Cactus

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Cactus

by PinkHitman

Summary

When Keith moves from the desert in the middle of ass backwards nowhere, to plop in the middle of the big city, he doesn't expect to instantly grow fond of the tall, endearing, jerk across the street. But it's hard not to see roses when said person works in a flower shop.

(Now has a continuation One shot! Blossom!)

::Edit 3-82019::
Two years ago I tried to go back through and polish up this work. I've gotten many notes and know that I can improve it. So, I am going to reread this for the first time in two years and attempt to iron out some of the rough spots I know are there. My hope is to turn this into a comic although I have no idea how well that will go. So cheers to old me for writing this, lets see what 2019 me can do.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Sky Garden

Chapter Summary

Keith explores his new settlement.

Chapter Notes

Some edits have been made, I realized I uploaded the wrong file and there was a huge section that I had that was left out. If you are returning, please give it another look.

:: Update Feb 7th, 2017:: Starting new updates and rewrites from here. Nothing huge will change, just trying to weed out some awkwardness.

Chapter 1: Sky Garden

Keith situated himself on the warm wood floor in the middle of his new apartment. At the moment, it was mostly still empty. Nothing more than a few scattered sealed boxes, neatly labeled, and a soft gray sofa which looked empty without his usual bed fixing strewed across it.

He had gone from living in a small shack in the middle of hell’s nowhere to a rather large apartment that equated to a tiny speck on the San Francisco skyline. It felt all so unreal.

His life had fit so well into that small spot out in nowhere. Here he felt smaller than ever.

He supposed if he made an effort, more items in the space would remind him more of the cramped space in his old home, but he felt no will power to do this. In a way, the empty space would be his desert.

He laid down on the sleek wood floor, gazing up at the iron support beams and rosy orange brick walls. Almost the entire east wall was taken up by a large window, divided into parts that arched slightly onto his balcony. It looked like a slice of a greenhouse, and the area under and beyond it flooded with dust filled warm sunlight. He wanted to bask in it, feel the warmth of it fill each pore on his skin. But there was still work to do.

He pulled himself up, wobbly and slow. Moving on his own hadn’t been easy, and when it came to the couch he had to call in a favor. Shiro, who lived a few floors down from him, was an old friend of his. Well, more like a big brother or even a father. It had been Shiro who had managed to get Keith his job as a test pilot at the S.N.I.F. (Scientific National Institute of Flight). They had apparently begun work on several land, sky and space vehicles. Shiro had explained he would mostly be running simulations and that the job at least paid well enough. Not that he had much to compare it too; he had practically lived off the land and a small bit of independence in Nevada.

Shiro had scolded him quite openly when he had realized that Keith had moved in everything on his own, spouting off how he could have helped. In a way he did. Moving a couch was much easier when you were moving it horizontally rather than vertically, and to top it off the freight elevator he
had been looking forward to was out of service. Despite this assist in the one big object Keith owned, Shiro was still fussy.

He wasn’t so sure why Shiro was acting so over protective but it was kind of nice for a change. He had been over the moon to see Shiro those few months ago during the interview, to see him again and know he was nearby was a fast step to feeling at home.

Keith picked through the boxes, all of which sat on a tarp to catch any dirt or sand that may have gotten in while packing. It was something he was used to, the rocks and sand and occasional deadly animal, but that didn’t mean he wanted to bring that with him. The only thing he really brought from the desert was a small cactus that had traveled alongside him and now sat on his balcony past the large window. It was easier than a pet and still managed to fill a need of distraction. He needed something to take care of other than himself, and he couldn’t just leave all of them behind. He had grown a whole patch of Echinocereus Triglochidiatus, well they grew naturally but he looked after them, and it wasn’t easy to separate one from the dense patch. He still had a few fresh scrapes on his hand but it was worth it.

Unpacking didn’t take too long, his now seemingly oversized kitchen and apartment only lacking a few things he could go buy tomorrow. The sun had just begun to set, drawing Keith’s attention outside. The bewitching scene pulled him out to his balcony where he was met with a cool, welcoming, soft breeze. He could stand the heat no problem, but a lot of people forgot the desert got cold. The drop in the temperature reminded him he wasn’t in such an alien environment and he felt he could handle the noise that city life brought.

His eyes scanned the skyline, which seemed to slice the setting sky like a paper cutout. It seemed so jarring and harsh, yet was still somehow beautiful. San Francisco was a hive, a construction against nature. Although there were trees shooting up from sidewalks, they all looked like saplings, as if someone at the last minute wanted to add some green to make the area look less of a concrete jungle. The sky also seemed too cluttered to him, overrun with boisterous skyscrapers. It was nothing like the home he had known; a flat, empty but not too empty area that allowed him to see the sky touch the earth. Visually he had his issues, but he wasn’t expecting to obtain the same peace as he did in Nevada. The chattering of the city was always present, only muffled by walls. Out on his balcony, he could pick out details, like different instruments in an orchestra. The buzz of thousands of cars zooming in the city's labyrinth, the faint noise of the train, and the distinct sound of...singing?

He looked down over the railing, observing the people passing by on the ground floor near where his red truck and motorcycle were parked. They were all too far and it didn’t look like anyone had stopped to hum. He closed his eyes, trying to locate the source. It sounded distant but at his level, as though it were above the noise of traffic...maybe someone had a window open? His eyes scanned his own building as best they could, and when they didn’t find anything out of the ordinary they started to shift to the neighboring buildings on either side when something else captured his focus. It was a brick building across the street, much like his own but a few stories shorter and painted in an orange color that was visible through the green ivy wrapped around the structure. The top floor seemed to be sliced in half, leaving half of it open for a balcony that was filled to the brim with plants that were bursting with color.

He couldn’t tell what each plant was from a distance but he could see the small area was bursting with different shades of green and splotches of pastel blues and purples, vivid reds and oranges, and bright yet soft yellows all glowing in the evening light. In the garden was a young man, lanky with warm tan skin. Keith couldn’t make out much from the distance, but he could see the man bouncing along to the melody Keith had been hearing. Was he the one singing? It was hard to tell. There were no words and the young man wasn’t really facing Keith enough for Keith to catch a glimpse of his face.
It was then Keith noticed his tight grip on the railing and the fact he was almost leaning out over the edge. He straightened himself, feeling a bit embarrassed. It was odd living in such close proximity to other people, and he felt as though he had intruded on a private moment. Still, the garden was lovely and Keith was glad to have something so nice visible from his new home.

Keith turned away and reentered his slightly humid apartment, leaving the door open to coax some fresh night air in. He sat down at his small dining table that was situated just inside the doorway of the balcony, a setup that coincidentally allowed him to still look over and see the garden across the way.

He opened his laptop and chose a place at random for takeout before pouring over emails from his new employers. It had been like spam the first few months all through the hiring process. He had to confirm about a hundred times that he was taking the job, sending off medical records, and ID photos, all his schooling credentials. Now it was a nightmare of training packets, a list of staff he would be working with along with short bios, and specks of simulators attached with their controls for him to study. Organizing it all was a nightmare, and it wasn’t long before the sun had set and the only sources of light came from streetlamps below and windows across the street.

Instead of turning on a light he decided he had had enough work for the day. His food arrived and he closed his laptop, enjoying his quiet and food. The food was actually pretty enjoyable; take out wasn’t something he was really accustomed to so he was delighted that it was fairly decent. It was certainly more decent than what he was used to, which was mostly canned food. It was hard to keep fresh food out at the shack, the electric appliances limited to a mini fridge and a hot pad. The fridge kept drinks, the hot pad cooked a variety of canned soups, and sometimes just rice and spam. The prospects of a new diet seemed appealing in many ways, but Keith would have to find a local gym fast before his indulgences caught up with him.

Keith glanced across the way and saw the lights from the apartment with the garden had turned on, now giving Keith a decent view of it. It was...well, it looked a bit crowded. Keith thought the garden was overloaded, but that adjective clearly wasn’t enough. At least one potted plant seemed to exist on every surface he could see from his angle, as well as a few larger ones on the floor. It seemed warm, though and inviting. Earth tones and wood basked in the yellow light which made a wonderfully deep rainbow. A small gray cat seemed nestled on the sofa, so content and unmoving that Keith had almost not noticed it. Off to the far left, he could see the boy from before, still bouncing and now apparently cooking. He wondered if that garden had any fresh vegetables. Probably. Keith looked back at his own kitchen. He should try to make some headway on filling it.

Despite not knowing how long this job would last him or if he would even stay in this city, the idea of returning home felt like it needed improvement. Maybe, because he still owned the shack and the land it was on, he would add to it. Or build something near it and allow the shack to be his workshop.

Those were all ideas for the future. In the end, it didn’t matter if he kept nothing that he planned to buy in the coming weeks and completely went back to his old ways. Everything could be sold or passed off; he didn’t have to be attached.

With that thought, he cleaned up his mess and fell onto the sofa, soaking in a familiar smell he didn’t even realize was his own.

A few days passed as he flitted from store to store to try to fill his new place. He had yet to really bother with a bed due to him not really having one in Nevada but had found a decent desk and some good cookware. He was incredibly out of practice when it came to cooking. Keith, being so used to
the small amount of heat the old heating pad would give off, had found himself burning a bit more than he’d like too. But eventually, he was back to a good diet of rice, meat or fish, with some grilled vegetables.

He even invited Shiro over for a simple meal. Anything for something to do, Shiro was a great distraction. He had tons of stories and advice about the job ahead. He had a few criticisms about Keith's lack of a proper bed, but they came to the understanding that Keith would get one at some point as he was just ‘transitioning’.

Shiro was well built, even slightly better than Keith seemed to remember despite his age, but his hair was graying fast and a small tuft of silver sat in areas where he had allowed hair to grow longer than a centimeter. His right arm was stiff and webbed with scars, matching a scar across his face. He held himself like a soldier, which was funny considering much like Keith, he had gotten into flying by being raised on a farm and then attending college for aviation science. Keith had always attributed Shiro's nature to the fact that Shiro was a natural born leader, his powerful yet calm presence enticed others to stand tall and follow. He had a warmth to his tone that would relax even the most anxious person. The man was, in a way without being weird about it, everyone's Dad.

He had been a test pilot at S.N.I.F. years back, and due to an accident with a project, lost enough function in his arm that he was deemed no longer fit to fly. Shiro had talked about it before, how he wasn’t much disappointed because they gave him a great job leading construction, that he had never been so attached like Keith was to flying. Keith saw nothing to contradict this, but he himself couldn’t understand. He would have been furious.

Shiro had explained that Keith would be running simulations and each live test would be heavily controlled, which bored him slightly but at least put Shiro's mind at ease.

“ Maybe you should get a cat?” Shiro suggested, the two having moved outside to the balcony and Keith was enjoying mindlessly watching the garden guy. He was again cooking and seemed to be talking to his cat who was either rolling around the table for attention or sitting up straight, meowing for attention.

“ A cat? ”

“ Make this place feel less empty.” Shiro took a swig of beer, letting out a low content breath as he let the bottle rest on the railing. Keith gave him a silent look. “ I know, I know, you like empty. But seriously what are you gonna do with your time? I’m not even sure what you did with your time out in Nevada.”

“ Training, I guess? I’ll be working.” Keith returned to watching. There was an old biplane in a small cave near his shack. Flying and maintaining it had taken up a good amount of his free time. He had to leave it, though, and he couldn't really travel back and forth just for something to do. He supposed he still had his motorcycle and truck to work on, but he felt uncomfortable working in the garage or the middle of the street.

“ Not as much as you think. You might run simulations a few days a week, but every time you report a problem it’s a good month before you’re back in. It’s not a bad job if you’ve got hobbies. So I’m just saying, maybe find something to do?” Shiro had moved in close, Keith’s vision still on the Garden Guy and took a sip of beer. “ Or… someone?”

“ What?!?” Keith nearly spat out his drink. Actually, to avoid spitting it at Shiro, it more or less gargled in his mouth before drooling a bit down his shirt. Forcing a swallow of the warm beer, he wiped his mouth roughly with his forearm. He looked down his soiled shirt and began pulling it off, walking back inside.
“Shiro, you know I don’t date,” he yelled out at Shiro, who had stayed outside and was trying to hide his laugh.

“I figured you didn’t because it’s kinda hard to date when there’s no one around? The city is different. You should try to meet someone.”

“I haven’t even lived here a week. Aren’t you jumping into that topic too fast?”

Shiro let out a long sigh and leaned against the railing facing Keith and the apartment inside, his eyes unfocused.

“I just… I want you to stay close or at least give it a shot. I know you might not notice, but being alone messes with you after a while. I could tell how happy you were when I visited, hadn’t seen you that happy in a long time. You being close… I think it will be good for you.”

Keith felt a little guilty. Shiro had been trying to convince him to move closer for years. Keith's past, well it wasn’t stain free. That shack was where he had run away as a kid, his own little hiding spot from the world. But Shiro, who looked out for him, Keith could understand the worry. Keith mostly took the job to get Shiro to shut up, but it was also to put his friend at ease. After all, Shiro was like… what.. 40?

“I get it, I’m not going anywhere. But you start playing cupid and I might.”

“Noted.” Shiro raised his glass in acknowledgment, before killing what was left inside. Keith had lost his taste but his eyes couldn’t help but find the guy across the way, smiling lightly as he watched the guy feed his cat bits of what he was cooking. Maybe he should get a cat.

The next day, with a complete lack of anything better to do, he crossed the street. He had noticed a business on the ground level the other day and felt some odd urge to investigate. He dressed in his normal black t-shirt and black jeans. The only really item of color in his closet was his favorite red leather jacket but it was just too hot for that today. It was a short ride down the freight elevator and an even shorter walk across the street. He looked up to see a sky blue awning over the window with slightly faded print reading “Lion’s Rose.”

Of course, it was a flower shop. Whether the guy worked there or not, it would be hard to keep away from the beautiful display of plants and not want to take them home. Keith's evidence that the shop was quite popular was displayed in what looked to be some small fresh display of flowers in the front window of each surrounding shop. He nonchalantly walked along by each shop, inspecting the arrangement. Each was different and somehow suited the colors, interior, and atmosphere of the place it sat in, and the only common factor was that each arrangement was marked with a sticker of a blue rose. A sushi place had something that looked like a traditional Japanese flower arrangement, similar to the ones Shiro’s mom used to create.

He walked into the sushi place, which was called ‘Yellow Rolls’ and was met with warm wood counters and the smell of fish. It was small, shack-like and had a T.V. playing reruns of Happy Days off in a corner. The place was empty and Keith quickly made his way to the front counter. He debated for a moment to sit or not; he had yet to eat breakfast but he wasn’t really sure if the place was even open. He had finally decided to commit to sitting at the bar, only to be startled as someone burst through a curtain off to right on the other side of the counter.

“Woah! Hey there, welcome!” said the man.

This guy was huge. Bigger than Shiro, which was saying something in Keith’s opinion. It wasn’t just a tall thing either, the dude had killer mass. His long, dark bangs seemed decently managed with a
headband and his smile was wide and bright as his eyes.

“Uh... Hi.” His voice felt weak compared to the booming voice of the man before him. Keith watched as the man paid little mind to him as he began to set up his workstation right in front of him. It was like second nature to this guy, pull that headband down over his eyes and there would be little difference.

“Haven’t seen you around before.”

“Just moved in, ‘bout a week ago.”

“Oh yeah?” He carried on sharpening knives while keeping a constant, but not unpleasant eye contact. “Thought you’d take in the sites?”

“Yeah, more or less.”

“Well, Mr. New in town. Got a name?”

“Keith.”

“Well Keith,” Hulk began slicing off small pieces of fish and arranging them on a plate. Working at a pace so fast, Keith had trouble keeping up. “Welcome to the neighborhood.”

He set the plate down and gestured to it. It was sashimi, he had had some before when traveling with Shiro years ago. Fish with no rice. He took a piece, remembering ‘no soy sauce’ and ate it in one bite. It was... good! It melted like butter in his mouth. While he was enjoying it the man had given him a drink.

“I didn’t catch your name.”

“Everyone calls me Hunk,” Hunk flashed a smile.

Keith sat and ate happily, not realizing how hungry he was. Hunk carried on talking and asking questions. Keith gave a lot of short answers but was mostly content to just listen to Hunk talk about himself. Hunk talked about his family who was from Maui, showed off his arm which was etched with a tribal tattoo, and talked about his grandfather being a sushi chef and growing up on this street. When Keith had finished he stood, pulling out his wallet.

“How much do I owe you?”

“First time is on the house. Haven’t even technically opened yet, to be honest. I’ve got a few friends that like to swing by for this soup I make in the mornings and they always forget to lock the door. So you’re off the hook.”

“Uh.. well would you take a tip?”

Hunk got serious, his smile gone and his back straightening as he glared down at Keith with furrowed eyebrows.

“Only always,” he spoke in a deep tone before breaking out into a cheery laugh.

“R-right,” Keith joked and left a five on the counter. “Oh, I meant to ask, those flowers in your window-”

“Oh yeah? From the shop, my friend runs a few places down. Dude has some major skills, he’s like the best in town. He gives arrangements to most of us on this set. Then again, we all know each
other. You should swing by, say ‘hi’.”

“Ah- yeah. I’ll do that.”

Keith had been too nervous to bring up the apartment garden, not wanting to seem too much like a stalker. He left with Hulk hollering friendly goodbyes at him and made his way to the next shop.

The next door down was a bookstore. It was crammed from the floor to the ceiling with books. A staircase off to the far left was roped off, but the underside of the case was suited out with shelves that were jammed with books. Surrounding it was a small desk and at that small desk buried in their laptop sat a girl. Well...Keith wasn’t sure; he could tell from the figure and bone structure that it was a girl, but the short unruly mess of hair and college sweatshirt gave off a neutral tone, the large round glasses perched at the end of their nose seemed to complete a fitting look. If it wasn’t for the fact they seemed to be working on their computer Keith would have guessed this person was a book worm.

“Uhh…Hi.”

They looked up, and Keith noted how young they looked, probably a good ten years younger than himself. Their eyes scanned Keith with idleness before they returned back to their work. Keith wasn’t really put off by this, he was the same in a way when it came to his work. He decided to look around instead.

The shop was rather awkward to navigate. The shelves were all different heights and widths and so closely packed together. Scanning the rows, he managed to find an old book on the history of aviation, one that cataloged motorcycle design, one full of old star maps, and finally an old cookbook; Keith figured he had to restart somewhere.

Returning to the front of the shop he noticed, along with piles of books, papers some as big as maps, laid out surrounding the kid working the desk. Looking over one he noticed the distinct shape of a wing and hull. He opened his phone and flipped through his emails and managed to find a similar schematic. It was the “Comet” he would be testing.

“Hey!”

The kid looked up again, giving an unamused look that later turned to one of resignation upon noticing how Keith, and made an act out of closing their laptop.

“How can I help you?” Their voice was a little groggy from lack of use, but there was some bite in it.

“Why do you have those blueprints, they’re top secret...?”

That got their attention. They looked up at Keith through those oversized spectacles, a new gaze that made Keith feel like he was being x-rayed.

“How do you know they’re top secret?”

That got their attention. They looked up at Keith through those oversized spectacles, a new gaze that made Keith feel like he was being x-rayed.

“How do you know they’re top secret?”

“I’m supposed to fly it.” Keith held out his phone with the email. It took the kid a second before suspicion faded from their face and was replaced with excitement.

“Get out! You get to fly it?! Man, I’m so jealous. I’ve been hoping to fly along as technician but the new design eliminates the need for other people. Like, I think they want to ‘reduce casualties’ or whatever… My dad’s lead on the project, alongside my brother. I’m Pidge”

The kid held their hand out and Keith pocketed his phone so he could shake it. Keith shook it quirking up an eyebrow.
“Pidge, huh? Don’t remember seeing your name on the list of people assigned to the project.” Pidge started gathering up the schematics.

“Yeah, that’s because I don’t have access. But one of the leads, Shiro, wouldn’t know a decent password if it was written on his forehead. I’m still finishing up my degree but I interned there and learned enough. I can’t wait to help out.”

“I… Guess I look forward to working with you.” Keith had thought about reprimanding this kid, family or not, that what they were doing was illegal. But somehow he feared this kid could fight in a way Keith had no ground to stand on. So he let it slide. When the table was clear Keith set down his books and the Kid started ringing them up.

“Well Keith, you sure do have a one track mind.” Pidge held up the book on aviation.

“I could say the same for you.” Keith smiled.

Pidge looked a bit sheepish for a moment before wrapping the books up.

“My mom runs this place, and it’s a great summer job, but I can’t stop working ya know? So we don’t get too many people in and I tend to work here. That’s 20 bucks.”

“Seriously? I thought it would be more.”

“Family discount or ya know, whatever.” Pidge smiled and Keith returned it, taking the bag.

“Come by again sometime and we can talk secret stuff.”

“You’re gonna get me fired.” Keith laughed as he headed to the door.

“Who said it had to be about the Comet?”

Keith shrugged, his hand on the door, his eyes caught the arrangement in the window. Daisies.

“Actually? I have a question.”

Pidge perked up, they had begun to open their laptop again.

“Those flowers. They’re from the shop next door, right?”

“Oh yeah, dude that runs it keeps us all in fresh supply. Like he doesn’t get enough of it at home, he’s gotta see it in every window of the block.” Pidge smiled, letting their chin rest on their hand. “It is pretty nice, though.”

“What do you mean ‘at home’?” Keith asked an odd excitement building.

“Dude lives on the top of the building and he’s got a wicked roof garden. He had me and Hunk, a guy that works next door, help build it a few years back. It’s a pretty awesome little spot.”

“No kidding. I’ll have to check it out.” and with that Keith left.

So he knew the shop was owned by the same dude that owned the garden, and he was probably nice enough. It was the middle building out of the five on the block, and Keith found himself peering through the window. He saw the boy from before, his skin seemed to glow even more in the mid day light and Keith could now see how truly animated he was as he was working and talking with his customer. The shop seemed full of people, in fact. Maybe right now wasn’t the best time. Keith then noticed his own reflection, his hair was somehow a mess. Most likely from his nervous tick: when he
didn’t know what to say he would comb his fingers through his bangs. Do it enough and they wouldn’t settle right.

He passed the flower shop and entered another store two doors down. It was a barber shop and it looked like it was at least 40 years old, if not styled to look older, with spinning pole sign and everything. Keith entered into what felt like a time machine, complete with old, brown leather chairs and big circle mirrors. It was very clean, the only person presents being a tall man, with a fluffy, curly mustache. It was as red as his hair, which was slicked back in a modest style.

“Greetings! How may I assist your many follicles today?”

“Uhh... Hi. A trim maybe?” Keith set his bag of books down in one of the chairs in the waiting area and picked out a seat. The man fluttered over to him in an instant, a big black smock ready in his hand. The man whipped it out like a bullfighter before wrapping it around Keith with a high flourish.

