny; I thought it’d only complicate them further.’

‘Now, how would you know that unless you try?’ he asks, gentling his voice a little. But she only looks back at him incredulously.

‘I’m not taking relationship advice from you, Lance.’

‘Why the hell not?’

But Jemma only makes a sympathetic face, patting him on the shoulder.

‘You’re dating your ex-wife, Lance; it’s possible you haven’t quite figured out the dating thing just yet.’

‘I…’
He can’t really argue with that. She makes a good point.

‘Now,’ she decides, holding up the semi-melted belt buckle triumphantly. ‘Care to give me a boost?’

‘Hold still!’ Jemma calls down from where she’s sitting on his shoulders, reaching for the roof.

‘I am!’ he complains.

‘Well clearly you’re not, since – ’

‘Yeah, yeah, alright.’ He tries to readjust his grip on her calves without jostling her too much. ‘Have you thought about what we’re going to do once we get out of here?’

‘I have,’ she admits. ‘I doubt they’ll let me return to gather any of my samples, but perhaps that’s something we could negotiate at a later time.’

‘Jemma.’

‘Because really, it’d be such a shame to let so many great research opportunities go to waste like that.’

‘Jemma.’

‘Yes?’

‘I don’t give a shit about your samples; I’m talking about getting back home. The whole rock thing.’

‘Oh, that,’ Jemma replies, unperturbed. ‘I wouldn’t worry.’

‘Really,’ he says flatly.

‘I already worked it out, so as long as you can return us to the point in the restricted zone where it left you, we should be perfectly alright.’ Tapping him on the head to indicate that she’s done, she sort of kicks her feet towards the ground. Rolling his eyes fondly, he lowers her back down, where she dusts off her hands and looks up at him, a pleased grin on her face.

At his dubious expression, though, her grin falls.

‘What?’ she asks, defensive. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘You worked it out. Just by being transported here. Just like that.’

One corner of her mouth tugs upwards.

‘What, like it’s hard?’
Barely an hour later, they’re tumbling back out onto the floor at the Playground, Jemma landing clumsily on top of Lance with a startling lack of grace. He groans as she rolls over, sticking a pointy elbow into his ribs, but he can’t even find it in himself to be grumpy.

Because she did it. She got them back.

She didn’t even need him, really.

‘We made it!’ Jemma exclaims, turning her head to grin at him broadly.

‘The princess knows her stuff,’ he replies, smiling back just as stupidly. Rolling her eyes, she sits up.

Which, naturally, is when Fitz decides to enter the room.

‘Hey, uh, Jem-Jemma? I was just thinking that…’

He stops dead in his tracks, taking in the scene before him: Lance sprawled on his back in front of the stone container; Jemma, sitting back on his thighs, still wearing her alien clothes and sporting an honest-to-God tiara.

‘Erm. What?’ Fitz asks weakly.

‘Fitz!’ Jemma breathes happily, springing to her feet and launching herself at him in a hug. Fitz’s arms come up around her gratefully, but he still looks confused as all hell.

‘Why do you…?’ He trails off, squinting at her hair. ‘Is that sand?’

Jemma pulls back. ‘Um.’

‘Jemma was just thinking,’ Lance tries, picking himself up from the floor, ‘that the two of you should go to a themed restaurant!’

Fitz stares back in horror. Jemma sends Lance a withering glare.

‘Indiana Jones, right?’ he continues. ‘Everyone has a bit of a thing for Indy, Fitz. Come on. Admit it.’

‘Perhaps,’ Jemma interrupts, ‘we could continue this conversation in a room that doesn’t contain a portal to another planet.’

Fitz’s eyes bug out.

‘Good plan,’ Lance enthuses, clapping and moving to usher everyone out the door. ‘I knew there was a reason they made you queen.’
Fitz is awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck now, one eye squinting.

Poor sod.

‘They, um. Made you queen?’

She looks bashful. ‘Sort of.’

Silence.

‘Ah, Jemma?’

‘Yes?’

‘Who’s “they?”’

‘Her loyal subjects,’ Lance butts in, grinning.

‘Lance, get out.’

‘Fine, fine,’ he gives in, putting his hands up in surrender and backing away down the corridor.

‘You’re welcome, by the way.’

She scoffs. ‘For what? I rescued you!’

‘Whatever you need to keep telling yourself, princess.’

‘Sorry – could someone tell me what’s…’ Fitz just looks completely aghast now, so Jemma reaches out a hand, gently touching his forearm.

‘Perhaps over dinner?’ Jemma suggests sweetly. ‘While Lance debriefs Agents Mackenzie and Weaver?’

‘I’m sorry, what?’

But Fitz only beams, ignoring Lance completely. ‘Sounds great.’

They walk away down the hallway then, both of them wandering dangerously close to each other yet refusing to make any physical contact. Watching them go, Lance can only sigh, before shaking his head.

Not bad for a day’s work, all things considered.

He turns to lock the door of the storage room.

End Notes

Thanks for reading!!
As always, you can find me on tumblr at 'imperfectlychaotic.'

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!