“Would you like a shave as well sir?”

“Ahh...” Keith gazed at himself in the mirror. He had yet to grow anything resembling a decent beard, it always came out patchy. Keith often tried to avoid anything beyond a five o’clock shadow but, with the move and all, it had escaped him and he looked a bit more rugged than usual, not just his hair. “Sure. Go for it.”

“Very well, any particular style sir?”

“Uh.. no? Just all gone, and please don’t call me sir.”

“Very well miss, as smooth as a baby's bottom.”

Coran, as he later introduced himself, breezed through the trim, complimenting Keith on the maintenance of his hair, and more or less styled it neatly and then moved onto the shave. Keith's chair was tilted back as a soft foam, smelling of wildflowers, was slathered across his face and neck.

“Have you been visiting the neighborhood?” Coran asked. Keith, afraid to nod with a straight razor aimed at his neck, resorted to mumbling a quick ‘yes’.

“Very good of you. We are very ‘close knit’, as one might say. Why I remember when I started work in this shop. The Yellow Roll had just been built, and the wonderful woman who ran the flower shop, why her kids had just been married. Never seen so many flowers. They had ordered so many to arrange on top of their normal orders that there were buckets lining the street.” Coran let out a sigh. “Those were the days. Her son runs it now, and he does an alright job.”

Keith wanted to ask more, but the blade that had been at his neck was now near his mouth, so he didn’t risk it.

“Almost every shop except Yellow Roll is at least three generations deep. Even the owner of Yellow Roll just passed it onto his son. This is a place of family. So, are you living close by?”

One final swipe and Coran finished, tucking the blade away and handing Keith a hot towel.

“Yes, the apartment building across the street.”

“Very good! So nice of you to support us, you’ll be part of this family before you know it.”

Keith peeked out from behind the cloth to see Coran’s eyes focused on the bag of books from Pidge’s shop.
“Business is a little rough, but the Lion’s Rose has been bringing in some new people and any support is welcome.”

Keith stood, feeling an oddly warm feeling buzzing in the pit of his stomach. It was jarring, how friendly these people were to a complete stranger. At least, on some level, Coran seemed to be restraining himself.

“How much?” Keith asked, pulling out his wallet.

“Well, if you promise to leave the shaving to me, consider your first time free!” Coran smiled brightly, which you could only tell by how round and far back his cheeks were, his teeth hidden by his bushy mustache in an almost comic fashion.

“How am I supposed to support the area if you guys keep handing out free stuff.”

Coran didn’t answer but just twiddled his mustache, laughing merrily.

Keith slipped a five in the tip jar by the desk, grabbed his books and left.

The final shop on the street was a clothing store, sandwiched between Coran’s barber shop and the flower shop. It, much like the surrounding stores, was decked out with warm wood floors and brick walls, yet it was the first time Keith had noticed the store due to it being the most empty out of all the areas he had been to so far. Racks of clothing and accessories lined the walls, with a few mannequins breaking the flow. The theme seemed to be a bohemian grunge, the establishment being filled with distressed denim shorts in an array of colors, lace, and flower print.

As Keith turned to leave he noticed a woman working in the back, along with four assistants, huddling over something and hadn’t seemed to notice him enter. He was more than tempted to leave but wanted to somehow complete the chain and get the meet-and-greets with everyone out of the way.

He pretended to be eyeing several assembled mannequins, trying to find a good time to break up the discussion. When he peeked over, though, his eyes were met with a vibrant light blue gaze surrounded by dark skin and framed by platinum blond hair.

Keith jumped a bit back at the intensity of her gaze, her eyes seemed to study him, almost like Pidge but somehow with more fire.

Keith waved awkwardly and she seemed to notice that he was looking at her, flashing a smile at him and returned to talking with her workers. Keith finally made the decision to leave, yet, as he turned, he felt a strong hand grip his arm. He turned and was met with the same woman.

“Hello dear, forgive me for not introducing myself, I’ve been busy with my staff. My name is Allura and welcome to my shop.”

“Uh... Hi, I’m Keith..?” She started pulling him in over towards the table she had been working at.

“It’s wonderful to meet you, Keith, really. I’m just so glad you decided to pop in.”

“Well, I just moved in across the street and was checking out all the shops so-”

“Marvelous! You’re nearby. You see, I was going to ask you a question.” She snapped and one of her lackeys flew around the work table with a tape measure in hand. He looked... well, his attitude reminded him of Keith himself. Or at least a couple years younger than him. It was as if the kid was born frowning, though they had a stylish half buzzed haircut and stylish dark clothing. The kid was wrapping the tape measure all over him, forcing Keith to lift his arms and shift around awkwardly.
However, when the guy got too close to his crotch, Keith decided that crossed the line and kicked the kid away.

“What the heck!”

“Oh my, forgive me, dear. It’s just, I’m designing a line of men’s clothing to add to my ever-expanding repertoire, and I need a good male model to work with. Heaven knows I can’t get Lance to do it.”

“Uh…” Keith said, feeling a little frustrated and embarrassed. “Who?”

“Lance. He runs the flower shop next door. Tall, dark, and regrettably handsome, can’t miss him. He’s such a flirt,” she had the look of annoyance but it was betrayed by a subtle tender look in her eye.

“I used to have him wrapped around my finger. He was my favorite model, well… anywho that’s in the past.”

She smiled at him brightly. “Do not worry dear, I’ll just need you every so often, whenever you’re free really, to try on some designs and make sure they fit. I’ll work completely with your schedule. Just give us a ring.”

She slipped a card into the bag with the books he had gotten from Pidge’s and then she was off, back to talking with her workers. One of the taller ones with bright blue hair and thick framed glasses winked at him, and Keith took that as his cue to leave. But, if he was thankful for one thing, it was that he now knew the boy’s name. Lance.

Somehow his interest in the boy who he had caught singing in his garden had become a full on manhunt for information. He wasn’t sure why he was so fascinated with him, maybe because it was the first person he had paid attention to besides Shiro. Maybe because even living out in the desert, he didn’t have the nerve to sing out loud. Maybe cause he liked his guys tall and tan and gangly. Sure, he wasn’t the dating type but that didn’t rule out attraction. It was odd that he had seen someone that had captured his attention so quickly, so fast within such a short amount of time. Maybe Shiro was right, maybe he did need to get out more.

He stayed off to the side, gazing in the window. Sure his hair looked okay, not that he was even sure why he was so bothered by it, but all he wanted to do now was run his fingers through it. He closed his eyes tight.

Shiro had just gotten in his head was all. He must have thought Keith was watching this guy ‘cause of an attraction, which wasn’t really not the case but still, and so Shiro had brought up dating. Because Keith had still been looking at the guy it made some odd correlation in his head that this guy, who he had never met, might be interesting enough to date. When in reality, Keith just had a fondness for plants right… Right? Ri-

“Dude, are you gonna walk by all day or come in for once?”

Keith jumped. He was staring at the boy, Lance, who was poking his head out the door. His hair was short, messy, and a dark warm brown that complemented his golden brown skin. His bangs were slick with sweat. His eyes, though narrow and a little beedie, were shockingly blue. Lance’s eyebrows were quirked up in a confused expression, but he held a shockingly bright smirk on his face.

Keith didn’t say anything, he felt his hand shaking as it wanted so badly to mess with his hair or
maybe hide his face.

Lance rolled his eyes and went back inside, and like a starving puppy, Keith followed. By the time he had entered Lance was back behind his work counter. Keith slowly made his way towards him. Even from this distance, he could make out the small smudges of dirt on his blue button-down shirt that was rolled up to his elbows, revealing long strong forearms.

"S-sorry I just… I've seen some of your work in town, so I was admiring your um.. set up." It wasn’t long before curiosity ruled over nerves, the place was warm and smelled of soil and water. The walls and shelves were painted with a fading pastel blue that allowed each speck of green to pop right out. There was a small wood counter in front of a glass cooler displaying different shades of roses, and then a small three-step riser that had buckets and buckets of large green leaves, other smaller stems of leaves, and bunches of what Keith remembered as ‘baby's breath’.

"Thanks, man."

Keith hadn’t exactly complimented it, the sight was just overwhelming. Keith nearly rammed his head against a hanging plant on his way to the counter, but he let it slide.

"So, you live around here? I feel like I've seen you before."

"Uh... Just moved in 'bout a week ago." Keith felt awkward standing in such a cluttered environment while Lance worked, too afraid to misstep or get in his way. But Lance never stepped out from behind the counter, spinning almost on the spot and building up an arrangement of what looked like red roses and blue hydrangea. Lance, much like Hulk, worked so smoothly it was hard to keep track, and Keith found himself confused and a little scared as Lance took out a hammer and beat at the ends of the hydrangea.

"... Wait a second." Lance paused, the arrangement nearly done and only lacking the red ribbon he had in his hand as well as his signature blue rose sticker. "I know what this is!" Lance's eyes were wide, focused on Keith.

"Huh?” Keith felt confused by the sudden outburst. What was what? And why was Lance looking at him like he was trying to zap Keith with his mind?

"YOU! You’re from a rival shop, aren't you?! Who sent you SPY? Was it Bunches?! They would… or was it Linda’s Lily’s? !” Lance shouted, pushing the arrangement aside to get a better look at Keith.

"I bet you’re from..” Lance jabbed a finger in the air at Keith, punctuating each syllable. “ Dozen Does It!”

"Wh- what are you talking about?!” He blanched. The guy was nuts!

“OH hohoHO. Playing stupid are we mullet?! Well just look here. I’m not afraid of competition, so you can walk your pretty little ass out and go tell whoever you work for to politely SHOVE IT!”

Keith was beyond angry now. His nerves had dissolved faster than tissue in hot water. The hell was this guy’s deal? What evidence did this guy have against Keith? He started caring less and less and was more focused on defending himself. This guy could go fuck right off for all he cared. He did turn around and leave, but not before waving his royal middle finger high above his head. He could hear Lance yelling insults behind him as Lance followed him out, an odd, light clank paired with each step.

He marched across the street feeling as though steam was pouring out his ears. He turned around to
see Lance had made his way outside his shop and was yelling at him from across the street.

What Lance was saying was bullshit, but what caught Keith’s eye was Lance’s left leg. From this distance, he could tell it was artificial.
Chapter Summary

Lance and Keith meet again.

This is where I start using up any facts I learned while working in a flower shop at age 13.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 2 Hydrangea stems.

To set the mood of Keith’s frustration, the night brought an unusually strong downpour. Keith, though he usually loved rain, found himself lying on his couch, glaring at his ceiling. He didn’t bother turning on the lights and just allowed the flashes of lightning to burn images of his surroundings into his mind. It was disheartening, maybe even a little anticlimactic, all the events today. He had gone out of his way to visit and talk with the owners of half the shops across from him, only to have the one he was most curious about accusing him of being a spy. Really, what did the guy think? It was something so outlandish, and it came from out of nowhere that Keith couldn’t help but fight back. He had, in that moment, really wished they were rivals so he could beat the crap out of Lance.

The guy looked strong enough to last in a fight anyway. Keith reflected on how easy he had moved. Lance’s arms, though lanky, looked toned and strong and were attached to broad shoulders.

Keith let out a curse under his breath. He would not do this, he would not subject himself to being tormented by some asshole’s good looks. It was all physical, and not like Keith couldn’t best him in that department anyway.

This fact still couldn’t explain his lack of hunger or a subtle rage boiling in his chest.

His phone buzzed. It was Shiro. They had run into each other in the hall on his way up and Keith had kind of blew up at him. He hadn’t really meant to, he just hadn’t cooled off completely yet.

So, like the concerned man Shiro was, he was texting Keith about once an hour.

“ What happened?”

“ You okay?”

“ I’m gonna order dinner, do you want in?”

“ Hey, buddy.”

“ Okay do I need to come up there to talk to you?”

Crap. He started typing out a message to Shiro when a knock sounded at his door. Double crap. As much as he loved Shiro like family he wasn’t really in the mood to complain to him about some guy
he had just met. There was a time and a place for drama gossip, and while Keith tried to avoid it all together, he was sure this was too soon. He wanted to brood more.

He left his phone on the couch and grumbled as he stood, wondering why Shiro wouldn’t bother using the spare key if he had planned to bother Keith anyway. Maybe he was giving him the option to not open the door. It was tempting but too late to consider as he had already slugged over to the door. He raised the lights as he approached, leaving them dim and pulled the door open, ready with a polite rejection.

“Shiro, look, I just d-”

He tried his best to hide the surprise he felt as he looked at a sopping wet Lance who was holding the arrangement he had been working on hours before. Lance’s eyes had gone wide as the door had swung open and he threw on a sheepish smile as he held up the vase which was just about ready to overflow onto the hall carpet.

Keith felt his body go rigid, trying to process the face he had last seen so furious now looking like he popped out of some romcom, cheesy and sad. When Keith said nothing, Lance seemed to grow uncomfortable, tapping his fingers against the vase.

“Hi… Um… Keith? Right?”

“Y-yeah. How did you-” but he was cut off as Lance began to vomit an explanation.

“Okay, so the thing is, I’ve had a lot of competitors since I took over the shop, ya know cause everyone’s jealous of my skills, which is why I don’t hire help anymore because I couldn’t trust any of my staff…” He looked strained and released one hand from the vase to start sheepishly rubbing the back of his neck. The action sent his short hair at every angle making him look ruffled and windswept.

“So I’ve gotten a little paranoid these days, and I happened to swing by Hulks place and he said you swung by earlier. So I went around asking and got some ‘info’ on you from my friends and concluded you are not a spy. So… Here.” He pushed the flowers forward and some water sloshed out and landed on Keith’s shirt.

“Oh.. whoops, sorry. I guess I put too much water in.”


Lance leaned past Keith looking into the dim apartment towards the window which was still showing a raging thunderstorm.

“Oh...wow. Umm...” Lance looked down at himself. “Double whoops. I know it kinda ruins the whole apology thing but could you lend me a towel to dry off with. Oh,” he held up the flowers, “And let me fix them too, guess we all got tossed around in the rain.”

“Can’t ruin the apology if you forget to apologize,” Keith said, rather surprised with himself about how cold it sounded.

“Wha... OH! Whoops again. Dang. Sorry for thinking you were a spy and kicking you out of my shop.” Lance smiled, and Keith felt the cold in his voice melt a little.

“S’fine. Come in.”

Keith began pulling off his wet shirt, hearing Lance practically drop the vase in the sink. Lance
pulled off his own button-down shirt, revealing a clingy white tank top under that Lance left on. Keith busied himself with finding a new shirt and a towel.

Rejoining Lance, fully clothed again, he looked over and saw Lance had laid out paper towels along the counter and was shaking out each flower before laying them out. It seemed odd to Keith, flowers need water anyway. But then again, he wasn’t a professional. He set the bath towel on the counter beside Lance’s workstation and settled in behind him making coffee, only needing to enter Lance’s personal space a few times. Then he sat back and watched Lance work with new fascination.

“ You got any scissors? Or a knife you wouldn’t mind me using?”

Keith handed Lance the closest knife. Lance took it and began his work on the cutting board with Keith hovering behind him. Lance took a slice off the stem from each flower, spending an extra moment with the hydrangea stems to roll it under the flat side of the knife. He then filled the vase with fresh water and started arranging the flowers back into it.

“ Why do you do that?”

“ Do what?”

“ Cut the stems? Or crush them?”

“ Ah…okay so, I finished this a few hours ago and the roses are usually kinda picky, don’t worry I don’t expect you to keep up with them.”

He looked up at and saw Keith's annoyed face, mistaking the expression as Keith being annoyed that Lance thought he wasn’t competent. The gardener hurried to explain himself, though Keith wasn’t bothered by keeping up with them, more like how Lance seemed to over explain things.

“ My intention is to make them last as long as possible without you messing with them. So fresh cut the stem so they can drink easy and Hydrangea… well their stem is tough, so you gotta break it open or they can’t drink as well,” Lance explained, his hands flying around and arranging the flowers before he stepped back.

“ If you want flowers to last you gotta change their water, but you also gotta cut the end of the stem. The roses in the shop like warm water with a bit of bleach keeps it clean for them. And then there is the pruning.”

Lightly, Lance plucked rose petals that had come loose or looked withered.

“ Got a glass you don’t plan on using for a few days?”

“ Uhh…” Keith looked around, he pulled out a mug that said ‘Don’t mug me’ on it. He had been a Christmas gift from Shiro. He placed it by Lance who chuckled and then dropped the rose petals in.

“ Now you can put these in the bedroom and it will smell like roses.” Lance waggled his eyebrows in Keith’s direction and Keith got the feeling this guy would be that dude who put rose petals everywhere to seduce a girl. He remained unamused and didn’t bother correcting Lance and telling him that he didn’t have a bedroom.

Keith picked up the mug full of roses and took a sniff, finding it did smell delightful. Sweet yet soft and calming, it wasn’t a completely bad idea. It only took a few more minutes for Lance to finish and seconds for him to transform his new workspace back into Keith’s kitchen.

“ There, now that’s an apology gift. Though I had originally meant it as a welcome, so when these
get gross, bring back the vase and I’ll set you up again.” Lance stepped over and grabbed the towel and began drying off his hair and arms. Keith's eyes watched lazily, his eyes wandering over the dark skin, across his stomach, and down to his shorts and the artificial limb. It almost looked like a paddle, and he could see the material was flexible enough to keep up with his bouncy attitude, connected somewhere above the knee and hidden by shorts, but Keith was more interested in the design; how Lance seemed to lack a foot leaving his weight to rest on the curve of this odd limb.

“How…” Keith found himself whispering out loud/ Lance turned around and Keith suddenly felt a hot wash of embarrassment graze his cheeks. He had simply been wondering about the design, but he was obviously also curious as to why Lance had a missing limb in the first place. Keith knew though that this wasn’t exactly the best subject of conversation. He also knew that it was probably the number one question Lance got on a day-to-day basis.

“I… Umm… I just mean, the design. It’s... umm… not why you… ugh,” Keith ducked his head down in embarrassment.

“Haha, it’s fine dude,” Lance chuckled, slapping a hand on Keith’s shoulder in an attempt to lighten the mood. “Everyone wants to know about the leg. How else do you think I get laid when I own a flower shop?”

“With.. flowers? Don’t girls like that?”

“Girls like tough guys who swallow their pride and get them flowers, not guys who know color pallets for seasons and make ‘tasteful arrangements’.”

Keith wasn’t sure that was true, but he decided not to argue. He’d much rather hear about the leg, no matter how insensitive it felt. He nodded towards the coffee, silently offering, and Lance nodded putting his arm back down. Soon the two each had a cup of coffee and were sipping it in silence. Keith and Lance watched the rain as it began to pour more and more heavy, splattering against the windows. The room was still dimly lit, creating an oddly intimate moment before Lance finally spoke.

“Iraq.”

“Huh?”

“I lost it in Iraq.”

Keith was a loss for words. It wasn’t shocking, he supposed. But at the same time, Lance seemed so young. He couldn’t have been too far off from Keith’s own age. But as Lance spoke those words, those few simple words, the light he had in his eyes dimmed, his focus growing distance. They were the eyes of an old man, someone who had seen enough for a lifetime yet here they were.

Lance took a long breath and pulled his tank top aside, revealing a tattoo over his left pec. It was a star with large simple square wings and above it a blue rose, the same from the stickers.

“United States Air Force.” Lance pointed at the symbol beneath the rose. “Two years and an honorable discharge. My plane crashed and just about all of me made it out.”

Keith wasn’t sure what to say. He just stared into his drink, listening to the rain, trying to picture it himself.

“That’s.. rough.”

“Rough is an understatement. But thanks for not saying ‘I’m sorry.’ People do it all the time. What’s
really ‘rough’ though is that Air Force wasn’t even my end goal. I wanted to fly, like a test pilot or something.”

“Wait, like at the Scientific National Institute of Flight?”

“Gesundheit.”

Keith gave Lance a confused look as Lance started giggling.

“You know… S.N.I.F.? Sniff? It’s pretty funny.” Keith didn’t laugh, he wasn’t even sure if he should, just to humor Lance. Lance seemed to shrug it off as he continued.

“But yeah… them. They were like… my dream job, ya know. But to work there you need a degree and a degree takes money and… well, my grades weren’t great so, hello US Air Force! Wanna pay my way?”

Lance took a sip of his coffee.

“Loss of dream aside, I mostly just miss flying.”

“I- I know what you’re feeling.”

Keith really could, the few times in his life when he couldn’t fly because he wasn’t near his biplane were horrible. Even these weeks he had felt unsettled and irritated. But to be told you could never fly again?

“I’ve never seen a leg like that before.” Keith found himself saying, it was a better topic shift in Keith's opinion.

He could see it curve so far back it looked like a question mark, and it ended in a flat paddle. Keith was curious as to what it was made from because it didn’t seem to break under Lance's weight. On top of that, he could see little grips at the bottom each time Lance lifted his foot. His bounciness was apparently not only part of his personality but a way to balance himself.

“Ah, yeah. I like to use this one while I’m working. It cost the AF a pretty penny, but my other two are more casual and I don’t like getting them dirty in the shop. Also, I move better in this one. The others are kinda weighty, especially with a shoe. This baby is the same design used by athletes, and I can run pretty fast in it so that’s something.”

Keith took another sip of coffee and he was surprised at how much colder it tasted, a testament to how long had they been standing there talking.

“So… less about me and my oscar winning story. What about you man, this place is….” Lance looked around. “Well, you’ve got space.”

“I work for S.N.I.F.”

“Need a tissue?” Keith glared again. “Sorry bro, I got a million of those.”

“I’m a test pilot.”

Lance seemed to freeze as though someone jabbed him in the back. Keith was glad Lance hadn’t taken another sip of coffee for it looked like Lance might have spat it out. Instead, Lance set his cup down and moved closer to Keith, placing a hand on his arm.

“You’re fucked.”
“What?” Who the fuck did this guy think he was anyway? Keith felt heat prickle at the back of his neck as he shrugged out of Lances hold.

“For real dude? I’m just joking. You looked so stiff when I talked about flying, now I see why. I’m not bitter. For real. 900% over that shit. But real talk? From someone who actually almost died in a plane crash. Be careful.”

Two swift pats on the shoulder and Lance backed off, grabbing his shirt as he made his way back to the door. Just like that their conversation was over, Keith was having a hard time worrying that maybe he struck a nerve, that he should have lied. But he was more frustrated with Lance. It wouldn’t be the same. Flying in an active war zone was not the same as flying simulators or even controlled test flights. But Keith didn’t voice that distinction. It seemed Lance, for someone who he had just met, really was worried about him. Even if he was a jerk about it.

“I’m serious ‘bout the flowers,” Lance said turning back to Keith. “Want anymore just let me know. And uh... welcome to the family.”

Keith followed with the intent of locking the door behind him, but he noticed Lance pause as he opened the door. Seeming to be looking at something. Keith hurried over as Lance looked him over, face beginning to swell with a dark red color and then spat out another hurried goodbye before leaving.

Keith looked out and saw Shiro, his eyes darted away as he motioned to let him in. Shiro entered, take out in one hand, his calculating eyes finding the arrangement still left on the counter in the kitchen.

“New friend?” Shiro said, raising an eyebrow and smiling.

“Neighbour across the street, met a bunch of ‘em today.”

“Yeah, looks like you got your bangs trimmed from Coran. So he’s not a special friend.” Shiro moved over to the counter and began setting plates without asking.

“No,” Keith said pointfully ignoring the ‘look’ Shiro was giving him.

“Ya know, Lance is a pretty good guy.”

“You know him?” Keith picked up the vase of flowers and headed over to his table by the window, trying to place them where Lance might see.

“He wasn’t a bad pilot, I know that much. Guys at work considered letting him through without a degree. You could probably outfly him but the guy was smart.”

“Is.”

“Huh?”

“He.. still is smart.”

Keith could just hear Shiro smiling at him as he twisted the vase around, trying to show the best angle, while also watching lights flick on across the street. Keith looked down and saw his cactus on the balcony.

“Ah, shit!”
He ran out, was it dead? Well, it hadn’t drowned yet. Keith hurried back over to the kitchen and tipped the pot into the sink, trying to pour out as much water as he could.

“That’s one of yours from Nevada?” Shiro asked through a mouthful of fried rice.

“It’s not adjusting too well, is it?” Keith said, looking at his cactus. He went over to the stove, turning on one of the burners just to warm up the area a bit, and placed the cactus near enough to it in the hoped that it might help the plant dry out. Shiro handed him a plate of fried rice and Keith took it, feeling somehow defeated.

“It’s just a little shellshocked. It’ll be okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Took a bit more time with this but it's hard starting and coming back to something, which is what has been happening with my life being thrown into chaos. But once again I'm open to crits cause this helps me better my normal writing. I think I tend to get lazy with fan fiction because there is an existing structure and I don't want to be lazy about it.

Also a lot of these early chapters are pretty short but they will be building in length over time.
Anthurium Heart

Chapter Summary

Things get a little dirty.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Keith reset his shoulders, his eyes scanning the unfamiliar snowy terrain before him. He checked his computers, 200 feet above the surface. There were large arches of frozen tundra popping up fast from corner to corner, it was hard to see much farther than 20 feet ahead past the nose of his ship. His hands easily adjusted each maneuver, but it was getting tiresome, he needed to focus on the land.

He pulled up, sending his ship skyward side several snow structure. He couldn't tell how dense they were and was not up to testing it, when he reached his peak he tried his best to make a vertical landing, leveling the ship and slowly lowering it with the base thruster. It worked, for a while, until he tried to pull the wings into a fold to keep them from crashing into one of the structures. They wouldn't go in. Typical.

The instant the right wing made contact he felt the ship violently shake, warning lights started lighting up like early Christmas as he looked over to see one of his wings was completely missing now. The ship, unbalanced, sank began to fall towards the left side. He tried to cut off one of the four base boosters on his right side, It wasn’t perfect but it would allow him to even out enough to land the last 90 feet. But, he couldn't. Dammit.

Trying to steer the ship at this point was useless and Keith opted for removing his hands from the controls to instead brace for impact. He closed his eyes as the ship shook violently one last time.

Simulation Failed.

The lights turned on and Keith looked back to see the door open, and Shiro appeared. Keith unstrapped and removed a heavy packet from the chair next to him.

“You did good, 'till the end,” Shiro said as Keith exited, Keith just grabbed a pin from Shiro’s shirt and began scribbling in a few notes on the last page.

“I could have survived if not for my lack of control over what the ship does.” He finished the note, handing the packet to Shiro. “There is too much safety bullshit. If I need to close the wings BEFORE landing, I should be able to.”

“I understand Keith, trust me. You’re talking to the guy who had to deal with all those issues of flight drones. I’ll hand your uh…” Shiro flipped through the packet. “Notes... Off to the team. If you want you can head home, I think this will be enough.”

“You sure? Cause I can come in tomorrow and run the simulation again if they-”

“If I give you one more day to find problems with it, there won’t be a ship left. Go home and get some sleep, you’ve been at this for what... Six days now?”
“I’ve been getting sleep.”

“Yeah that reminds me, you have that whole bedroom in the back at your place, you should think about getting a b-”

“Thanks for passing off the notes Shiro, let me know when you need me again.”

By the time Keith had returned home it was just after one. He felt a bit frustrated he couldn’t have just finished the full day of work, but then remembered he was at least getting paid for sitting on his ass; even if he did hate it.

His cactus was doing much better, as was the arrangement he had gotten from Lions Rose. He had watched Lance carefully enough to keep them alive, yet their ‘look’ was something to be desired. He had to hand it to Lance, it was a lot more than just shoving flowers in a vase.

Keith looked out on to the balcony, perched on the edge was his cactus. It felt odd, how badly he wanted Lance to notice it. He had stopped in a few times, but mostly Lance had been too busy to talk; which had been fine considering Keith had also been working.

He was two weeks into his new job in fact, and already sent home. Keith had spent most of the first day getting a feel for the simulator, something that was supposed to take weeks, but sure enough he was flying perfect by the end of the day. He would spend the day flying and then take his notes home and type them up, add suggestions, leave extra comments and any praises. This went on for two weeks, and now he was left with nothing to do again.

His large shelf, which he had bought to fill a large space in the right side of the apartment, was filled with only the books he and most recently gotten and a few old notebooks.

He let out a dreary sigh, falling into his messy bedding on the couch. He tried to sleep, but he wasn’t tired. He tried to plan out tonight’s dinner but he couldn’t think, he was almost too hungry. With that in mind he sat back up; it was time to pay a visit to Hunk.

Crossing the street at a slight jog, despite the lack of cars, he found himself stopping and peering into the Lion’s Rose. Lance, surprisingly, wasn’t working. Well, he was, but not like usual. His normal pace had him running around the shop making several arrangements at a time. Even in his downtime he seemed to be playing and experimenting with scraps. But now Keith watched him as his fingers lightly pinched around a bucket of roses, reminding Keith of the mug in his apartment filled with dry rose petals.

Without thinking, he found himself entering the warmth of the shop, listing to the distant ting of a bell. It was hot outside, a dry heat Keith was more than used too, but inside the shop was humid. It was a warmth that snuck around him and seeped into his skin. Add the scent of the surrounding flowers and soil from the potted plants and he could feel his muscles relax and an odd sense of dizziness fill him. Somehow the coupling feeling was welcome to him, rather than making him feel gross.

Lance had looked up at the bell and flashed Keith a smile before returning to his work, letting Keith explore the shop a bit before he tried to casually make his way to the work table.

“How’s my favorite spy doing?” Lance smiled brightly, looking up from his work only for a moment as he continued to check each rose.
“Fine. You seem slower than usual.”

“In a way, how would you know my usual.”

Keith felt a new heat rise up his neck, and tried to pretend like he was still interested in looking around the shop.

“I pass by every now and again.”

“I know, just messing with you.” He giggled. It was, cute? Should it be cute for a grown man to giggle? Keith noticed that Lance had been picking the rose petals and putting them in an old wicker basket. Before Keith could ask if he sold rose petals or something along those lines, he watched Lance pick up the basket and nod his head to the front, inviting Keith to follow. They stepped outside and Keith watched as Lance began to decorate the sidewalk with rose petals. He must have been pruning for some time, because along with the fresh deep red petals were a mix of white, yellow, red tipped, orange, and pink.

“This,” Lance started, “Is one of my more ingenious ways of bringing in new customers.”

“It looks nice.”

“I know, right? Here, sprinkle a bit.” Lance handed Keith the basket before leaning up against the side of the building. Keith reluctantly started sprinkling.

“So, how are your flowers.”

“Okay, I’ve been following your instructions.”

“Seriously?” Keith turned to see a surprised look on Lance’s face, he looked amused too, maybe even a little happy.

“Uhh.. yeah.”

“Don’t take it the wrong way, I mean I’m glad. Almost nobody does it. So they still look okay?”

“More or less. I’m not so good at arranging them.”

“Yeah, well, it’s hard to compete with the best.” Lance’s smirk sent an odd shiver down Keith’s spine, one that he couldn’t decide if he like it or not.

The two headed back in, and Lance busied himself with putting the roses back into the glass cases behind the work table and Keith found himself casually hopping up onto the counter. It was an old habit that Shiro always scolded him for, but when Lance peeked around he said nothing but let out a soft chuckle; ducking down to the bottom of the case to inspect the flowers there.

“So…” Keith began, “You.. uhh hungry?”

With a swift movement, Lance shot up and banged his head on the cabinet. Keith looked away, trying to pretend casually that he didn’t see it to allow Lance some pride, but it was hard to look away as he awkwardly stood, bouncing up on his artificial leg, and gripping the table for support.

“Sorry, didn’t catch that.” He grumbled. “What were you asking?”

“If you were hungry. I was about to run over to Yellow Roll and well… you guys have all been nice to me..” He looked over at Lance who seemed to be gazing at him, not like Allura or Pidge, but in a way that felt like he didn’t believe Keith was there. “Well for the most part.”
That snapped Lance out of it. He let out a hearty laugh.

“Haha, don’t worry about it. I’ve already got an order with Hunk I was gonna run and pick up in a minute, so I’m.” His eyes drifted to something beyond Keith's shoulder past the door and he seemed to stiffen as if frozen on the spot.

“Yes. Please. Go and I’ll pay you back. Go now. I’ll even cover your end. Just... “

The bell jingled at the door and Keith looked around to see a tall woman with dark long hair, she looked. Well she looked as if someone had pissed in her coffee. Somehow the face didn’t suit the rest of her though, she had a build like a model that looked almost photo-shopped to perfection, and was dressed in a black blazer and pencil skirt and blood red blouse. If Keith believed in hell then this woman looked like she ran it. She eyed Keith sitting on the counter, unlike any ‘look’ Keith had felt this one felt like she was eyeing trash. He felt a spark of defiance ignite in him and turned to lance, not moving from the counter.

“I’ll be back in a bit.”

Lance nodded, yet his eyes stayed ever focused. It was a look of fire, an intense focus of hate that Keith almost wanted to stay, just as a witness to what Lance might do, or maybe lend a hand depending on the woman's intent. But Keith slid from the counter top and slowly made his way past the woman, and out the door.

He hurried along to Yellow Rolls, where inside Hunk seemed to be recovering from a small lunch rush.

“Whoa Keith, buddy. How ya been? Feeling up for something tasty?”

“Fine and Yes, also I’m picking up Lances and taking both to go.” Keith sat down at the bar and started to look over a menu.

“Huh. That’s weird. Not that he isn’t lazy, but he’s not one to miss out socializing with out that ‘business owner facade.”

“Someone came in, some lady.” Keith’s eyes skidded down the menu, grabbing an order card he started filling it out. “She seemed intense.”

“Intense?” Hunk took the card and started on the order. “Wait, was she like, tall? Oh and had long dark hair and looked like someone BM in her cornflakes.”

“I thought she had a big pot of piss coffee, but yeah.”

“Shitake mushrooms!” He saw Hunk looking a bit panic stricken, yet the man seemed to work as though Keith and him and Keith were talking about the weather.

“What’s wrong?”

“She’s bad news. Not my business to say really. The two have some...” Hunk leaned in, despite Keith highly doubted anyone was listening. “History.”

What did Hunk mean? Like an ex-girlfriend? She was pretty enough, though that attitude seemed too sour for what he knew about Lance. In fact, the two seemed like polar opposites.

Though, if Keith was honest, he wasn’t far off. He had made an unusual effort to know his street out of curiosity, but that was about the extent he would test his own friendliness. He had also been told
his ‘resting’ face tended to look as though someone had personally stepped on his toes. His energy and openness tended to oppose Lance’s bouncy nature. But still, he wasn’t a bitch.

“You might wanna hang here dude, till it’s over.”

“How will I know it’s over?”

“Well~”

As if on cue they could hear the echo of a door slamming over the chatter in the restaurant, followed by muffled shouting. Hunk lay the food on the counter and Keith snatched it up.

“I’ll put it on his tab, but serious dude, you might wanna chill here.”

“Thanks!” Keith said as he pushed out the door. Curiosity overwhelming him. The second the door opened, shouted words hit his ears.

“You can’t hold out forever Sanchez. You may know flowers but you don’t know shit about business.”

“Then it’s a damn good thing I don’t fucking sell ‘BUSINESS’. Come back here so I can de-thorn you! God knows you fucking need it.”

She cackled and Keith watched as she climbed into her car, composed until Lance whipped a ball of wet soil at her. She ducked giving him an un-amused look before Lance continued to fire upon her car, one hitting her right in the face before she let out a frustrated scream and drove off.

“Your fancy ass car looks better now that I’ve covered it in something decent smelling, rather than your bullshit! I~”

“Dude. She’s gone.” Lance looked at Keith, suddenly realizing he was there. He had just run past Keith shouting at the woman as she had driven off, holding a large potted plant.

“Well.. at least I came out on top, she’s not looking so cool no~” Lance had tried to shift the pot under his arm but the weight had thrown him too far on his artificial leg, sending him toppling to the ground. The pot he was holding managed to flip, sending a decent amount his way.

Keith was worried for a moment when Lance didn’t move until he spoke.

“Did anyone see that?”

“Probably.”

“Did you?”

“… um… yeah.”

“Fuuck….”

Once Keith managed to get Lance standing again the two headed back to the shop, Keith waited inside while Lance went out and attempted to sweep up some of the mess on the sidewalk. The whole time he could hear Lance grumbling in Spanish, the only word he could catch was “Puta”, whore. By the time Lance had returned, Keith noticed an hour had passed. Lance locked the door, flipping around an ‘away on lunch’ sign before motioning for Keith to follow him to the back.
One you got past the cases and shelves of flowers it looked very industrial, brick and pipes webbed the walls and a small light fixture hung from the ceiling, there was a large industrial sink and a large stock of glass vases and bowls. On the far left side there was a doorway that led to a winding staircase. It was at this point Keith realized he was being led up to Lance’s apartment and an odd excitement bubbled in his chest. He had been excited to see the roof garden up close.

The apartment was much like the shop below, humid and warm, yet so relaxing. Deep earthy blues complemented the hardwood floor and Keith could instantly see the large window that took up entire north side; as well as the garden beyond it.

“I’m gonna go wash up, you can sit and eat, sorry for the trouble.”

“No problem,” Keith said, setting the food on the Kitchen counter and trying. He turned to see Lance lean against the sofa and unhook his leg, grabbing a church that had been leaning against the wall, and then limping his way out of sight.

Keith paused eyeing the hooked paddle foot, still covered in soil, that was resting on the floor next to the couch. He had an urge to pick it up and take it outside to clean it, to be nice, but he held back. He turned his focus toward the kitchen and started looking for plates to eat from.

His mind is buzzing as he sets up for lunch, it was odd how Lance seemed to pull him into these intimate moments, odder still how Keith followed without question. They had only had a few exchanges and yet they seemed to click instantly, like childhood friends. Or rivals.

As Keith turned around he jumped seeing a cat now sitting by the sink.

“Oh yeah, don’t mind Blue. She’s a sweetheart.” Lance entered, a towel draped over his head, he was in a new shirt, and new shorts, with a new leg. This one looked more solid, more like what you would expect from a prosthetic, and it had a beautiful painting of roses up the outside calf and thigh; like a tattoo.

Lance sat, and Blue approached, licking at the drops just barely clinging to Lance’s short brown hair. Keith couldn’t see Lance's face, but the giggle was all too heartwarming, it was as life bitch slapped him into a domestic life that wasn’t his own.

After Lance's hair was mostly dry, now sticking up at all ends much like the night he had visited Keith, he left the towel to drape around his neck and started eating.

“Sorry ‘bout all that.” He began, slurping up soup and biting into big meaty pork buns. Keith stayed standing, starting in on his sushi rolls and noodles respectively. There was also a set of rice balls that Lance had apparently ordered and he set between the two, offering some to Keith.

“What was that anyway?” Keith spoke fast between the moments after he would finish swallowing and the moment before a new bite would enter.

“Ugh…” Lance spat out a bit of food, swallowing harshly. “Maria Curry. Or ‘ese cerdo en una peluca’, if you know her. She’s been after my business sense I got back, so like… five years? She’s been at it since day one. Offering support, offering a ‘trustworthy work staff’, like I couldn’t see through that. She owns the chain of flower shops called ‘Dozen Does it.’ They even got little shops in big grocery stores. Not me or my grandmother's style.”

“Oh.”

“Why?” Lance said quickly, “What did you think was up?”
“I don’t know, from what Hunk said—”

“What did Hunk say!? “

Keith jumped, looking at a somewhat panicked Lance, his outburst had even caused Blue to stop begging for scraps and run for cover.

“Just… that you guys had.. ‘History’?”

“Oh… uh. Yeah. We, umm… dated.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes. Before I went over seas. I found out a bit too late how she was a grade A bitch and was really just after my shit. You know, the shop and everything. She played me like a puppet but she fucked up and now I that I know her game she can’t get in.” Lance seemed bitter, but at the same time a tad proud.

“That sucks dude.”

“Yes, my life, what can I say. I should sell it off and try to win an Oscar.” Keith laughed.

“I’d watch that.”

“Yeah?”

Keith nodded, too focused again on eating. Hunk was, of course, amazing, it was hard to carry on a conversation when the two both seemed equally hungry. Not long past, however, before Lance glanced at his watch and started cleaning up with Keith’s assistance. Lance sat on the arm of the couch and switched his legs. Keith watched with interest as it twisted and clicked off and the other dirty one went on just as easy.

“Okay. Time to get back to it.” He picked up Blue who had been pawing at his feet. “Sorry sweetheart, daddy’s gonna be back in a little while.” One big sloppy kiss to the cat’s neck and he started to head towards the door, with Keith trailing behind. Keith gave one last longing look out to the Garden he had yet to see before he followed Lance out.

When the too were back in the shop, Lance walked Keith to the door to unlock it and bid Keith off. Keith wasn’t sure what he was going to do now but left with a small smile anyway, waving goodbye to Lance as he crossed the street to his building. As he reached the other side he heard Lance call out to him.

“Hey, Keith! Game night at my place tomorrow if you wanna get your butt whooped.”

There was a buzz and a fire in his chest as he shouted, longer than he had in a long time.

“You’re on!”

Chapter End Notes

I made some changes to the first chapter! I had left out the introduction to the rest of the gang.
The smell of Alstroemeria

Chapter Summary

With new friends, games and a bit of alcohol mix; what could go wrong?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Keith had been so excited about game night that he had told Shiro about it while they had dinner in Keith’s apartment. He pushed past Shiro’s smug looks and smirks. To combat Shiro’s annoying attitude he decided to drag him along as well, calling Hunk’s restaurant to talk with him and make sure it was okay to bring a guest.

He wasn’t sure why he was so excited, but Saturday morning he found himself pacing across the floor of his apartment while he munched on toast. Hunk said they were all meeting at 8 after most of the shops were closed, with Hunk leaving Yellow Roll to his workers.

Keith finally decided to clear his head with a good workout. Though he missed training out in the desert, it was immensely nicer to have a gym with AC and tons of stuff for him to do. He held his own fairly well with kickboxing but really only liked sparring with people he knew so he didn’t have to hold back, so he let his mind wander as he ran on the treadmill.

It was almost meditative, running. He could focus on his breath, his legs, and how his body moved. Running in the desert in the early mornings had been a favorite of his. The gym lacked the same view but at least it was easy to cool off.

He enjoyed the feeling as the first large drop of sweat would fall from his brow, trickling down to his chin. It was a sign of triumph, that he was working hard. Before he knew it, two hours had passed and the gym had started to get oddly crowded. Keith took that as his cue to leave. The gym, being so close, had him walking along his street in no time. He peered into Coran’s shop to see him with a few clients. He couldn’t see Allura in her shop but saw one of her mousey workers resembling a mannequin.

And then there was Lance. He was, well, Keith couldn’t really tell but at least he wasn’t busy. There seemed to be a few people floating around the shop but they had that distinct vibe of ‘just looking’. Keith opened the door, enjoying the humid feeling once again, the smell of flowers somehow stronger than normal.

Keith looked over at Lance’s work table, which was a mess. It was covered in paper, long strips of plastic, and.. wires? Lance was hunched over a bucket of super bright-looking flowers, hyper-focused.

"Hey."

“Oh hey!” Lance jumped. “You’re not here for game night, are you? It’s not till later.”

“Yeah, despite you not telling me when it was, I found out from Hunk. I’m just swinging by from my workout.”
“Oh yeah? Keeping in shape tough guy?”

Keith shrugged and then cleared off one end of the table, silently asking if he could toss the paper, and then took a seat on it.

“What do you do? Like, do you even lift?” Lance smirked, seeming to be restraining himself from laughing at his own joke.

“Yes, muscle work and cardio, though I prefer kickboxing.”

“Oh yeah? Kickboxing is fun. If you ever need a spare let me know. Us Army boys know how to fight unlike you college kids.”

“Army? I thought you were in Air Force?”

“Don’t you use your book smarts on me!” Lance said, waving a wire around like a weapon. Lance held one end of the stiff wire in his hand and moved in close, the other side he pulled back with his finger and then he let it fly, right against Keith’s arm.

“OW! What the heck did you do that for?” Keith rubbed the welt, trying not to laugh along with Lance.

“You insulted my honor, so I had to defend myself.”

“Right…” Keith smirked, watching as Lance took his ‘weapon’ and dug it right into the base of the blossom of a flower, under its petals.

“What are you doing?”

“Wiring the Gerbera. They have a heavy head and a weak stem, so you stick this wire in and then…” Lance's fingers began to dance, pulling the wire in like a tape measure as his finger traveled down the stem, leaving a spiral of wire.

“So… how long do they stay like that?”

“I usually leave it in until I’m ready to use it. Sometimes with big arrangements, they stay in for good. It’s really just so that they don’t get droopy.” He held up an orange gerbera, the color so bright and vibrant that it captivated Keith’s attention completely. Well, almost completely. As he took the flower Lance offered him he caught a flash of his bright happy grin, which sent a rush of heat through the center of his being. Keith decided then to try to focus completely on the flower, the odd fuzzy texture of the stem, the wire Lance had just attached so skillfully, and its color. The orange faded and mixed with light streaks of yellow like it had been stained, and the bright yellow pollen seemed to amplify the dark color in the center.

Such an odd needy thing, a flower that needed assistance.

His eyes fluttered over to Lance as he worked, a smile on his face and the sound of a soft melody humming in Lance's throat. Keith looked back at the flower and smiled. He decided he liked it.

“So, should we bring anything for game night?” Keith asked as he gazed at the flower Lance had given him while Lance began to work on the roses. Unlike in Keith’s kitchen, Lance used special scissors to cut the stems rather than a knife, explaining knives were too hard to keep up with and normal scissors crushed the stems.
“ ‘We’?” Keith heard a snap of the scissors and the soft thumping of stem nubs hitting the table.

“ Oh, I asked Hunk if I could bring someone. He said it was okay.”

Another quick and harsh snap sounded.

“ Shit!”

“What…?” Keith turned around to see Lance had cut the roses in half instead of trimming the end of them.

“ Oh, Geese. Are they okay?”

“ Yeah!” Lance said shortly. “ They’re fine… Just…” He let out a frustrated grunt. “ Short.”

“ … Oh.”

Lance swept the stems off the table and pushed the short roses off to the side, finishing the rest quickly.

“ SO, you’re bringing someone?” Lance asked, moving to the back to fill a bucket for the roses.

“ Umm… Yeah. Is that okay?”

“ S’fine!” Lance shouted over the running water. His voice a bit higher.

“ So long as they’re not a serial killer or something,” Lance returned, plopping the bucket of warm water on the floor and placing the roses in.

“ He’s not.”

Lance seemed a little stiff, but Keith felt he could understand. He had been so excited he hadn’t realized Lance probably had trust issues. After all, he had thought Keith was a spy the first time they met. Still, Keith was so sure Lance would have been okay, he just seemed so open and friendly. Maybe Lance was just miffed about the roses.

“ So who is he?” Lance picked up one of the short roses and began running his thumb along it, finding each thorn and applying a small bit of pressure before it snapped off.

“ Friend I work with. I think Pidge knows him too, his names Shiro.”

A thorn snapped off and hit Lance square in the forehead.

“ You mean THE Shiro!?” Lance looked up at him, eyes wide. Keith couldn’t tell if they were excited or scared, unknown to him that they were both the exact cocktail of emotions mixing in Lance at the moment. Keith just gave him an owlish, confused look before nodding slightly.

Lance let out a long tired sigh.

“ How is that even fair?” Lance slumped over the table, continuing to de-thorn each rose by hand. Keith was tempted to ask what Lance had meant, but decided against it. He knew Shiro was famous to anyone who was obsessed with aviation or space travel, knowing it was no small feat to get a job as a test pilot at S.N.I.F. But he didn’t ask because he didn’t want that petty jealousy between them. Though Keith lacked friends he considered Lance to be a close friend in the making. So how could he protect that?
Keith studied Lance’s slumped over form. He wasn’t the best at cheering up but he had to do something. He picked up one of the de-thorned roses and gently laid it on Lance’s slightly large ear, the deep red softly complementing his dark skin. Lance had jumped the moment the flower made contact and now was just gazing at Keith.

Lance sat up slightly, reaching his hand across the table. Keith felt a shiver run down his spine when Lance's hand found his own. With ease, Lance slipped the gerbera from Keith's grip, removing the wire and breaking the stem in half before copying Keith’s gesture, all while keeping eye contact. He felt Lance’s hand hover up around his cheek before sliding down and closing into a fist at the table that he began to lean on, pulling himself ever more close.

It was the smile that did it. Sudden, as if Lance had been holding it back. It was so sweet, Keith felt his heart ache at the sight of it.

“ Well-” Lance began, his eyes drifting to an all too appealing half-lidded expression, but they shot back open as the bell chimed.

Keith turned around to see an older woman with dark skin and hair wrapped in a violently colorful scarf and wearing a nice, modest dress.

“ Mrs. Johansson! Hi!” Lance shouted, his voice shooting up another octave. Keith hopped off the table.

“ Lance, my boy! I hope you’re keeping this place in good shape. Slack off too much and I’ll call up your grandmother.”

“ Not slacking off Mrs. Johansson, just chatting with a friend.”

The woman smiled at Keith and he smiled back, turning to Lance as he jerked his head towards the door. A quick nod from Lance and Keith was out, back across the street and back in the lobby calling for the elevator, his heart going eight miles a minute.

The doors opened and he was met by Shiro.

“ Woah Keith, I was just about to head out and get stuff for tonight. Did you find out what we should bring?”

“ Uh.. no. Beer will be fine. Let’s go.”

“ Uhh… you sure you wanna go out like that buddy?” Shiro’s expression twisted into a small amused smirk.

“ Like what?” Shiro just pointed up, to his own hairline. Keith followed and his hand met with something soft and delicate. It was the gerbera Lance had given him. Keith had been so focused on Lance that he hadn’t even noticed that Lance had put it there, mirroring what Keith had done.

Keith’s face flooded with heat as he ripped it off, marching past Shiro into the elevator and practically punching the button. He could still hear Shiro laughing two floors up.

When they left together five minutes later, Keith caught Lance waving to Mrs. Johansson. Keith gave a small wave, catching Lance’s attention, who seemed to brighten and wave before freezing and darting back inside. Keith looked around to see Shiro’s hand raised to wave but with a confused look.

“ That’s odd, he was so friendly before.”
“Oh right, you know him don’t you?”

“Well, I stop in the shop every now and then. It’s where I got my basil and tomato plants. Had them specially ordered too.”

Shiro shrugged and continued on, leaving Keith confused and gazed across to the Lion’s Rose. He had been so sure not too long ago that Lance was jealous of his friendship with Shiro. But Lance obviously knew him, so what had bothered Lance?

Keith wished he knew Lance well enough to understand what was causing him issues, but his lack of knowledge led him to just assume it was the short roses that had gotten him riled up. Keith had spent most of the afternoon in his apartment, the gerbera he had gotten from Lance now sat in a glass on his kitchen counter, and he started looking up ways to preserve flowers.

Despite his care, the first arrangement was starting to look a little grim. He had found that roses dried well if you hanged them upside down. So that had been his project that afternoon, binding them with athletic tape and stringing them up by his pots with fishing wire.

The gerbera, he thought, would probably look best flattened. But he held off on it, not wanting to cut into the flower quite yet. The now washed out vase gave Keith an excuse to visit again despite him being fairly sure they were on the fast track to some form of friendship.

Keith had tried some attempt to look nice, but besides his button down shirts for work he only owned a collection of graphic tees, plain black v-neck t-shirts, and a crap ton of skinny jeans. Dejected a little, he put on his normal outfit but perked up a bit at the idea of adding his favorite red leather jacket. It was a good idea too because now he wasn’t dressed entirely the same as Shiro. It was frustrating sometimes that the two of them had a similar preferred ‘look’.

When the time finally came they met up with Hunk, still dressed in his work apron, outside Lance’s shop. He showed Keith and Shiro the back entrance that led straight up to Lance’s apartment.

“Look what I managed to drag in! New family!” Hunk said upon entering. Pidge was sitting on the couch with Allura, who looked overdressed compared to Pidge but odd without her assistances floating around her. They both stop talking as Hunk, Keith and Shiro entered. Coran and Lance seemed to be busy in the kitchen.

Keith took in what he could see of Lance. He was wearing a casual baseball t-shirt which fitted him snugly and baggy denim pants covering both legs completely. Keith knew it was odd to focus on the leg but it was just so weird to see it covered up.

“And they brought beer!” Hunk laughed as they all moved in. Hunk made his way over to the kitchen island counter where tons of tasty looking treats had been fanned across the table. Hunk started to go for something looking like chocolate when a spoon hit him across the hand.

“Watch it Hunk,” said Lance. “Last time you overdosed on those and chucked them all up.”

Hunk sank slightly behind the counter, pouting. The guy was an amazing cook so it was funny to see him act so childish about food. Keith and Shiro moved further into the apartment, setting the beer on the large circle table just off to the left of the doorway.

“Watch it Hunk,” said Lance. “Last time you overdosed on those and chucked them all up.”

Hunk sank slightly behind the counter, pouting. The guy was an amazing cook so it was funny to see him act so childish about food. Keith and Shiro moved further into the apartment, setting the beer on the large circle table just off to the left of the doorway.

“So,” Keith started. “Thanks for having us.” He turned to Shiro who gave an approving nod, still always the dad when it came to Keith and his manners. Keith then glanced at Lance, whose neck seemed to snap back to what he had been doing. The thoughts from earlier rose again in his mind,
both the positive ones and the negative. What was his deal? What was that ‘thing’ before that got
Lance all tense?

Keith brushed it off. If Lance was gonna be pissy about something he wouldn’t pry or let it spoil his
own fun. Shiro sat down in an armchair by Allura and Pidge, while Keith headed into the kitchen to
find a bottle opener for the beer.

“Grab one for me too!” Pidge shouted out.

“You sure you’re old enough?” Keith shot back smirking. Finding the bottle opener, he began
cracking off tops and delivering them around.

“What, you gonna card me, slick?” Pidge smirked, reaching for their bottle.

“Like you couldn’t fake an ID.” Keith hadn’t spent much time with Pidge, just a few chats, but he
felt he had seen enough. Enough to know that this kid was too smart for their own good.

“I’m 23 dude.”

“Riiight… kid,” Keith joked, pulling up a chair from the table to sit next to Shiro and facing it
backward so he could straddle it and lean his arms on the backrest.

Allura let out a giggle and patted Pidge’s head while Pidge glared at Keith.

“It’s okay Pidge,” said Hunk, walking over to the couch. “Combined, you and me got the brains
and mass of three people.”

“Combined?” Pidge asked.

Hunk then squatted slightly, his arms stiff spun ’round while he made robot noises, and closed
around Pidge, lifting them up before placing them on his shoulders.

“COMBINED!” Hunk shouted, striking a strong pose. Suddenly Blue streaked out and climbed up
the towering two, perching herself on Pidge’s head.

“Oh shit! Lance! Blue got out!”

Lance hurried over from the kitchen, and Keith took an interest in his ‘Kiss the Chef’ apron and the
much more plain looking foot of the artificial leg Keith had yet to see. It looked older but the same
shape as the decorated one, and Keith could tell the joint in the knee was stiff causing Lance to
timesmake a small, outside arch with his step.

“Come on Blue! You know Hunk’s allergic.” The cat leaped down into Lance's arms and looked
sadly at Hunk, who returned with longing glances.

“Blue, I’m sorry! I wanna play with you so bad! Don’t be mad at me!”

Lance left with Blue in arms, who was mewing away sadly.

“Starcrossed lovers. Never meant to be,” said Allura. Corran nodded solemnly, taking the seat next
to her. Hunk’s shoulders slumped. Pidge, still riding Hunk, patted his head in an attempt to comfort
him.

When Hunk finally had put Pidge down, letting them reclaim their seat while he took the second
armchair, Pidge then attracted Shiro’s focus.
“You know…” he started, “You look really familiar, do I know you from somewhere?”

Pidge seemed to stiffen before looking away.

“Nope! But I get that a lot.”

Keith couldn’t hold back laughing as Lance re-entered the room. Lance seemed to gaze over at him for a moment before moving back to the kitchen.

“Hey Coran, gonna move the food to the table so we can start playing.”

“What’s the game?” Keith asked the group as Coran removed himself to go assist Lance.

“We used to play all kinds of games.” Allura started explained, looking tired. Pidge chimed in.

“Then he went kinda nuts last week so we’re just gonna stick to poker.”

‘Nuts’ how?” Keith asked.

“We played Settlers of Catan but he wasn’t great at trading.”

“You wouldn’t trade with me! You had brick that I needed, I tried to offer you sheep!” Lance came over, apron now gone, and wiped his hands on a dishcloth.

“I didn’t need them.”

“Didn- Ugh! Whatever, Catan was stupid.”

“To be fair,” Allura started. “I’m not sure why any of us expect anyone to win besides Pidge.” Keith looked over at Pidge who had a wicked smirk stretched across their face. The kid looked maniacal.

“You that good?” Keith asked. Pidge only responded by shrugging, their demeanor giving off a distinct ‘whatever’, yet still smug vibe.

“They are. Pidge wins so much that we usually all aim for second place or at least try not to get screwed over too bad.”

“Okay, enough chit-chat, let’s get playing so Hunk can get back to work,” said Lance.

“Dude doesn’t remind me, I’ll start stressing out.” Hunk paused then proceeded to whip out his phone. “Maybe I should shoot them a text to make sure things are going okay.”

“They’re fine Hunk. They know how to reach you if they need to, you need a night off man,” said Pidge, snatching the phone away.

Hunk could have gotten it back easy, but he seemed to respect Pidge’s words and decided not to fight it.

The group was gathered around the table, filling up on food before the start of the game and chatting happily. Lance was a decent cook; not as great as Hunk they all agreed, but good enough to make Keith try and make sure he got invited over again. Most of the food involved spice and meat, though a few dishes were left for Allura who was a vegetarian. It was explained to Keith that they were all inspired by Lance’s upbringing in a Cuban/Mexican household as well as from watching Hunk
cook. It was all super tasty, and when Keith told Lance this, Lance’s cold demeanor seemed to crack slightly and Lance became slightly bashful for a moment, muttering something in Spanish. Once the eating had slowed down Lance cleared away most of the empty trays, condensing what was left into one. Keith finally went for one of the chocolate Hunk had been going for earlier, which had surprisingly been left alone.

“Be careful with those,” Pidge said, adjusting their glasses. “Lance puts a generous amount of whiskey in those, it’s why Hunk got sick.”

“He didn’t get sick because of them, it’s cuz he ate too many.” Lance protested, trying to shake off any accusations towards his cooking. “It’s not my fault ya’ll are lightweights.”

Lance picked one up, making a show to demonstrate that not only were they safe, but also delicious. Keith could feel his mouth watering and proceeded to take a bite into his. It looked like a normal chocolate, Lance had obviously used a rose to mold the chocolate into its fancy shape, but the taste was extraordinary. As soon as Keith bit into it, he could feel a flood of cold liquid that moved like sap and left a flaming trail behind it. It coated the back of his throat making it feel as though it was closing and he felt a jolt of heat fill his chest, stomach, and face. The chocolate was a good mix too; because it was creamy and rich it soothed his mouth and throat.

He hadn’t noticed he had closed his eyes until he opened them to find the table looking at him, eyes wide, Lance looked a good two shades darker.

“Woah... dude. Inappropriate noises,” Hunk nervously chuckled to try and relieve the tension. Keith had been planning on grabbing another but now felt a need to hold back; those things were dangerous. Keith felt hot, probably due to the chocolate mixed with embarrassment, so he shrugged off his jacket onto the chair behind. He noticed Lance staring for a moment until Lance’s neck snapped away.

Hunk pulled out the cards and chips, designating himself ‘house’, and the game of Texas hold’em began.

Keith wasn’t bad at poker, he just didn’t seem to have the best luck. Well...maybe that and more. He tended to be impulsive, shooting for higher ranked hands and sacrificed any pair below a five for the chance to get a pair of faces. The only player worse than him was Lance.

Lance had no poker face. None whatsoever. While Pidge was studying everyone’s ‘tells’, Lance was either grumbling, brows knit in frustration, or looking around the table with the smuggest look he could muster and asking how everyone was doing.

Pidge was destroying everyone. Coran had left on his own due to him “not being as young as he used to be” and had divided out his chips. Shiro and Allura had both dropped out and seemed to be engaged in a chat of their own, their focus far from the game.

Pidge had nearly everything and would for sure win, so far ahead that there wasn’t even a point in making a big deal out of the game at all. Except Lance was now determined to beat Keith.

“Can’t we just say I won and let you two dorks battle it out for stupidity by yourselves?” Pidge whined, counting their chips. They weren’t worth anything really but Keith could see Pidge wanting to record how much they had won for the sake of knowing.

“Fine, Keith and I will battle for second place.”

“Technically Hunk is second,” Pidge pointed out. “If this were money the ‘house’ would be doing
better than both of you.”

“But it’s not and Hunk didn’t do anything. Battle for second! Hunk, lay ‘em out.”

Hunk laid out the first three cards: a King, Queen, and a nine, all of hearts. Lance looked across at Keith and for a moment it was like they shared the same thought. Royal straight. Keith’s cards wouldn’t help at all, just a pair of fives. He turned them in and saw Lance do the same. The new ones weren’t much better; no pair except for the Jack of hearts.

“All in!” Lance boasted, looking so proud of himself. There was no fucking way that ass hat got what he needed, but at the same time, he knew Lance couldn’t bluff. Keith studied him; he was proud, no doubt, but not completely over the moon. He probably, like Keith, only got half of what he needed.

He didn’t want to admit it but he was loving how Lance was looking at him with fire in his eyes, even if it was because they were battling against each other.

“I’ll call,” Keith put on what he considered his most charming smirk and felt excitement stir as he watched Lance flinch.

They both looked up at Hunk, who then flipped the last two cards.

Two fives.

“FUCK!” Lance’s anger launched him out of the chair and he proceeded to pace, limping awkwardly as the weight and stiffness of the artificial limb couldn’t keep up with his anger.

Keith leaned back into his chair and grumbled. How dumb was he, he could have fucking won! He looked over at Lance’s card and saw the ace sitting there. If they had been a team they could have won but who the fuck teams up in poker?

Lance’s Spanish seemed to naturally slide off his tongue in anger, which made his ranting a lot more confusing but also more pleasing to listen too. Even kinda hot. Keith had managed to sneak and quietly eat a few more of those chocolates and the effect of that mixed with the few beers he had was starting to get to him. He put his hands down, ready to admit defeat, call it a night, and go curl up on his sofa until noon tomorrow.

“NO. Fuck this! No ties!”

“You didn’t tie, you just both lost,” Pidge corrected, putting away the chips while everyone else helped to pack and clean up.

“No fuck that!” Keith started to stand up. “Sit back down!” Lance demanded, whipping off his shirt and then slamming it on the table.

“Strip poker.”

Keith felt his face flush, the alcohol unleashed his imagination, his eyes drinking in every last second. He pulled them away to look Lance in the eyes, so blue and so full of that same fire. He knew he shouldn’t. He knew it would end poorly and that he should just take the heat. Let Lance call him a coward if he wanted.

“You’re on.” Fuck.

Keith pulled off his shirt and dropped it on top of Lance’s.
“Okay, well, I’m not staying to watch you two get naked. You guys can play five card stud on your own,” Hunk said, putting his hands up in defeat. Allura and Shiro seemed to agree as they continued cleaning up.

“I might stay just to watch. Who knows, they might try to wrestle each other halfway through and not even finish the game. That’s good blackmail material, “ Pidge joked, settling in their chair.

Shiro approached Keith from behind, putting a hand on Keith’s shoulder and leaning down to whisper.

“You sure you okay with this? I think you’re kinda drunk, I can pull you out if you need me too.” Yes, a million times yes. This is exactly what Keith needed; an out.

“No, It’s fine. I’m fine. I’ll text you tomorrow,” He whispered back. Shit.

The hell was wrong with him.

“Quit kissing your girlfriend, MULLET. I ain’t got all night!” Lance shouted. Man, he really knew how to piss Keith off.

Keith shrugged out of Shiro’s grip and sat down, taking a large swig of beer with Lance following suit.

“This is gonna be funny,” Pidge said, pulling out their phone as Lance started to shuffle the cards.

“I don’t think so,” Shiro picked Pidge up by the collar and began leading everyone out. “I don’t think anyone should watch this.”

This might have worked if either of them understood the rules of strip poker. After Keith won the first hand he tried to reclaim his shirt but Lance told him that was ‘cashing out’. So, hand after hand, the clothing drifted across the table. Each hand won you kept the pot and could use it all for further games if you lost you had to pony up a new item. It had been mostly basic stuff; after the shirts came shoes and socks.

Lance had been the first to lose his pants, revealing not only his artificial leg but the royal blue boxers. Keith felt himself cross his legs under the table, digging his heel into his shin to keep his eyes from wandering. It was easier when Lance sat down and his lower half was hidden by the table, but Keith couldn’t help but be reminded of what was under that table every time the pants moved across the table.

An hour later Keith had lost his pants too, and the fire from the fight all but drained from him when he saw Lance staring. His red boxer briefs suddenly felt too tight, too revealing, and he shot down as fast as gravity would let him.

Both seemed distracted yet oddly determined to win. Considering they both only had one thing left to loose, it was an unusually heavy tension. Keith was struggling through his slightly drunk state, though still managing to outwit Lance. Taking each item back until Lance had nothing; nothing but the boxers.

“I wouldn’t look so smug yet,” Lance said, flashing Keith a cocky grin. “Because you’ve forgotten something.”

Keith quirked up an eyebrow in confusion until he heard a muffled click from under the table.
“No.”

“YES!” Lance said, the artificial leg crashing down on the table.

“You can’t bet your leg! That’s cheating!”

“How is it cheating?”

“Cause we had the same amount of stuff on, making us even. You can’t just pull that out of your ass!”

“I didn’t! I pulled it off my stump! There’s a difference. Now shut up and play.”

Keith leaned back and felt something behind him that he hadn’t noticed for a while, and looked up at Lance, smiling.

“Fine.”

The game went on and when Keith found himself in the same position as Lance had, he turned behind him and added his jacket to the pile.

“You can’t do that! You weren’t wearing it!”

“You used your leg! I used my jacket, what’s the big deal? We’re even again.”

“Cause I wanted the upper hand!”

“S’not my fault you forgot about it. It’s still playable.”

“As if I could forget that thing, looks like you grabbed it at the same vintage store as you got your hair.”

“Hey, fuck off man, I like this jacket.”

“Clearly.”

Keith seethed.

“Fine! Clear everything off, we’re both trying to humiliate each other so let’s get it over with!” This was probably a bad idea, case in point being the startled look on Lance’s face.

“W-what do you mean?” Lance stuttered.

“We’re gonna be in this stalemate all night. Next round wins it and we bet what’s left.”

“A-alright, FINE.”

They both stood, Lance a bit awkwardly but balanced enough. They each hooked their thumbs onto the brim of their own underwear. Keith could feel his head clearing in the tension, realizing all too late what he had dragged them into.

“Okay, on the count of three,” Lance started.

Oh fuck.

“One.”
This was a disaster, he had to stop it before it got worse, but the prospect of seeing outweighed getting seen. The image of Lance across the table, blushing, ready to reveal himself, it was all too much and Keith could feel his own blush rising and... something else too.

“Two.” Shit! Now was not the time. He had to cool off, distract himself, but he needed time. Time and Lance not counting down almost naked in front of him.

Suddenly a soft mew called out and Lance had stopped counting. Taking advantage of the pause Keith sat back down instantly, crossing his legs, trying to delete the entire moment from his head. Lance reattached his leg and walked off down the hall to go fetch Blue.

When Lance returned, he wouldn’t look at Keith and Keith could feel he understood why they had definitely taken this to a weird place.

“It’s... kinda late. You should get going.”

“Uhh... right.”

Keith gathered everything up and rushed out the door, offering a small goodbye as he left. Across the street, back in his apartment, he felt like screaming. The hell was he doing with Lance anyway? Was it some kind of unconscious flirtation? Is that how he flirted? Was he really that interested?

Yeah.. a bit.

He couldn’t help moving towards the window, stepping out and looking down at Lance's apartment. He could see Lance, pacing and animatedly talk to Blue. One gesture sent him pointing at Keith's apartment and he froze as Lance looked at him for a second before turning back and then turning to look at him again.

Now they were both stuck.

Lance, who was still in his boxers, waved awkwardly. Keith returned it just as stiffly before darting back inside. This guy was going to be the end of him.

Chapter End Notes

These boys and their odd ways of showing they like each other.

I attempted humor. Can you tell?
Aster and Lilac

Chapter Summary

It's not a date!

Chapter Notes

:: Update Feb 7th, 2017:: This is the last chapter I've combed for now. More later. For now I must sleep.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After their fierce poker battle, it had been Keith who decided to bite the bullet and visit again, attempting to cut past the awkward tension. He offered to eat lunch again with Lance and it soon sparked a tradition between them. Days when Keith was not working at the S.N.I.F. facilities, which were many, he would drift down to the Lion’s Rose around noon. At first he would ask Lance what he wanted and then would run and get it, leaving the two to fight over payment. However as Keith steadily began to predict Lances cravings, he would show up with the food to see a delighted Lance, no longer fussing over who was paying.

This went on for about three months and though it felt as though no time was passing at all, early spring had shifted into a muggy summer. Keith was used to being surprised when seeing how much time had past, as both the desert and San Fran didn’t really have proper seasons. Not that he minded though, as he liked routine and something to do with his time.

They would often eat for an hour before Lance would get back to work, and Keith, depending on how busy the Lion’s Rose was, sometimes hid in Lance’s apartment due to people peering in and knocking while they were eating.

Although neither of them said it they both enjoyed the company. The unusual, yet familiar way they would slip into a rhythm was comforting. Though Keith never hated going into work, he was a bit sad when his lunches were eaten with Shiro in the work break room or on his own. Everything just felt so much colder.

Today Lance had been talking about his garden on the roof above, a sparkle in his eyes as he listed off the new plants that were doing well. He had served up the home grown tomatoes and strawberries at last week’s game night which were delicious. The only downside had been that Pidge had brought videogames instead of a table top, which had shaken Keith’s and Lance’s competitive nature to an all new high and had left everyone exhausted. Keith found himself waking up on Lance’s couch next to Hunk, who had passed out on the coffee table, and Pidge who had curled up in an arm chair.

He was brought to the present, calmly listening as Lance went on about each plant and what he planned on adding in. It made Keith realize there was something he had never asked Lance.

“So,” Keith asked, taking a bite out of his burger; they were both surprisingly messy eaters when it
came to fast food. “Why the love of plants?”

“I was raised in them,” Lance replied, eating another ‘angry fry’ which were bright red and covered in hot peppers; one of Lance’s favorite spicy dishes. “My grandparents lived in the apartment above. It used to be a bit bigger, and they raised my dad and his siblings there. They loved growing things. No pets just plants. So my dad picked up the same habit of always having something growing. But I wasn’t really into it until after my injury.”

“How do you mean?”

“When you’re going through rehab they often try to push all kinds of craft and hobbies onto you. It’s super annoying, like dude, I don’t want to spend the afternoon organizing coins or talking about decoupage. So I started with just taking care of the flowers I got to my room in rehab, then taking care of other peoples, then I got a window box.

Finally, I got released. Grandmother had to shut down Lion’s rose and move to a retirement home but it was still in my name.”

“It was in your name?” Keith found this odd, knowing Lance had siblings, older and younger, and his parents. Lance had wanted to become a test pilot like Keith. He joined the Airforce to do it. So then why?

“It’s… a long story, rather not go into it at the moment. We’ve got…” Lance checked his watch. “Eh.. bout 15 minutes. Anywho…”

“I moved into the apartment, which was huge, and started collecting plants. The area that is the balcony used to be all covered. Once I got on my feet we removed the roof cause I needed more access to sunlight. I just kept getting plants. Still do, and my therapist says it's coping but I think I'm just bored. After stuff got kinda cramped I sold a few off downstairs and got Blue instead to fill the void.”

Keith thought of the overly affectionate cat that was most likely sleeping above them.

“Shiro suggested I should get a cat.”

Lance tensed, pausing while chewing on a fry, Keith could see his jaw shifting, and rolling the food around but not biting. He swallowed and cleared his throat, going for his drink.

“Shiro’s a smart guy. Cats are good company. You considering it?”

“Yeah well, it’s either a cat or a boyfriend,” Keith joked, taking another large bite. As his teeth sunk in, so did his words. Ah shit.

Love life was a tense topic with Lance, mostly because it would bring up Maria which was something Keith had yet been allowed to climb into. Lance’s excuses were normally time based, but Keith could tell it was a deflection. He himself hadn’t had much of a dating past, but Lance never seemed interested enough to ask, so Keith didn’t talk about. This meant Lance probably didn’t know one huge thing about Keith.

That he was gay.

It was an unusual way to confess, or if you could call it that? He wasn’t sure what it was. Surely Lance seemed cool enough that it wouldn’t bother him. Perhaps, if anything, Lance would avoid suggesting strip poker in the future.
Keith hadn’t looked up or even finished his bite, feeling the bun going soggy in his mouth.

“ You’re single?”

Keith looked up, his jaw snapping shut on the bite. Which wasn’t ideal as it left him awkwardly trying to chew as fast as he could, swallowing far too soon. Lance looked surprised, though he didn’t seem too focused on what Keith was afraid he was going to be surprised about.

“ Uhh. Yeah.”

“ B.. But I thought… You were… and even if not.. Still…” Lance was a mess, and it was almost cute watching him try to get his words out or keep them in, his brain seemingly very divided on that. He finally seemed to settle on something safe.

“ You’re single?!”

“ Yes,” Keith answered, again.

Silence again. Keith was desperate to either get Lance's reaction verbally or move on. He really would prefer the latter. He reached across the table to snag a fry in an attempt to distract Lance only to have his hand slapped away. When Keith looked up though Lance was still processing.

Keith gave out a sigh and let his head fall on a patch of clean table, half tempted to run off and try for a fresh start tomorrow.

“ Question.” Lance finally said, after several long agonizing minutes.

“ What?” Keith grunted, not picking up his head.

“ Are you… Do you go both ways? Or just one?”

That, once again, was not the question he was expecting. He picked up his head, enough to look up at Lance who seemed concentrated and stiff. He let his chin sit and gave Lance the most annoyed look he could muster.

“ One way, I like dudes.”

“ Oh.”

More silence.

“ How long?”

“ I don’t know dude when every kid figures it out.”

“Right....”

Keith was tempted to ask if he was the first gay person Lance had ever met because it sure felt like it.

“ If you’ve got a problem with it I can just go now.”

This caught Lance off guard.

“ What? No! Oh, my g- I’m sorry dude. No, of course, it’s fine, great even!”

Keith raised an inquisitive eyebrow at Lance, who seemed to freeze again.
“I mean not great, not that it’s not awesome. But not like.. I’m glad or anything. I mean… ugh.. Just, its cause I get you? I mean.. Ugh!” Lance let out a frustrated groan and copied Keith’s position, although a bit harsher as he banged his head against the table to hide.

Keith sat up and tried to restrain a laugh. It was hard not to feel ten times lighter now that he knew Lance was cool with it.

“You okay buddy?” Keith asked chuckling, leaning forward to roughly rustle Lance’s hair. Lance had done this a few times to him, so Keith figured it wasn’t weird until Lance picked up his head to look at him.

“I’m bi.”

Silence again. Keith could see the dusting blush sitting on each cheek and even bridging his nose. He looked so serious, so determined to make sure Keith felt okay and accepted, and yet so embarrassed. Keith couldn't help but feel more surprised.

“Oh. Seriously?”

“What do you mean ‘seriously’?” Lance shot up and Keith withdrew his hand in the motion, tucking it under his other arm so that he could still lean on his elbows.

“I just figured you were a super straight ladies man.”

“What? No! Love is love, bodies are beautiful, and life’s too short to be picky. I dig ladies and fellas. Though I’m far less picky with women.”

“That much is obvious. You flirt with every girl who enters between the ages of 18-39.”

“It’s a switch I was born with and cannot turn off.”

“No wonder you’re single then if you start flirting with someone else while you're dating.”

“I’ll have you know it’s not like I can’t control the focus of it, it’s just a matter if I make tons of people swoon each day or one special person all the time.”

Keith couldn't help but start laughing, the conversation taking such a ridiculous turn.

“And what makes you think I’m single?” Lance asked, seemingly wounded by Keith’s laughter.

“Am I wrong?”

“Well.. no. But what about me says I wouldn't be taken? You saying I’m not a fine enough honey for the hive?”

That set Keith off, he could feel sharp pains in his side but couldn’t stop laughing. Tears formed in his eyes, peppering his eyelashes and making his vision blurred.

“A ‘honey’ for the what?” Keith managed to choke out between laughs.

“A honey for the hive! You know, fine and sublime price check in aisle nine?”

“Oh god …” that one was even worse, sending Keith off into another round of shaking laughter.

“Oh, I’ve got a million. Cause to me it seems like you’re saying I’m not styling profiling, is anyone hiring?”
Keith had attempted to stifle his laughs but they seemed to be like water ready to burst from a dam.

“Hottie with a body sitting on the potty.”

The dam burst and Keith felt he was going to fall off his chair, torn between gripping at the stitch in his sides or holding on to the table.

“Mr. Groovy booty from that one movie.”

And Keith fell over. He heard Lance cry out in surprise, darting around the table to see Keith laying face up on his back. His head was pounding from the fall and lack of oxygen as his vision swam with tears. He saw Lance bend over with a concerned look on his face but it soon broke into a grin.

“Falling for me?”

“That was the dumbest thing I’ve heard in years,” Keith said, calming down. “Why is the hottie on the potty?”

“Rhymes are tricky. Come on, let’s get you back up. I gotta unlock the doors in about ten.”

“I’m good,” Keith said, picking himself up. “I don’t think I’ve ever laughed that hard.” He still was, giggling as Lance’s dumb phrases echoed through his mind. He wrapped up his food, planning to finish it later as his stomach hurt too much at the moment. Lance was still munching on the last few fries.

“You probably need to get out more.”

“Probably.”

“So?”

“So what?”

“What makes you think I’m single?”

Keith took a moment to pause, he could either be honest or lie and say it was a guess. Keith decided neither.

‘Cause you’re like a crazy cat lady only with plants.”

Keith started laughing again, not nearly as hard but it still hurt. His body wasn’t used to laughing so much.

“RUDE! Leave my babies out of it.”

Keith kept laughing. Soon enough the table was clear and, as always, Lance followed Keith to the door to unlock it for the afternoon. Keith gave his goodbye and was halfway through the door when Lance stopped him.

“So, I’ve got about ten back-to-back weddings and this huge event, calling the family in to help, and even working on my days off.”

“That sucks.”

Yeah... So I’ll probably be too busy to eat lunch with you for about two weeks.”
“That’s fine, I head back to work on Monday.”

“Right.” He paused and Keith started to leave. “So I was thinking…”

Keith turned. Seeing Lance like this was so different; he had pulled himself up in a way that reminded him of Shiro, reminded him of the fact Lance had spent time in a branch of the military. It had always seemed as though Lance’s nature was too carefree, slouching or bouncing to keep up with his leg. Now, as he held himself to his full height, Keith could tell Lance was a few inches taller than him.

“We could get some hang time in before all that craziness. I mean, you haven’t really explored much, and like.. I grew up here so… yeah?”

“Sure!” The word shot out of his mouth like a bullet, and was a bit louder than he meant it to be. He had been exploring during his walks around the area but hadn’t really left his neighborhood much. Shiro was usually busy, so the two ate locally and sat in his apartment. Really the most excitement Keith got besides work was lunch with Lance and game night.

“Cool. Sunday okay?”

“Yeah, of course. I’ll meet you here at… uh..”

“How bout 11?”

“Yeah.. See you then.”

“Yup.”

“Sure…”

There was a long silence were the two just stared at each other, neither knowing how to end the conversation or if it was even over. Then Lance stiffened even more so that Keith had a feeling if he tapped Lance, Lance would fall over.

“It’s.. I don’t mean it like a date.” Lance rambled off.

“Right.”

“I mean not that I’m not... I mean not that I wouldn’t be interested in-”

“…”

“Bro time,” Lance concluded

“Bro time,” Keith repeated.

“No homo.”

“…”

“I mean… ah shit. I’ll.. I’ll text you.”

“Kay, you’ve got my number?”

“Uhh…”
Keith knew he didn’t. He pulled the sharpie that sat in Lance's top breast pocket and grabbed his hand, taking the cap off with his teeth before scribbling the number down. Lance looked at it like Keith had just handed him a bar of gold.

“Thanks.”

“See ya,” Keith said, putting the marker back and walking backwards out the door. It slammed behind him, leaving Lance standing inside looking stupid, but Keith wasn’t thinking about that now. Despite how bro ‘no homo’ it would be, he found the whole interaction a little too much like asking someone out on a date. He was glad Lance had clarified, but a little sad. Still, he felt himself smiling at the fresh image of Lance looking so happy as Keith basically defiled his hand. He’d have to commit that to memory.

Often enough, after lunch with Lance, he would check in on the other shops. He avoided Allura due to her lack of restraint, as she often spent most of the conversation trying to get him to be her model. Once or twice she would ask about Shiro, which Keith found amusing, and they would continue talking about him for a while before she brought up fashion again. Still, these conversations were far too rare.

Coran was more of somebody to listen to, which Keith liked, as he had learned a lot about the neighborhood through Coran. Though he tended to drone on the stories were interesting, and if he had already told a story he would repeat it, making it different by adding in more details.

Hunk was tough to see because he spent so much time working during these hours and the only time the place seemed really quiet was when it was closed. Hunk would also usually have these morning meet ups anyway so everyone could come in for breakfast. On days when Keith worked he would head in early and join everyone before driving off to work. Hunk’s reasoning was that everyone needed to eat properly to make sure they were all healthy for the long day ahead. It seemed as though no one working on that street would ever go hungry. Each breakfast felt as though he was eating with family, not that he really knew that experience.

He told himself he should go in every day, even his off days, but something held him back. It might be that he felt like he was forcing his way into this family, though they made him feel so welcome that it was a thought he didn’t dwell on too long. It might also be that he didn’t like to wake up until after ten.

So he turned into Pidges bookstore. The paint, which had nearly all but peeled off when he had first entered, had been repainted two weeks ago and now “Spines for spineless” was shown in bright green letters. When Keith had asked about the name Pidge had explained it was their Grandfather's idea, a hint at the benefits of knowledge giving weak men power, and a pun.

“He was weird like that.” Pidge had explained.

He walked in to see Pidge tinkering with something that looked like a small metal pyramid. Pidge was often more secretive about their own projects than that of the ones they had ‘hacked’ in to see, but Keith had a feeling he would find out when it was finished.

“Sup Pidge.”

“Hey Keith, I heard from my bro you’re going back tomorrow.”

“You sure you didn’t see it in Shiro’s email?”

“Eh, I may have read one before I heard the other.”
“You gotta quit messing with him, he’s gonna be pissed when he finds out.”

“He won’t, he’s too busy making ‘casual’ dinner plans with Allura.”

“What? No way.”

Pidge nodded vigorously, before turning to their laptop and searching for something.

“Uh… let’s see. ‘Saturday was fun…’ yadda yadda. ‘Heard Keith’s been stopping in.’ Um.. oh! Here!”

“Pidge..”

“Oh come on it’s funny.”

“…Fine. Go for it.”

“’I’m glad to see you’re so interested in designs for our pilots, the sketches you sent me are really something. Sadly I don’t have the power to bring you in and suggest them, but maybe if we met up over coffee we could talk about them and other things and I can introduce you to our engineer and design staff. I’d just swing by but it might be nicer to step away from our respective jobs for a breather. Coffee is on me. -Shiro”

“and then Allura seemed to suggest they drop work all together and just chat. Pretty cute, right?”

“I don’t know, seems pretty normal to me Pidge.”

Keith’s phone vibrated and he took it out, expecting to see something from Shiro, but was surprised when he saw a text from an unknown number with an attachment. He looked and saw a screenshot of his number on a contact page, but instead of his name it said ‘Mr. Groovy with a booty’ and under occupation it had ‘from that one movie.’ The contact photo was a picture of Keith passed out on Lance’s couch, face first, knees bent slightly, butt stuck up in the air. Keith felt his face go red.

“You took a picture of me.” He texted. Almost instantly his phone buzzed.

“Like you wouldn’t have taken one of me.”

“Not while you’re sleeping.”

“You are a liar. >:P”

Keith added Lance to his contacts and couldn’t resist changing the name to ‘Hottie with a body’ and under occupation listing ‘sitting on the potty.’ He then searched up an image of a toilet to use as a contact picture. He was proud of his work and he took a screenshot of it, sending it off to Lance before putting his phone back into his pocket.

“So what’s new?” Keith asked, leaning on the counter to study the blueprints Pidge had laid out. Pidge looked at Keith with an inquisitive, piercing stare.

“Not much. What’s new with you? Never seen you text someone before.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t do it.”

The phone started buzzing again. Keith had almost thought it was a call due to how many times it kept going off. What the heck was Lance typing? Keith resisted the urge to check, not wanting to be rude to Pidge, but Pidge seemed almost more focused on the phone’s buzzes then he was.
“That’s Lance, isn’t it.”

“What?”

“Lance, the one texting you.”

Keith didn’t answer, how did they know? He felt his hand move towards his back pocket, not to pull it out but to try and stifle the loud buzzing.

“Look, there is only one dork in the universe who texts like that.”

“Yeah, it’s him.”

“Didn’t know you guys were so close.”

“We’re not, it’s just texting.”

“Well how come we don’t text, you’ve never given me your number.” Keith let out a sigh.

“Do you want it?”

“Naw, I already have it, but it was the principle really. Just means Lance is a little bit more special is all.”

Keith didn’t say anything. He just pulled one of the blueprints over and started looking at the corrections and notes Pidge had made. They were usually along the same lines as his own thinking so often, with Pidge’s permission, he would include them in his own report.

“Do you have Hunk’s number?” Keith had snapped up to see an amused Pidge with their wide, devilish smile.

“No okay! I just got Lance’s today. I’ll start collecting everyone’s contacts and text them all equally,” Keith turned back to the blue print.

“You just now traded numbers? What’s the occasion?”

“We’re going out this Sunday.”

Wait…

His head shot up again to see the grin was now paired with bright eyes and the look of someone trying to hold in a laugh.

“Wait! Not like that-” it was too late Pidge was laughing and bits and pieces of what they were saying kept popping up, dripping with sarcasm like, “no, totally not a date” or “Lance is in no way special, got it.”

“Pidge, it’s not. We’re just hanging out cause we’re gonna get busy s- NOT LIKE THAT!”

Pidge had renewed their laughter.

“Work! We both have work to do, so we’re gonna chill. He’s gonna show me around.”

Pidge raised an eyebrow. The phone started vibrating again, cutting itself off to sound again. Keith covered the phone again but it was no use.
“It’s okay. I’m just teasing you, dude. Lance is super bad when it comes to texting. You’ll probably delete his number in a few days.”

Keith pulled out his phone to see a wall of short texts.

“IT is a little excessive.”

“Just tell me the details when your date is over.”

“IT’s not a date, and don’t tell anyone about it, or that it’s a date. Cause it’s not,” Keith said, turning off his phone. It finally went silent. Keith figured Lance had to get to work sooner or later.

He began looking over the blue print again, this time actually taking it in instead of hiding behind it. He recognised part of the design, the two large circles containing old plain fans, the design having been used for a failed hovercraft that had been in S.N.I.F. files. The original design was laid out like a bed with four fans laying horizontal in each corner. Not really much of a design, but more like an experiment to test a theory. Keith remembered the notes saying something about issues with weight. This new design though looked more like a bike.

It was all together more of a design than its predecessor. The seat raised up and seemed to have an extra booster for forward motion, allowing the two turbines to focus on keeping it skyborne. The turbines sat on wings, giving it balance and possibly better control, and the cockpit looked a lot like a motorcycle. Two handlebars, a clutch, and no roof. Keith wanted to ride it.

“Pidge, what is this?”

“Oh.. that’s Sparrow, a project Hunk and I have been tossing around.”

“Hunk?”

“What? You think Hunk went to culinary school? He’s the same as Lance; he was raised in that Kitchen and took over it from his dad. He was Air Force too, he followed after Lance ‘cause the two have been friends since they were kids. I’m just glad Hunk was an engineer and hung out at the base for the most part.”

Keith hadn’t known, though why would he have? Lance didn’t really talk about his days surfing, which was odd because he boasted about not being afraid of spiders the other day, you’d think he would love being a war hero. Hunk hadn’t brought it up either, and the fact he had served with Lance made Keith wonder if something had happened. Well, besides Lance losing a leg. Keith knew that had to be it, but Lance never seemed to want to talk about it. Maybe Lance just wanted to be normal.

“So,” Keith started again, attempting a casual air. “Sparrow? Looks like the turbines from the H-014.”

“Haha… So you noticed?” Pidge nervously laughed. “Yeah well, that was the project I interned on and they wouldn’t listen to my ideas, so when it obviously failed I took the plans and made it better. It’s heavy, but smaller and it can get off the ground and go zero to sixty just like any normal car. Wind resistance is tough but it doesn’t have to deal with terrain, and with its carbon fiber body it can survive most temperatures.”

“You sound like you’ve got this thing built in a shed somewhere.”
“Well, no. But we’ve run loads of simulations. They’re just as good.”

“Not really, not when you’re flying.”

“Well, it’s not like we’ve got a place to build or a place to test it.”

Keith paused, letting the words sink in. He scribbled out his number on a scrap of paper and handed it to Pidge.

“We’ll talk later.”

Pidge seemed a little taken back, but then a devious smile grew across their face.

“Yeah. You gotta tell me how your date goes. Oh and remember? I don’t need this.” They held up the scrap. “Thanks, though, it’s nice to know I’m special too. Gonna hang this over Lance’s head.”

Surprisingly Keith didn’t find himself objecting, he just chuckled as he left heading for home.

Keith found it hard to sleep that night, mostly because he had turned his phone back on to find a wall of text from Lance.

“Rude! Though not gonna lie, nothing like having an artificial leg to help bulk out.”

“Check it, the gun show! -photo attached-” It was a photo of Lance in the store showing off one arm while the other held the camera. The arm was impressive, but it was dampened by the dumb puffed out face Lance was making.

“Sorry for the pic dude..”

“Not tryin' to send you sexy pics or nothing”

“Just jokin’.”

“.... dude?”

“you ignoring me?”

“Oh! Maybe you liked the photo ;)”

“My stars Keith you're making me clutch my pearls”

“But not like that.”

“...”

“Okay, why does Pidge have your number?”

“I mean not that it matters, Cause that’s fine. Pidge is just being a dick about it so…”

“Lance, it’s fine. Pidge got my number cause I wanna help them with something.” Keith had responded. “Also quit spamming my phone.”

“Haha, sorry dude. I’ll lay off. See ya tomorrow.”
And Lance did lay off, at least until Keith received another photo. He was sure Lance’s intent had been innocent, at least that’s what the text would imply. Under the line “I didn’t want to move her” was a picture of the gray cat Blue, fast asleep in Lance’s lap. It’s wouldn’t have been a problem, if Lance wasn’t shirtless and his abbs weren’t the backdrop of an incredibly cute cat sleeping. He knew he found Lance attractive, biology was biology. It didn’t mean that he was in love or even crushing on Lance, but it was difficult to not hyper focus in on the fact he was going to be spending an entire day with Lance.

He woke later than he had wanted to, missing group breakfast, but that might have been better in the long run if Pidge had spread the word to the others. Nothing would make the date more awkward than it already might be. He opted for just eating toast and having a cup of coffee, enjoying what little silence the city could bring at that hour.

He couldn’t see the point in getting dressed up, it was just them hanging out, so he went for comfort, leaving his jacket at home. It had been hot most of the week, and today was bringing no sign of change. He changed into his all black outfit of jeans t-shirt and biker gloves. He really hoped Lance would bring him somewhere shady, otherwise he would burn alive. Speaking of heat, he stepped out on the balcony to check on his cactus. It was really doing much better than he had first expected. It had two bright orange blossoms now and was positively sparkling in the sunlight.

He glanced over at Lance’s apartment and saw him moving about in his own garden. He seemed focused, checking each plant, spraying water, plucking tomatoes from what looked like a small corner dedicated to edibles. It was hard not to watch him work, getting lost in each moment and trying to imagine them up close and in detail. He found his shoulders releasing a tension he wasn’t even aware he had, leaning over the barrier of the balcony, his ears catching a tune Lance was singing. A few weeks ago Lance mentioned this habit when Keith had caught him talking to a potted plant in his store window. He was talking to it like a dog or a newborn, with a sweet sing song voice and a soothing demeanor.

“It makes them happy, helps them to grow.”

Well, he wasn’t going to argue with an expert. Lance had all the proof he needed in his garden that whatever he was doing was working.

Keith had been so lost in thought he didn’t immediately realise that Lance had spotted him, waving wildly in the middle of watering a large rose bush. Keith tried not to react embarrassed and instead lazily waved back. He couldn’t quite see Lance’s face, but something about the way he straightened his back and puffed out his chest made Keith think he was smiling.

As he turned to leave, a loud rip sounded from between his thighs. Looking down he noticed that a loose fiber had caught on a piece of metal in the railing, so that when he turned he left a good chunk of his pants behind.

He cursed himself. These were not only his favorites, but one of the few pairs left that actually fit him properly. Although he hadn’t gotten out of shape he had for sure bulked up a bit, gaining a few centimeters in several places. The pants had been loose when he had bought them but now they were more like skinny jeans, well now they were more ruined than anything.

He scurried inside cursing himself, he had put off shopping due to him overall hating the experience. Now he was about to go out with no pants.

He managed to find some safety pins in an emergency kit Shiro had bought him and pinned up the gap as carefully as he could. It just had to rip in the crotch. If it had been on a knee he could have played it off. There was really one thing to do.
He pulled out his shirt, hiding the damaged area and flew down stairs and across the street, to Allura’s store “Castle”. Thankfully she was there in the front with one of her lackies.

“Hey! Allura!” Keith whispered, harshly.

“Oh Keith, hello! What brings you in so early?”

“I uh… had a problem this morning.”

He pulled up his shirt, revealing the poorly safety pinned mess and causing Allura to gasp.

“Oh, my! Did Lance do this?”

“What?!”

“You boys must really be careful with foreplay, so wasteful.”

“What? NO! We weren’t- I haven’t even seen Lance today! It just ripped on something sharp on my balcony,” Keith could feel blood and heat rush up the back of his neck, across his face and to the tips of his ears.

Allura attempted to hide her wide grin behind her hand but Keith could hear her giggling.

“Very well,” she said, turning away. “But I’m not sure I can save them.”

“So long as my boxers aren’t hanging out.”

She nodded and ushered him back to one of the changing stalls. The door clicked shut and he could here soft alternative rock being pumped in through a tiny speaker. He removed his pants carefully and passed them under the door.

“I’m in a bit of a rush too, so could they be fixed kinda fast?”

“Fraid not darling. But I have an idea…” Keith could hear rustling from behind him, feet darting across the floor in a symphony of heel clicks and whispers. “Why don’t we lend you an outfit and you can wear it for the day. This all black is going to be far too hot to wear anyway.”

“What? No! Please, just fix my pants. Or give me new ones and I can pay, but ones like the ones I have.”

“Fraid we don’t have anything like that in right now.” Her voice almost sounding like she was singing with joy. “Yes, that will do,” she whispered to one of her workers.

“Now Keith,” He could hear her right outside the door now and it made him more nervous and scared than ever, considering how he was without pants. “We are doing a favor for you, fixing these things. The least you could do is return the favor in kind.”

“What do you want.”

“For you to not look like a complete boar on your first date.”

“It’s not a… how?”

“Pidge told us all at breakfast. Really, it has been months and we were hoping you two would get a move on sooner, but beggars can’t be choosers. Here.”

She knocked on the door and then opened it just a hair, sending Keith to scramble as far out of sight
as he could. When he saw she hadn’t peeked but simply handing him the outfit, he took it and pushed against the door again, making sure it locked shut.

“Now get changed while I take care of something.”

Keith looked at the items in his hand and felt his shoulders sag, he supposed it wasn’t the end of the world. Lance would probably find the story funny enough anyway. He pulled off his shirt roughly and began changing into the full outfit Allura had picked out.

It was, well, not bad. Keith had been worried it would be a little too.. flamboyant, considering the tags indicated most of the articles were for girls. He was now dressed in a pair of black harem pants that stopped about mid calf. Allura had provided a pair of men’s black sandals which were surprisingly comfortable. He was also in a white fitted graphic t-shirt that had an astronaut's helmet with ‘space cadet’ written across it. She had also handed him a beanie, bandana, and a few other accessories he felt like he could pass on.

“Allura,” he said, clicking the door open. He could hear her talking to someone, but then suddenly something pulled his door shut from the other side.

“Hey! Let me out! Allura!” He heard someone approach and then faint whispers behind the door.

“What’s wrong Keith, are you finished?”

“Yeah! But someone shut me in.”

“Oh… do you have on the accessories?”

“Uhh.. no?”

“Please Keith put them on too, Otherwise the look is not complete!”

“All of them?”

“Yes!”

“But you gave me like.. options? Which ones?”

“I don’t think I did, what’s confusing you?”

“The… bracelets? And wristbands? Also, I’ve got two hats.”

“The silver goes on your ankle. And you’ve got one hat.”

“What about the bandana?”

“Not a hat, wear it around your neck. I’ll be back in just a moment.”

Keith added the extra items. Red wristbands, silver anklets, a red beanie that rested just barely at the back of his head, the dark red bandana, and a log red vest that looked like a rope net, light and each knitted end on the bottom ended in a tassel. When he reviewed the full ‘look’ it was like he was looking at one of Allura’s mannequins. He had neglected the last item, a pair of white, thick framed, oval sunglasses, which he added on now just to attempt to hide how embarrassed he felt. He looked, well not horrible and somehow not unlike himself, but he couldn't shake the stiffness, the awkward feeling of being in new clothes.
This time when he exited, he was met with all four of Allura’s staff, nodding in approval. Allura joined them not long after, covering her mouth as she gasped with excitement.

“Yes! You look wonderful! I am so glad you let me do this Keith, really!”

“Uh.. yeah no…” He turned and saw the assistance were clicking away photos.” Problem- hey can they stop, please?”

“What? Oh yes of course.” She snapped her fingers and they all scurried off. “Really though Keith, you really should let me do this on a regular basis. I would pay you.”

“Thanks, but I’ll pass for today. I do owe you one though.”

Her grin grew mischievous for a moment before softening.

“I’ll keep that in mind. Now go have fun. Mom’s orders.”

Keith found himself chuckling but agreed and left.

Now he was standing outside of Lances shop. He couldn’t see Lance inside or hear him outside in his garden, so he figured Lance must be getting ready. He had already felt the stares from people passing by. He already felt awkward enough but now that he was attracting attention he fished out his phone in an attempt to look busy and undisturbed.

It wasn’t too long after he took out his phone that he heard the familiar off phase of footsteps coming from down the street. He looked up and saw Lance, or at least it looked mostly like him.

He was wearing the decorated artificial leg, which was complemented by his light blue shorts. This was normal; Lance often wore shorts due to the fact his athletic leg didn’t fit inside pants as well, however the rest of him was absurdly different. He was wearing a white graphic t-shirt that had ‘out of order’ written across it, a black open sleeveless hoodie draping on his shoulders. As Lance awkwardly scratched his chin, Keith noticed similar bangles on one arm and a long rose pendant around his neck. Finally, a wide brim blue hat sat backwards on his head with a pair of aviators perched on top. He also seemed to be wearing sandals matching Keith's own.

“Allura got you too?”

Keith nodded. It wasn’t an outfit he would expect Lance to put together himself, but much like his own it suited Lance, the detailed prosthetic adding the feel of a tattoo.

“Uh... yeah.”

“She’s a nightmare when it comes to repaying favors,” Lance chuckled and Keith tensed.

“Oh.”

“You... you weren’t repaying a favor.”

“Oh... no, I was asking for one. I owe her now?”

“You were?” Lance had a small grin on his face now as he roughly grabbed Keith around the shoulders. “You’re doomed now.”

Keith let out a laugh, feeling the tension fade as Lance pulled him to get moving.

The two walked side by side, casually chatting. Keith had offered riding on his motorcycle, but
Lance declined.

“Parking will be a nightmare, even for motorcycles.”

The electric wires crisscrossing above mixed with the pulley system of the rail cars below made it easy enough to get to just about any area. Arizona wasn’t like that. If you didn’t have a car, you had a long way to walk. He hadn’t been crazy about the idea of riding public transit, favoring his truck and motorcycle. He didn’t like the idea of being crammed into a metal box with strangers but, somehow, Lance made it bearable. He made a whooshing noise with his mouth every time they felt the heavy kick of the bus starting up again and, despite it being crowded, Lance got a seat due to his leg. There were a few awkward moments where Keith found himself nearly falling into Lance’s lap, but Lance laughed it off. It soon happened so much that they would draw attention to themselves, laughing with each burst of speed from the electric bus. A fifteen minute bus ride had the two exiting the bus and instantly inhaling the smell of the bay. Seagulls swarmed over almost like clouds and the heavy smell of salt and brine hung in the air.

“So the piers are pretty great. Some are kinda touristy though, but we have got to start at the most important one of all… 45!” Lance punched his fist in the air in exclamation.

“What’s so special about 45?”

“That’s where Musée Mécanique is.”

When Keith had pressed Lance on what exactly ‘Musée Mécanique’ was, Lance had stayed silent but still kept hinting at what a great surprise it would be. Keith couldn’t help but notice the stares they gained as they walked along; a couple of guys walking around like models and one of them missing a leg would draw attention. While pausing so Lance could point out the prison out in the middle of the bay, looming on a rock, he heard the light tapping of a finger on plastic. Looking down he spotted a kid about eight years old, bright green eyes and blond hair, showing off a smile with several missing teeth. The kids hand was resting open palm on Lance's left leg.

“Why are you a robot?” the kid asked. Keith hadn’t been sure Lance had noticed the kid, but Lance turned and smiled at the kid.

“I’m not a robot, I’m a pirate.”

The kid didn’t say anything, seeming more confused if anything, and looked from Lance's face to his leg and back again. The kid went right on and grabbed the knee joint, patting it softly with his hand.

“Want to see how it goes on?”

The kid nodded vigorously. Lance sat himself down at a bench and lifted up his shorts on his left side. Keith could see the casting around his thigh was smooth and of a dark color.

“This is carbon fiber, they make cars out of it, and if I click this…” His thumb found a button and pressed it there was a small hiss of air and suddenly Lance was pulling his leg off. Keith was watching just as eagerly as the kid. Once the leg was off, Keith saw something white and rubbery covering the remaining half of Lance's leg; this he left on.

The kid was thoroughly distracted by the leg but at one point his gaze fell on Lance's covered thigh and when the kid made a move to though it Keith saw Lance tense up. Thankfully the kid was stopped.

“Ryan! Oh no! I am so sorry! He just got away from me.”
"It’s fine." Lance said, though Keith could hear the slight shake in his voice. The mother didn’t seem to notice how uncomfortable Lance was, as she was too busy fussing and scolding her kid, and Keith found himself trying to think of something to say to scold her.

"Really, we are so sorry. Go on Ryan, say goodbye.”

"Bye bye Mr. Robot.” The kid waved.

"You mean Mr. Pirate,” Lance smiled. The kid smiled back and the two headed off. Keith watched as Lance let out a sigh.

"You need help?"

"Nah, I got this. Do it all the time.” Lance put the leg back into place before standing up, seeming to rock on it, taking a few steps with it, Keith could hear air whoosh out with each step. Once it stopped releasing air and Lance seemed satisfied it was in place, the two started walking again.

"Does that happen a lot?” Keith asked, trying to fill the silence.

"Yeah.. I like kids more than adults. Kids ask questions, they’re curious. Adults are just… I don’t know, They just assume I need help all the time.”

"Oh.. I- I’m sor-"

"No not like that dude. You’re fine. I just mean… It’s fine to ask, it’s another thing to insist and then make me feel bad.”

"That happens?”

"Somehow. Guess you can kill with kindness. Come on, it’s over here.”

Musée Mécanique was in a pier shed that was meant for housing boats and supplies years ago, but now one of the large garage doors was gone permanently in exchange for glass front doors and a shop sign. Wandering in, one of the first things they were greeted with was a change machine and a horse race game that looked about 60 years old. Lance started with a twenty, making quarters and shoving all but two into his pocket.

"I’m a wiz at this one.”

He inserted the 50 cents into the game and grabbed one of the knobs. He looked at Keith pointedly to do the same. When a bell sounded the two began vigorously turning the knob, cracking their own wooden horse across the box to the finish line.

Keith won, and the two horses moved back into place.

"Woah, not bad.”

Keith shrugged. He couldn't see why Lance would get twenty bucks worth of coins for one dumb horse game.

"But I bet I can beat you at the others.”

"Others?”

Keith followed Lance as he began to head towards an entry way off to the side. There was a sudden buzzing of noise pouring through, a buzz that was filled with odd whoops and bells. When they
pushed into the entryway Keith felt his jaw fall slack.

The room seemed endless, large and open, with the garage doors open on the opposite side showing the bay and letting in a wonderfully cool sea breeze. The air was full of flashing lights and music and odd little noises, as surrounding the walls and filling the center were rows upon rows of arcade games. Not just the ones Keith knew from his days growing up, but ones from the 80’s and tons of antique wooden displays showing mechanical feats of the early 1920’s to the 1950’s.

Keith walked alongside Lance, marveling at the rows of wood and glass boxes. They had puppets, audited fortune tellers, tests of strength, old peep and photo shows and, Keith's favorite, mechanical ‘automated’ instruments.

Keith spent a good five bucks just watching each of the instruments play with wrapped attention, his favorite being a large box that played a duo between a piano and a violin. He had known about player pianos; they were mechanical themselves so it made sense to some extent, but the violin was something else. Each spot where a finger would go was replaced by a bit of metal, small and thin, connected by wires that would press each point of the string. An odd wheel wrapped in bow hair spun against the strings to make the noise. It was mesmerising.

“Hey Keith, you up for a challenge?”

Keith peeled his eyes away to look at Lance, standing tall looking and ecstatic, his thumb pointing towards the back of the room. Keith had noticed the machines seemed to be placed chronologically, ending in the mid eighties to early nineties.

Keith followed Lance back to a game of Donkey Kong and watched as Lance dived in, flying through board after board. Keith found himself watching with a similar fascination as he had with the odd instruments. This wasn’t as effortless as Lance was in the shop, but he was not completely out of his element. There was a fire and a passion behind his gaze that left Keith watching Lance’s face more than the game. Lance’s game ended, and he took the highscore spot.

He coolly rubbed under his nose, obviously unable to resist the prideful smirk stretching across his face.

“Beat that!” Lance challenged.

And Keith did.

In fact, Keith beat him by such a large margin, Lance demanded to play again to make sure Keith hadn’t rigged the game. Keith hadn’t of course. Lance moved on to Miss Packman. Keith played first, Lance beat him out. This continued on, through each arcade cabinet there. Everything from Tapper to Tron. They were evenly matched. Lance obliterated Keith in Wild Gunman, while Keith annihilated Lance in Mortal Combat.

Keith hadn’t realised how much time had passed, how much fun he was having, until he was laughing his ass off as Lance continuously screwed himself over in Doctor Mario.

“I hate to…” Lance was gasping for breath after Keith kicked his ass again. “Admit but… we are too evenly matched.”

“Yeah, I said that about twelve games ago dude.” Keith was trying to hide his smiling, it just wouldn’t stop; he could feel his cheeks getting sore.

“There is one last thing.”

“Fine, then let's get some food afterwards.”
Lance pulled him over by the arm to one of the older machines. It looked, well it looked gross. Bad color choice and he wasn’t sure what was supposed to be going on in the picture on the display. What caught his eye mainly was the half figure sitting on the table, with a luchador mask on.

“Arm Wrestling?” Keith read.

“I am a champ at this.” Lance inserted his quarter and gripped the hand of the figure. A bell rang and Keith could hear motors in the box, turning the plaster arm of the masked figure against Lance’s own hand. Lance looked like he was struggling, but soon he was winning, and in a few seconds the fake arm tapped the table. The sign ‘Champion’ lit up in yellow as a bell rang loud.

“That was about what.. Five seconds? Beat it, if you can.”

Keith didn’t really want to mostly because he didn’t want to touch the damn thing, but he did anyway. The bell rang and the harm pulled against his own, and in three seconds it was down.

“Woah wait! No fair! You have your stupid gloves, they probably help!”

Annoyed but not making an argument, Keith pulled off one of his gloves. Now he could feel the fading warmth from the painted plaster. He gripped it, and as it moved and he pushed against it he could feel the plaster pull at old calluses on his skin. The arm was down in two seconds.

Lance was speechless.

“. . . thi- That doesn’t prove anything. Come on, I’ll take you on for real!”

“Fine.”

Keith and Lance headed outside where people were eating at benches and tables lining the pier.

“Best two out of three.” Lance said as the two sat down. He set his right arm ready. Keith copied, gripping it tight. It wasn’t like the mechanical arm at all, it was warm and like his own, covered in calluses. He felt his heartbeat quicken as Lance flashed him a cunning smile.

“Three, two… one… GO!”

The two were just as evenly matched at real arm wrestling as they were in the arcade. They were in fact so matched, endlessly going back and forth in a stalemate that they grew a crowd. A crowd that began taking bets.

“Last round, Winner takes all!” someone called out.

“My money’s on you kid.” said an old man to Lance. “You’ve got the fighting spirit, I can tell, show him what you’re made of.”

“Yes sir!” Lance saluted the man, taking Keith’s hand for the final round.

“We’re cheering you on Handsome,” some girls giggled at Keith, who shrugged them off. The countdown struck again and the two were off, each pulling with surprising force. Keith could feel the sweat building between their hands.

Keith started to win, pulling Lance from the stalemate closer towards the table. Lance was fighting well to hold on. By this point it should be easy. By this point Keith should be able to push Lance in seconds. He had the leverage but Lance held on, pushing back.

In a quick moment Keith looked up to see Lance had looked up too, their eyes caught each other and
Keith felt his hand falter.

Lance winked and something boiled over inside Keith, sending him to grip the hand even harder and slam it into the table with a killer force. One that sent Lance tumbling to the ground to a chorus of cheers and disappointment.

“Holy shit!” Lance said as he spun to the ground.

“Oh my god! Lance! You okay dude?”

“Jesus, what does Shiro feed you, spinach only? You win dude.”

The crowd dispersed as Keith helped Lance back up the table. Once Lance had regained himself he stood and ran off to go get something to cool off with, returning with two popsicles.

The two sat, enjoying their icy treat and a cold sea breeze.

“Didn’t peg you to be that strong,” Lance said breaking the silence.

“I train a lot.”

“Hmm.. Yeah. Why though? You’re a test pilot, not like you need to be excessively buff.”

“I’m not buff, can’t stand buff, I just like working out. Relieves stress.”

“You should try gardening.”

“Crazy plant lady.”

“Hey!”

Another silence filled the air and Keith replayed the image of Lance falling over, trying not to focus on the previous memory of Lance winking at him.

“How come you think-” Keith started. “Shiro feeds me spinach?”

“It’s a joke, you know. Like Popeye.”

“Right, but why Shiro? Didn’t popeye eat spinach on his own?”

“Didn’t take you for the cooking type, you seem like the kind of guy that gets by on the bare essentials.”

Ouch, but true.

“Still confused though.”

“About what.”

“Shiro.”

“W-what about him.”

“Why would he feed me?”

“Don’t you guys eat together a lot?”
“We’re in the same building, we’re friends. Besides, I think I eat more with you these days.”

“Oh.”

Keith looked over at Lance who seemed to have turned away. Keith wasn’t the best at reading people, but it was a bit easier when he could see their face. Lance was an open book for the most part, he seemed to have pinned his heart to his sleeve long ago. But now he was hiding, or doing his best too. But why, why Sh-

“Do you- like Shiro?” Keith asked, Lance turned blushing slightly. That had to be it.

“Man does have an ass like a chicken fajita.”

“What?”

“Never mind.”

So Lance did like Shiro. That was... a little disappointing. Fuck that, it was a lot disappointing.

“I was just asking because you seem kinda tense when he’s around.” Keith felt an all too familiar stab at his heart as he watched Lance miles away in thought. This only seemed to get worse as Keith watched, flustered as Lance began tending to his popsicle that had begun to melt down his hand. Keith saw flashes of Lance’s tongue as it darted out, catching stray sweet drops of blue popsicle, before nearly swallowing the damn thing whole. Keith choked.

“Oh jeez dude, its not for show, you gotta eat it.” Lance said, eyeing Keith's own melting treat. All too smooth, Lance took his free hand and wrapped it around Keith's wrist, pulling it towards Lance's face and pulling him closer so that he could see sweat dripping down his face. Time moved in slow motion as he watched the same tongue, slightly blue, dart out and graze his fingers. It felt hot and at the same time cold, the cold spots of his tongue sent shivers down his spine and heat flooding to his face. Lance finished with his fingers, leaving Keith panting, then took one long lick of the frozen red treat in his hands and stopping his breath all together.

Keith’s whole body was rigid, and he felt frozen as Lance looked up at him with calm eyes that grew to saucers in seconds.

“Oh jeez! I should have gotten that flavor! It’s awesome!” Lance let out a wild laugh and tried to take a bite of the treat but Keith pulled it away on instinct. Keith’s breath was shaky and rattled painfully with each breath. Lance pouted at the action.

“Sorry bro, do you wanna try mine?” Lance held it out but Keith held up his hand in silent refusal. “Oh come on, try it-” Lance jutted the popsicle forward, aiming for Keith’s mouth but instead hit his cheek, leaving a streak of sticky sweet blue. The two froze before Keith gave Lance the coldest glare he could muster up. Lance let out a week laugh, and then ran. Keith chased after.

Keith felt himself holding back with each step. He could easily outrun Lance, and not because Lance wasn’t fit or not able to run well. Keith was actually surprised at how Lance moved his bulkier, fake limb. But there was something about the chase that was fun. He felt a smile stretch across his face as he listened to Lance’s panicked, crazed laughs. It almost felt like he was a kid again. He found himself laughing and gaining on Lance, finally tagging him on the back before pulling in front of him to slow down.

“Damn dude. You can really haul ass.” Lance panted, resting his hands on his knees.

“So can you.” Keith responded, breath heavy. He felt the heat of the sun warm his back like he was
standing next to an open oven. “Let’s go somewhere cool.”

“I know just the place.”

Turns out that place was just another short bus ride away. They chatted away about the games and their increasing hunger, having left their popsicles to melt on the pier. Keith sat next to Lance this time, and the two chatted casually while Keith tried not to focus on the tingling warmth from their legs touching. The city was a blur of color out of the side of his eye as he focused on the wild smiles and charming presence of Lance. He often thought about how Lance was able to get in so easily, despite Keith being so guarded. Was Lance just that good? Or was it that first charming quiet moment, where Keith had watched him in his garden, bewitched by the odd grace he held amongst his flowers like he was one of them?

They exited and Lance led him to a rather small mall, filled with Japanese storefronts and restaurants. In the back of his mind he remembered Shiro telling him about this place but he had pictured something different. Lance dragged him through the small mall, past the tea shops and book stores, over to a small window oddly encased in wood. Keith wouldn't have expected the tall wooden box in the middle of the mall to have food, it made more sense to be for security, but Lance went up and ordered a few things and in seconds was being handed something that looked like a fish.

“Here, it's taiyaki. Super good. Me and Hunk always come here, so don’t tell him we came or he’ll be super sad we didn’t get him any.” Lance handed one to Keith, and the two sat at a small table nearby.

It was a fish, well, fish shaped anyway. It looked almost like a waffle. When he bit into it, it was like a pancake filled with warm chocolate and banana. It was so good he felt himself groaning with delight before diving in for another bite.

“Jeez, maybe we should get more food,” Lance suggested. Keith nodded vigorously, having already reached his last bite.

“Well go easy on it okay? I was planning to make dinner later.”

Keith choked. Thankfully Lance didn’t notice, already on his way to buy another round of the fish pancakes. Part of his mind yelled at him to refuse, this was just too much, too generous, too much attention. But a guilty side of his mind enjoyed it. He enjoyed the way Lance was dragging him to all these small spots and buying him food and giving him his whole day off. Keith wondered if Lance was repaying him for the days Keith had bought lunch, or picked it up, and all the free time he spent in the shop. But that was different; he was bored and Lance was the easiest to talk to out of everyone on that street. Hunk was cool to talk to but he was usually super busy and Pidge had two modes: work or picking on him. So yeah, Keith would hang out with Lance.

Lance handed the treat to Keith who ate it slowly this time, savoring and enjoying each small bite as they sat in a comfortable silence.

Riding back home was a breeze. Lance made a stop at a local grocery for fresh ingredients to make some kinda pasta and Keith took this opportunity to pay for it, nearly getting into a heated argument with Lance about it. Still, Keith had logic, one pays the other prepares, and hearing Lance agree and claim he was gonna give Keith the best meal of his life seemed more than fair.

They made their way back into the familiar apartment, and Keith felt the abundant warmth and fresh oxygen from all the plants wash over him; he had no idea how tired he was. They had spent most of the day at the arcade but it had hardly felt like anything. Now he was so tired he just wanted to pass out.
He made his way to the couch to remove his shoes and as he sat Blue hopped into his lap. He scratched behind her ears mindlessly as he felt his eyes drift close, hearing the rattling and clanging of Lance in the distance.

Before he knew it he was waking up, Blue resting on his stomach as he laid stretched over the couch. The smell of grilled onions and garlic mixed with simmering tomato and basil was almost enough to lure him back to sleep.

“Yeah, he’s over here now.” He could hear Lance speaking quietly from the kitchen. He blinked hard, attempting to stay awake.

“No, we didn’t go, I told you we wouldn’t… Yeah, no. We just went over to pier 45 and hung out. I’m cooking now… He’s passed out…. I didn’t do anything to him. Jeez Hunk, do you think that little of me? Hold on, gonna put you on speaker, I need both hands.”

Hunk’s voice burst into the room.

“All I’m saying is you’ve got a pattern.”

“How can I have a pattern? I haven’t dated in years.”

“Yeah but not date less. I’m telling you, you do the same date over and over again. First the pier, then something tasty, then your place.”

“It’s not a date though, I was clear about that.”

“You can say it’s not a date all you want Lance, but the fact is we all know you’re smitten.”

“Shut up, please!”

“Why is he awake?”

“No? Hold on…” He could hear Lance’s awkward steps approach and he shut his eyes, hoping Lance wouldn’t notice how red his cheeks must be or how his heart was pounding in his chest. Lance must have taken just a quick glance because soon he was walking away again. “Yeah, he’s asleep. And I am not smitten.”

“You are so smitten with him. I’ve got your spam texts to prove it.”

“Even if I was.. A little bit interested, it doesn’t matter.”

“Oh? How come?”

“I think he’s secretly dating or got a thing for Shiro.”

“Wait, Shiro? The guy who is currently smitten on Allura? No freaking way.”

“Hunk, hear me out though-”

“No way. You’re just making up shit because you found a dude who fits your criteria but you don’t wanna get messed with again.”

Keith’s heart was beyond raising at this point, he was sure the rhythm mixed with his shallow breaths had woken Blue who was now looking at him with wide curious eyes as he eavesdropped. He heard Lance let out a long sigh mixed in with a muffled thud.
“I don’t know what I’m feeling, but I know that the street family needs to back off so I can figure this out.” Keith shifted, which sent Blue off his chest and running to her owner. He quickly tried to calm himself to appear as though he had just woken up.

“Hunk, I’ll call you later.” Lance harshly whispered into the phone, hanging up before Hunk could reply.

“H-hey.” Keith said, making his way over.

“H-Hi.” Lance seemed a tad stiffer than his usual demeanor, but smiled at Keith nonetheless.

“Sorry for.. falling asleep, I probably could have helped.”

“Hey, no problem. I’m nearly done. Why don’t you head out to the garden, we can eat out there.” Keith nodded, not trusting his voice. Not trusting that if he opened his mouth the sound of his heart wouldn't come pounding out. Not trusting that he wouldn’t say something stupid and run. Because that’s what he would normally do, first sign of any affection, of anything working out, he would run. Something kept him there though, not rooted to the spot, but moving calmly to grab his plate along with a glass of white wine Lance had offered him. Some calming force, outside his head, far from his normal train of thought, dragged him outside to the garden.

Maybe this was why. The garden he had been dying to see first hand, not from his apartment, or from below the shop, but right here; experiencing it. Maybe this wanting had been the thing that kept him rooted. After all, the sight was breath taking. Keith quickly found the small table, just off to one side beneath some of the taller potted trees, and set his food down before exploring further. The pots made little pathways to each section of the garden, and Keith could tell Lance had really utilised his space. Wires stretched across, seemingly connected to old support beams, lending extra support for some of the taller plants. In fact he could see Ivy beginning to crawl its way across.

He was sure it was more of a site to see in the day, not just with the light coming from inside the apartment. Many of the flowers lost their color in the shadow.

As soon as this thought crossed his mind, while hunched over a pot of pansies, fairy lights twinkled on from above, and a soft humming along with the gentle plucks of a guitar echoed over what appeared to be speakers. The fairy lights added a much needed glow to the whole scene, giving each plant just enough color back to make them pop out again, showing the wide variety of what the sky garden had to offer.

Keith looked around to see Lance closing the door, his own plate and glass in hand. His mind seemed to hyper focus on every small movement that Lance made, From adjusting his grip, to turning to make his way to the table, to the way he couldn’t help but examine each flower as he passed.

Few obsessions could be excused and even named beautiful, and this had to be one of them.

Lance followed Keith’s example, setting the plate down before joining Keith by his side. Keith tried his best to seem distracted.

“Do you like it?” It was hardly a question, that cocky grin, hands shoved in his pockets; Lance knew the answer.

“I love it.” It fell out of Keith like a breath, seeming to catch both off guard. The two adjusted, drawing their attention elsewhere. Lance, again began checking on every plant within a three foot radius, while Keith's eyes turned upwards, and his ears opened.
“I know this song.”

“It’s great right? Super calming.”

“It’s Brazilian, right?”

“Yeah, like there anthem or something. The plants love it.”

“The… Plants?”

“Yeah. Plants grow better with attention, not just water and food, but talking and singing.”

Keith couldn’t help it, a chuckle bubbled up from his chest.

“So that’s why you sing to them?”

“Huh?”

“I’ve heard you before, the night I moved in, I thought you were just singing for fun.”

“You heard?!” Lance stiffened, moving away for another distraction, finding it back at the table in his wine glass. The singer shifted from that of a man speaking in a language Keith didn’t understand, to that of a woman. One he could understand, the first few words being ‘Tall, tan, young and Lovely.’ Fitting.

“Y-yeah. Singing is good for the mind too though.”

“I bet.” Keith followed Lance to the table, taking a sip of his own wine. Lance seemed to be steady himself. Keith thought back to the conversation he had overheard. Whether or not Lance was into Keith this really was feeling like a date now. The lights and the setting, the music, all had this overpowering presence of budding romance. Maybe that was where he got his confidence from, maybe this was why he wasn’t running, because Lance was equally unsure. Neither of them were trying too hard, things were just moving naturally. Maybe Lance would have more confidence if he was sure Keith wasn’t dating Shiro, but a good way to prove that just wasn’t coming to mind. Neither of the moved, whether to sit down to eat or carry the conversation. Only small, unconscious movements seemed to chase through him, the tapping of a foot, the slight bob or sway of his head. He found himself closing his eyes. It was as if he hadn’t really listened to music in years. Music before was white noise, something he used to fill the void of silence while working, a job equally filled by radio news or some weird conspiracy podcast. There was nothing special about this song to him, but he felt as though in this moment something had been shedded. Some barrier that had kept him from listening in the past. His eyes shot open though as the soothing melodies were accompanied by a soft chuckle.

Lance was smiling, and seemed to have calmed down somewhat, enough at least to put down his glass, and gesture to the larger part of open deck. Holding his hand open for a dance.

This was a date, whether intended or subconscious. Keith could refuse the hand and call it a day, they could eat and he would go home and that would be that. Yet this new mind set, this new peaceful rhythm he had fallen into, that Lance had pulled him into, it was too tempting to end it. Maybe Lance really was as oblivious to his own feelings as he seemed, and perhaps some could consider Keith might be taking advantage of this situation to explore his own feelings. All Keith really knew is he took the hand without any hesitation.

The two swayed gently, no real fancy foot work due to the awkward gate in Lance's steps, but Keith was more than patient. He even enjoyed the slow simple movement. He watched Lance intently,
enjoying how Lances gaze would flicker up to his face before shy away, causing Lances grin to widen. Keith could feel the soreness in his own cheeks, how long had it been since he had smiled like that, consistently.

Lance licked his lips, looking as if he wanted to say something, when a loud vibration sounded between the two of them.

“Booty booty booty rockin’ everywhere, Booty booty booty booty rockin’ ever-”

“Hunk!!” Lance screamed into his phone, taking a step back; Keith still winced at the jarring noise. It had turned a complete 180 from a warm quite to a jarring headache. Keith, still close enough, could also make out Hunk’s screaming on the other end.

“Dude! You fucking liar! You are so on a date with Ke-”

Lance quickly covered the phone's receiver, looking panicked back at Keith, who immediately looked sideways, trying to pretend he didn’t hear anything. Lance uncovered the phone.

“What the fuck are you talking about Hunk.”

“I am talking about you and Keith being all hyper romantic.”

“How the fuck would you know!” Lance turned away, walking a few good feet to insure distance, and Keith could no longer hear Hunks voice.

Keith felt his own phone go off in his pocket. He answered.

“Shiro? What’s up.”

“Enjoying your ‘cat’?”

“What?”

“Nothing, you just look like you’re having fun.”

Keith looked around. His eye caught a white speck on the balcony on the building across the way, his balcony. There was a decent enough spot, where he could look up into it while having decent coverage, he snuck over and glanced up through the leaves to see Shiro waving, with what looked to be the whole crew.

“What the hell are you doing in my apartment!!”

“Well, I was checking on you, I guess I still am.”

Suddenly he sees Hunk pop up and wave too, and a radiating warmth behind him.

“Hunk! What are you doing up there!?!” Lance nearly screamed.

“Shiro invited us.”

“He can’t invite you to MY apartment, Get out!” Keith grumbled, turning around to speak into Lance’s phone.

“Wait! That’s your apartment!?” Lance screamed.

“The hell are you talking about, of course it is, you’ve been there.”
“I thought it was Shiro’s and yours?”

“What? No! Shiro lives a floor below me.”

“We decided to get a better view.”

“Keith! You really need to find another place to hide your spare key.” Pidge's voice chimed in.

There was a chorus of laughter over the two phones, Lance and Keith looked at each other.

“Move inside?” Lance suggested.

“Yeup.”

“I’ll get the lights.”

“I’ll get dinner.”

Keith scrambled back up, running over to grab the plates and balancing them on one arm, grabbing the wine in the other hand, before running back inside. Lance followed close behind, shutting the lights and the music, flipping them all off before stepping in and closing the blinds. Both seemed oddly out of breath, taking in the new silence.

“Think they will remember to use protection?” Pidge’s voice filled the silence and Lance scrambled for his phone.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I sure hope this chapter is as long as it felt to write it. I moved majorly within the last post, so about two weeks ago. I'm now living in Japan which is crazy. I've been spending more time settling so there have been some delays with this chapter. But I'm gonna keep working on this. And I hope the super long awkward crazy chapter here will make up for some of it.
The Tallest Sunflowers

Chapter Summary

Lets meet the new Lance family! (so many... he has so many family)
::EDIT:: Changes have been made to the spanish as will future chapters, Also translations are at the bottom! Thanks to all that helped!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dinner was awkward. In all honesty Keith wished he could have just left right then, after they scrambled back inside. But he ate out of respect in silence. It was tasty, and he couldn’t help but wish their ‘friends’ hadn’t ruined the night. Because now he was back to work and the flower shop was all but closed for wedding season.

At night, in the dark of his apartment, he would sneak glances across to the sky garden, where for the first time he saw almost more people than plants. Lance’s family must have been rather extended because the apartment looked ready to burst. Though many would eventually leave for the night, leaving Lance alone for the most part. Keith assumed someone had stayed due to the fact Lance kept sleeping out on the couch.

All of this was a distraction though.

Keith kept up with his normal testing during the day, flight sims and constant debates on new specs, and at night he leaned his rather large apartment and a decent sized storage units down in the garage to Pidge’s and Hunks work.

Keith really had to hand it to them, the two worked well under pure enthusiasm and excitement.

It had been just over a month since the date/not date with Lance and the three had managed to build a decent enough prototype. Now, they had no way of testing how well it flew. They were still working with rockets, and rockets plus wood floor apartments just didn’t mix. They had been able to locate an abandoned parking lot a few blocks away to test the boosters on their own, but not under the weight of the hover bike. Sparrow, was doing surprisingly well as a pet project, almost better then the hunk of junk he seemed to be test flying at S.N.I.F. That was not to say what he wasn’t testing wasn’t important. The ‘hunk of junk’ was designed for breaking atmospheres and long term fast space travel. Some small branch of government called’ Garrison’ was looking into a whole space program, with young pilots venturing out to explore new planets. Keith could respect this, he was disappointed he would never be considered due to his age. By the time the program would be set to launch he would probably be in his 50s.

The Sparrow however was designed for earth, and was the kind of transport Keith had always dreamed about, the fast kind. Its design allowed for complete control of systems by the pilot, which was something he was still fighting S.N.I.F. on.

The downside of building an Illegal hover bike in your apartment is you can’t invite your best friend over. If Shiro caught wind, Pidge was toast. Not to say Shiro would be angry, Shiro might even be excited, but Shiro was a rule follower, and the project would have to stop; or S.N.I.F. would take it
over.

Keith was not having it.

It worked long enough that he was mad for Shiro entering in his apartment without permission. But that excuse go old fast, and soon he favored the slightly more embarrassing ‘it's too much space.’ Keith in fact loved his apartment, but he now spent more time in Shiro’s, explaining how lonely the apartment felt.

“Maybe you should get a roommate?” He suggested one night over dinner. Pidge and Hunk up in his apartment working without him.

“You offering?”

“Nope.”

“Okay then, who do you suggest?”

“I’m not suggesting anything, I just think maybe you would enjoy your apartment more if you had someone to share it with.”

There was a loud bang from above, and Keith tensed. Shiro looked above, knowing Keith’s apartment is right above Shiro’s, but Keith just continued talking as if the noise had not existed.

“I like my space.”

Shiro looked at Keith, then back up to the ceiling, showing a disapproving confusion. It was as if Keith could hear his thoughts "Is it so messy that stuff is falling over?”

Shiro looked back at Keith who shrugged with the hint of an innocent smile on his face.

"So.. you're not lonely? You just said you were verbatim."

"Seemed like I needed to give you a reason for wanting to hang out. Compared to living in Nevada I’m a regular social butterfly." Shiro relaxed his skepticism and chuckled.

" I was worried," Shrio started, turning back towards his food. "That you would revert to your old ways. Obsessively working on your bike, or burying yourself in research, or that weird thing with aliens..."

" How can they not exist, there is no way we are the only ones in the universe!"

" My point is, I'm glad you took the job.” Keith felt himself deflate, a small part of him felt bad for not being honest with Shiro. He wasn't even sure why he was reluctant to take the job in the first place. Something about working for S.N.I.F. rubbed him the wrong way, maybe it was because they supplied the aircrafts for Galaxy Garrison. As long as he was concerned Galaxy Garrison could 'stuff it where the sun don't shine'. He had dealt with the ass hats before and was hardly willing to deal with them again. Never had he met a more uptight bunch of puppets, jerking themselves off over their new 'military' status. But S.N.I.F. was a little more low key, much more in Keith's ball house. He could be himself and it would be to achieve something, and that was understood, rather than his "attitude" knocking his "superior" down a few pegs. He had more than enough reason to stay in the desert till the hot till he was 100 and forgot all about the concept of 'other people'. He would have to get Shiro a decent Christmas gift for that.

"Yeah, me too." He spoke simply, no need to get mushy right now. He still had a lie to keep up.
Another loud crash and both heads darted up to the ceiling again.

"Man I must have really left it in some kinda state, I'd better go clean it." Keith stood up gaining a queer look from Shiro. "I'm taking this.." he said picking up his plate of nearly untouched curry.

"Uhh... sure? You want the leftovers too?"

"You don’t want them?"

"No, I just wont need them. I'm going.. out tomorrow." All too suddenly Shiro looked like he was more than ready for the conversation to end. But he made the mistake of being honest. Now Keith was interested.

"Out?"
"Out."
"For what?"
"Food."
"Where?"
"An Italian joint across town."
"With who?"
"..."
"With who Shiro?"
"Who says it’s with anyone?"
"You do."
" No I don't"
" You say it with your face."
" My 'face' is not saying anything."
" With... who..?"
"Can't a man enjoy a fancy Italian dinner by hims-"
"It's Alura, isn’t it?"

Shiro blanched, like a fish freshly plucked from the river, looking into the eyes of its executioner. Keith found himself grinning maliciously.

He stepped over to the stove and scrapped what was left of the curry into the pot. Doing the same with his leftover rice into another container. All while Shiro sat frozen, glaring at where Keith had just been, refusing to turn around to face him. As he packed up the leftover food he found himself whistling the tune that Lance had played for him that one night. It had actually been stuck in his head, and he found himself listening to it when no one was around. In his deep, unpracticed singing voice, he sang a few choice lyrics.
"Oh, but he watches so sadly..."

"Keith, quit it."

"How can he tell her he loves her..."

"I mean it." He turned around to give Keith a cold glare, but Keith just continued scooping rice and curry into containers, bobbing his head to the rhythm he recreated in his mind.

"Yes, he would give his heart gladly..."

"You have gotten really sassy lately."

"But each day when she walks to the sea, she looks straight ahead not at he-

He had been taking his time with each scoop, and Shiro seemed to grow impatient, shoving him out of the way. Keith hopped up on the kitchen island laughing as he watched Shiro struggle to remain cool.

"Tall and tan and young and lovl-"

"Singing about someone special now? You know, I'm not the only one that song applies too."

Keith shut up. He shut right up, which is exactly what Shiro wanted.

"Yeah, but I haven't been eyeing Allura for years before saying hello."

If ever there was a chink in Shiro's armor, it was his love life. Which almost didn't exist. The man was damn near unapproachable when it came to people liking him, so he hadn't dated much. So of course Allura who is strong, confident, not afraid of him and also very alluring, would catch his eye. The fact he was so spindless about it was all kind of funny to Keith. It took Keith moving into the same building as Shiro, and then making friends with everyone across the street for the two to actually exchange words. Talk about pathetic.

But still, Shiro saw the same weakness in Keith, and pounced.

"So you admit it? You like Lance?"

"He's attractive."

"And?"

"And I'm not gonna' talk about it with someone who has the romantic skills of a 3rd grader."

Shiro grimaced and handed Keith the food, now bagged up in a little shopping bag.

"Try to make this last, I can't cook for you all the time."

"Not if you're going out on hot dates you can't."

With that, Keith was nearly tossed out the door.

One quick elevator ride and he was back at his own door. You could hear the gentle noise of
tinkering, but beyond that it was quite. The noise even stopped altogether as he approached the door. Opening it up he found the lights off, and flicking them on he saw a hastily covered pile of junk and Hunks butt sticking out from the other side of the couch. If the couch was facing Keith and not turned sideways the hiding spot might have worked.

"Guys it's me."

Hunk popped up

"Oh thank goodness. When that last crash happened we were for sure Shiro was gonna head up."

"Naw, I covered it up."

"We know, we heard. Hunk just wanted to be safe."

Pidge's voice came from under the pile of junk, when Keith approached and lifted up the blanket he saw that Pidge had seemingly kept working through whatever chaos Hunk had made to hide their work. Pidge had their headphones on so it made Keith wonder how they could even hear him.

"Working hard?"

"Don't sass me when I'm coding." Keith smirked and dropped the blanket down again. Now that he had an idea where the laptop screen was, he could see the faintest glow of it from under the sheet, and the pitter patter of keys clicking nearly non stop.

"Pidge and I can get out of your hair in a bit, once we finish and clean up. Plus I'm starving."

"Here have this." Keith tossed the bag over to Hunk, who's eyes lit up in delight before he scurried over to the kitchen to get plates.

"Want some Pidge?" Hunk asked setting plates.

"Nah."

"Gonna rephrase that. Get over here and eat."

There was a long sigh from under the blanket followed by a soft click before Pidge emerged, hair wild and eyes sharp with a pointed glare. But there was no real bite to the look, and it lost some of it's edge when you saw how tired their eyes looked. Pidge sat and began spooning curry into their mouth, pulling over some papers that had been set on the counter and reviewing them.

Keith turned down his plate opting for an apple avoiding Pidge's "Cause he wants to look like an asshole" comment. Keith surveyed his apartment. Even with a secret hover bike being built it still had space to spare. He smiled to himself, it was exactly the kind of thing he would have obsessed over back home, in the same way too. What crazy luck he runs into two people as obsessive as he is.

"How much more time till its up and running?" Keith asked, trying and failing to mask the latent excitement in his voice.

"Bout a week. We also gotta wait for our test pilot to stop playing with the kid toys and move up to big boy testing." Keith watched as Pidge blew softly onto a bite of curry, for once giving it more attention than their work, and kicking their legs softly in delight as they swallowed happily. Hunk was equally if not more ecstatic about the food, odd considering he could have probably made something better with the scraps in Keith's fridge.
"Can't wait."

"Pidge and I have been trying to think of fair places to test, and we know you have talked about your place in the desert. But I think I might want to paint her first for heat resistance. We can't afford to blow an engine due to heat, and some of the inner wiring will cook if we don't prep for it. It won't matter how well it goes if we have nothing left after.

"Oh yeah, they have that space paint or whatever at S.N.I.F that they were designing for Garrison satellites. Is there something like that we can get?" Keith suggested.

"'Like it'? No. But we can just get some of the therm-neutralizing coating. Even if our first test isn't in the desert it's the best choice for material coating. I've seen them coat the main servers in the stuff, it's wild. It doesn't just keep exterior heat from getting in, but it pushes the interior heat out. We need it if we want this baby to be all terrain." Pidge said, taking a big bite and chewing happily, no longer looking over the notes at all.

"Uhh.. isn't it... top secret."

"so are Sparrow's engines, and yet you got two small scale ones sitting in your bedroom or... what do you use that room for? There is no bed."

"I use it for spare illegal engines." Pidge let out a wicked laugh and let question drop unanswered.

"So you're stealing the paint? I hope I'm not involved with that."

"Don't worry, you and your precious job are safe. I have the bio schematic for it and Hunk is gonna try to recreate it."

Hunk smiles with a mouth full of food.

"You two are something else. What on earth did you do with your spare time before this?"

"This is it." Hunk began, starting a new plate for himself. "Lance used to be our dream pilot. When he was flying he could understand a new interface in a snap, and he was always super dedicated to understanding how they functioned in and out, but he always refused. Dude won't go near a plane."

"I can imagine."

"It's not because what you think" Hunk started in. "Lance has some other things going on in his head about flying. It's less of a distrust and more of bad vibes. Like he's just stuck. Not to get into the details... Lance was a really good pilot.

"He was reckless, and clumsy."

"Ah... yeah he was."

"But he had good instinct and strategy and they made him honorary captain when he left. He had potential to be a great leader, crazy charismatic and hecka smart. When he was Air Force he knew every plane, the plains nickname, anyone he interacted with name and if they were married or not. Sometimes when their birthdays were too. As well as tons of battle strategies and formations. Just as well as he knows flowers.

Keith found his gaze wander as fresh thoughts, like a budding rose bush, beautiful and now stuck in his mind. His gaze shifted towards the the darkness out on his balcony, and the small amount of warm orange light that seeped in from the apartments surrounding him. They moved along the hand
railing to the right, and then down to see the corner of Lance's apartment, sitting like the crown jewel in an already dazzling crown. Lance himself was out of site, but Keith noticed a few figures he didn't recognize moving about. He kept watching and could just barely see an arm move out from the couch, shooing away one of the other figures. That was probably Lance. Keith found himself chuckling. Keith had already felt that Lance was more intelligent than he let on, it made sense. He seemed the type that would make up for lack of skill with brain power alone, but that wasn't to say Keith thought he was without skill. Their outing alone was enough information that his hand to eye coordination was at least somewhat matched in Keith's own.

"I can imagine." he said softly.

" I bet you could." Pidge spoke, but not from far away, from right next to him. Keith let out a harsh yelp, bumping into Hunk and letting out another surprised yelp that sent him crashing to the floor.

"H-How?" What did he want to ask? How long they had been their, how long he had been silent, or maybe how they managed to make it so close without Keith hearing. He felt like his heart was racing a thousand beats a second.

"Dude, you are not subtle." Hunk said smiling. "Nice view of the garden though, you peek often?"

"Wha? No!"

"I'll take that as a yes." Pidge chimed in. "Is that why you have a little cactus outside?"

"What? No! I bought it from my place in Nevada, that balcony gets the most light."

"But it's so sad and needy looking."

"Shut up!"

"Pidge, back off. If he wants to gaze at our friend while said friend is unaware, I say let him."

Keith was completely shut up now, he gave up arguing and opted for the much more sensible plan of laying on the floor with his hands covering his face.

"Will you two shut up? It's not like that."

"But you told Shiro you thought he was attractive, right?" Hunk asked innocently.

"...How... do you know that." Keith removed his hands from his eyes and sat up.

"I have him bugged." Pidge answered simply with a shrug as if this was normal, you just bug your friends all the time. Why not? What is privacy these days between good friends! "Your singing voice needs work by the way."

"Why..." Was all he could get out, he felt his mind collapsing into abstract thought.

"Practice makes perfect. Try starting with scales."

"No, I mean... Why do you have Shiro bugged?"

"Oh! Because I got him the date with Alura."

"So he let you...?"

"What? No. Even Shiro's not that trusting. I asked him to hold onto something for me, a project for
"safe keeping."

"He bought that?"

"I'm sure he wasn't 100% at his best mental capacity with that decision when most of it was diverted to Alura's... everything."

"Geese." Keith returned to laying on the ground covering his face. Pidge and Hunk joined him, Pidge grabbing the pillow from the couch to sit on and Hunk laying out on his stomach, continuing to eat his second helping.

"So back to the topic at hand." Pidge said. Keith could hear their evil grin that he knew was there. "Hunk and I were wondering what kind of attraction you have to our little surrogate brother. Is it just physical? or maybe something more?"

"'More'?"

"Yeah like, emotional. Or, one of those things were you like him for him and not just his peg leg."

"Are you really sure that is Lance's defining feature?"

"Its for sure the most interesting."

"This is why you don't have anyone Pidge."

"Maybe I don't want anyone Hunk."

"Both..." Keith finally spoke, bringing his friends attention back down to him. He felt as though someone had set off a hundred matches just under the skin of his face.

"Both?"

"Both. I'm attracted to him in a physical and personal way...

He could not believe he was doing this, but somehow discussing this with Pidge and Hunk was slightly less embarrassing enough to let it be okay. Besides there was no real harm, nothing was concrete or final in his mind yet about Lance.

"So... what does this mean." Hunk said.

"Please don't say it means I love him." Keith felt the words catch abruptly in his throat, feeling like they tore a hole in his throat as they left.

"Huh? What? No.. I mean Probably? Hunk and I were talking about our bet. I'd say a tie."

"Bet." Keith asked warning

"I bet Hunk that 'attractive' to you meant looks. Hunk bet personality. which, harsh dude... hating on your best bros looks."

"I'm not hating. I'm just sayin' he’s got a better personality, if anything I’m complimenting him, his personality is better than his looks which are great."

"Can we please stop." Keith groaned and flipped over."
"What do you mean his personality is better than his looks, I mean I love Lance like the brother I never wanted but grew to love anyway, but the man's a royal pain."

Keith let out a groan.

"He's got charisma. How can you deny he doesn't have charm when he won you over."

"Guys..."

"He cheated."

"You guys."

"How is knowing exactly what you want, every birthday and Christmas cheating."

"Hey! Can we please just-"

"He is buying my affection."

Keith let out another groan.

"You still accept the gifts."

"Yeah, Lances gifts are the best. The dude knows what I want more than I do."

"GUYS!" They stop and look over at him, which he's not sure how he looks, but it's enough to put a grin on Pidges face.

"If you want an explanation, I find I'm interesting. He's not... ugly. Is average. Anything interesting about him physically, not counting his leg, is annoying. His smirk, his stupidly short hair, and the absurd amount of perf- I mean he somehow manages to stay averagely toned. His personality is the same. Sure he's smart and creative and knows you better than he lets on, and he's funny and a bit wild but not in a damaging w- dammit." During his rant Keith realized he had managed to unseat himself and begin to pass across the wood floor by the large window. He now looked down at Hunk who was staring open mouthed and Pidge who could not smirk any harder even if they tried.

"Woah, Keith. You are mega boned my friend."

"Dammit." Keith huffed, tossing himself on the couch.

"Keith, It’s not that bad." Keith glared up at Pidge. "Really."

"It is for me."

"Why? What do you do when you usually have a crush." Hunk asked, in a sweet tone, trying to soothe the obviously disgruntled Keith.

"I don't..."

"Don't... what...confess?" Hunk asked.

"I don't get crushes."

"Bullshit." Pidge chimed in. Keith glared at her, giving her a look that tried to explain, without
words, how dead serious he is. She glared right back for several seconds before her eyes widened. "Woah... really? Lance is your first crush?"

It felt so weird to call it that, but he supposed that was a better way to put it then fruitless pining. A crush was something childish, an easy broken spell based off first impressions, or at least that's what he thought.

"Wait... are you a virgin?" Pidge said suddenly.

"What!? No!"

"Okay, will Lance be your first dude?"

"No. What do you mean 'will' I know he’s bi but."

"How do you know he's bi? Is this another gaydar thing?" Hunk asked looking at Pidge.

"No, he told me."

"Lance told you he was bi?" The two asked in tandem, which was more on the creepy side, but Keith push passed it and nodded.

"Oh shit. I need to bug you next."

"Please don't."

"What were you guys talking about that lead to that?"

"Uhh... I think I brought up how Shiro wants me to have some form of affection, so I joked that it was a cat or a boyfriend with him. I guess he didn't know I was gay? He didn't really say but he just seemed super confused."

"Oh he knew you were gay, he just thought you were taken." Hunk said before quickly slapping a hand over his mouth, eyes filling with panic. What Hunk has said seemed harmless enough but now Hunk had shown that it had been a secret.

"Taken? Who did he think I was with? My cactus?" Keith found himself grinning in amusement.

"By Shir-" Pidge had started but Hunks hand covered more than half their face to block out any more sound.

"Shiro?" Hunk violently shook his head, while Pidge violently nodded theirs.

Lance had thought he was dating Shiro? He let that sink in for a moment. Sure they spent time together, and besides from Lance, Pidge, Hunk, and the rest of the crew on the street he was Shiro was his only friend. He might have dragged Shiro over to game night due to his slightly restless nerves when dealing with people he was less familiar with. He thought about how easy they had been able to spot the crew from Lances garden, and Lances reaction to him being gay...

"You're single?!"

Keith had thought it had been a cover. But maybe Lance really was shocked. Maybe he had already thought...

"What does Shiro feed you... Don’t you guys eat together a lot?"
Even after knowing he was single, maybe he still thought there was something going on. Well that can't last long once he finds out how ridiculously straight and in love he is with Alura. But what did that mean for him. Had Lance been curious, or weighing his own chances.

The mere thought that Lance would be interested, even in a small mutual way like Keith, a childish crush, or even something more petty, set Keith's face unfire. He was sure all it would take was a dry spark for his face to ignite the couch beneath him. His arm covered his face again, his inner elbow finding his noses, shielding his eyes from the light and the knowing faces of his friends.

"You should go see him." Hunk started.

"What why?"

"'Cause I'm the only one that has seen him in a while, and I know he wants to see you, and he will be super excited."

"And you'll get to meet his family, they're all super nice and will tell you a bunch of awesome embarrassing stories." Pidge chimed in. "I might even stop in, it might be a new form of comedy to watch him squirm with this new interaction."

"So I just show up for no reason? Isn't that a little forward, I don't even..."

"If you say 'like him like that' I will bug you and use it against you, whether it's cute conversations or you crying his name out while you yank your chain in the night."

"Jesus Pidge!" Hunk cried.

Keith just found himself swallowing in fear. It's not like it has happened, he had more self control than that, but he feared that it could.

Sitting up and looking over the couch to the Kitchen his eyes caught what they were looking for, the clean vase that had been sitting unused on his counter.

".. Yeah. Okay."

"For real?" Hunk nearly yelped, looking between the two in fear.

"I'm not saying I have feelings, but I'm not saying I don't. So I'll go see him. He owes me flowers."

He wished he felt as confident as he sounded last night with Pidge and Hunk. He called in a sick day, which Shiro had called him to ask what was really wrong due to the fact Keith never took sick days. Keith dodged every question with one of his own about Alura, evening threatening to call the main desk back and make an announcement about Shiro’s date tonight. That made Shiro hang up. It was easy enough to call in, but getting out and over their had taken some time.

He had got his pants back from Alura when he delivered the clothing he had worn out, and they fit like new. That coupled with a black shirt and his favorite jacket he looked alright. Keith was never vain but never more did he over think his look, right down to how he should hold the vase when he went back.

Cradle it in one arm, two arms, hold it limply at his side, maybe use Shiro's shopping bag?

He opted for what appeared to be man handling it, unable to decide he just left his apartment before
he had anymore time to overthink.

She shop had a handwritten sign that read "closed for event preparation" taped to the inside of the front door. Keith tested the door, locked. He was about to move on when someone rushed the door and opened it violently, causing the bell chime to go wild.

It was a girl, shorter than him and younger, about fourteen, but that wasn’t what was so jarring. It was like he was looking at a young Lance. Sure her features were softer, like her chin and nose, she had long hair that fell past her shoulders. But the shape and color of her eyes, her mouth, her ears, her hair color, everything screamed Lance. Even that wild look in her eyes.

"It's you." She spoke, and there was something about her tone that reminded Keith of Lance, specifically of the first day they had met.

"Uhh.. is it? It could not be." He wasn't sure he wanted to be blindly associated with anything by anyone in Lance’s family. For fear of repeating that first encounter. The girl just rolled her eyes and made a grab for the sleeve of the jacket, pulling him in by the arm. "Hey!"

"Alice! We're closed, don't let anyone in." He heard Lance from the far back, far from help. Thankfully someone else crossed their path. It was an older woman, with dark rich chocolate hair, and creamy coffee skin, he could see several of the softer features from the young girl reflected in this older woman, but the resemblance wasn't overly strong, in fact the woman looked almost to young to consider to be the girl's mother.

"Alice! You know better, what-" The older woman that had appeared looked at Keith, her eyes possessing his face. She took a step forward, causing Keith to try to step back, but the young girl still had her tight grip on him. The older woman's hands flew at his head, lifting his bangs. Keith felt his cheeks warm and a prickle of tension at the back of his neck.

"Ah! El de las cejas gruesas." The woman spoke, but Keith didn't recognize a word.

"Sip, el novio de Lance. Your friends with Lance right?"

Is that what “Novio” ment, friend?

"Yes?"

The girl grinned widely,

"Abuela, el atractivo novio de tu nieto vino a visitar, ven a ver lo bonito que es."

"El novio de Lance? Ohh debo verlo!"

A third voice sounded off, soon followed by a third woman appearing, Silver gray hair and tan and looking every bit like Lance and the young girl. By now the middle woman had let go of Keith as had the youngest. Making room for the oldest to seemingly inspect him. Her gaze wandered up and down, she pinched a tuft of hair at his neck.

"Demasiado largo." Then proceeded to walk around. He felt his nerves rise when she was behind him, out of sight, and he was right too because he felt a hard pinch through his jeans at his right butt cheek.

"Bueno, Lance tiene preferencias con sus amantes, no es así?"

"Oh mamá, no te burles del pobre chico." Said the middle woman
"Y tampoco le pellizques el trasero!" Said the girl, prompting a smack from the middle woman.

"Hello dear," She finally introduced herself in English, and Keith never thought he would be so happy as to hear those two words that he knew he could understand. "My name is Rosa, I'm Lances Mama." She smiled, and Keith was floored, the woman hardly looked older than thirty-five. "This Is my mother and Law, Elena, and my youngest daughter Alice."

"Keith."

"I thought it was ‘Mr. Groovy with a booty’?" Alice snickered and earned another whack on the head from Rosa. Keith felt his face heat up, he had forgotten about that.

"Hey! I thought I was getting help, but it seems like everyone is more interested in- oh." Lance had appeared, trailing off his sentence to a near pathetic whine, his face flushing red in a way that Keith was sure his reflected. This was becoming a nightmare, he should have just stayed home, or not called in in the first place.

"K-Keith, hi. Uh.. I-"

"I know you’re busy with prep stuff and... Family. But I got called off today and my home desk looked kinda gray without your flowers so... uh... yeah." He held out the vase. "I'll pay of course."

Lance seemed dumbstruck, gazing at the vase as if he had never seen one in his life and had no idea what it was for.

"Of course he will! Lance! Go head to the main case, you need a break anyway! Trabajas muy duro!" Rose said guiding the two in.

"Que esta haciendo este chico acá?" Elena asked.

"Esta aquí porque quiere más de las flores de Lance." Rosa replied

"Oh Dios, tu hijo es bastante bueno. Se gana esa cara bonita con flores. Cuando se van a casar?"

Elena continued. Keith really wished he understood.

"Casar?!" Lance shouted, his artificial leg tripping over a small step to the main counter area. Thankfully Keith caught his arm and pulled him up, Lance despite being well built, wasn't far out of Keith's lifting weight range. The two woman clapped enthusiastically, praising Keith, while Alice tried to contain her laughter.

Keith helped Lance up fully and over to the counter where he proceeded to bury himself in his arms on the counter.

"Controlate Lance, estas paredes son delgadas y hay ventanas acá." Elena cackled before heading over to the back room and what appeared to be the door to the stairs leading up to the apartment.

"Lance, we will be back in a half hour to get back to work. Your father and Anthony should be back sometime after that so no more distractions after okay?"

"Yeah, okay."

"Lance, si cojes a tu novio, trata de no dejar un lío." Alice giggled, sending swarms of red into Lance’s face again.

"Regresa acá! Te voy a lavar esa boquita con jabón"
"Should I be worried about what you guys are saying?"

"Huh?" Lance spun around, as if just remembering Keith was here. "Oh, uh no. It's just small stuff. Alice has no respect for me."

"Should she?" Keith asked, throwing in a smirk.

"I outrank her, I'm older.

"Maybe you're adopted and they haven't told you, cause your mom looks way to young to have had you."

Lance let out a warm burst of laughter, it was violently infectious, pulling Keith's half amused smirk as wide as it could go. It was almost painful.

"Yeah, moms looks fab. She had me when she was still kinda young, like 20? It's not uncommon anything younger than me just seems too young."

"Good to know your standards will be forever changing."

Lance shrugged, he seemed to have pulled himself back to normal. He turned around and opened the case, blindly gesturing at Keith to set the glass on the table, and then began pulling out some flower stalks and setting them on the table.

"So, did you just come for flowers?"

"And to see you, I got attached to our lunches."

"Haha, yeah. Me too. It's been crazy loud here, I'm glad you stopped by, I could use a more quiet conversation."

"I'll do my best."

Lance was measuring long stalks of sunflowers to the height of the vase to the counter top, each stalk was nearly a meter long, far larger than Keith was used to seeing in Lance's shop. The blossoms and stock with were also much larger.

"New sunflowers?" Keith was kicking himself for how dumb he sounded. He knew Lance got a fresh shipment of flowers in each week, so every week the flowers were obviously different. Thankfully Lance smiled and nodded.

"These are special, from my family's home garden. They always try to bring me a good bunch for my apartment."

"Oh! You don't have to waste them on me." Keith cringed as Lance snapped another stalk. He was not arranging them right away, but separating them. Putting the extra large stalks to the side.

"I'm not wasting, I want to try something."

Keith felt awkward for staring but he couldn't stop. He watched as lance as he pulled several more flowers out of the case as well as some bunches of greenery, a single twirling twig, a large leaf.
Like Keith had watched before Lance started with slicing the spine of the large leaf like filleting a fish. Clean, precise and fast. He wrapped it around his hand, putting it in the vase and letting go. Then he left the table with the vase in hand, Keith could hear running water and a large plop. When he returned there was a mossy looking brick in the vase, but you could only tell looking down into it. Lance started arranging. First the two, now much shorter, sunflowers. To Keith it looked like he stuck them in at random. Followed by some bursts of white from the irises and a few bunches of greenish hydrangea near the base. He turned to the stocks and a tub of brilliant blue forget me nots. He took a stem, each holding several bunches of vibrant blue small flower. He wrapped the smaller stem of forget me nots around the old sunflower stem in experiment, before leaving the two on the table and ducking back to behind the counter.

Keith had not expected for lance to pull out a small case. With what looked to be sewing pins. He pinned the base of the forget me not stem to that of the scrap sunflower stem. Winding it around carefully in a spiral. He did this twice. Starting the two off in separate places, adding in a few pieces of green bunch or a think hydrangea scrap. The next one went the same but he added a stem of baby's breath straight up to be wrapped with the sunflower stem. the effect was something so bizarre.

He realized he had yet to say anything, and let his mouth open and just say the first thing that came to mind while his focused stayed narrowed in on Lance and his work.

"So am I going to have to start learning Spanish, or are you gonna explain why your grandmother pinched my but?" Lance choked on what was presumably spit, his face was a mix of horror and humor.

"She did what?"

"She touched my hair too." Keith said, leaning forward to rest his arms on the table and watch Lance work more closely, "said something like… ‘Demasiado largo’?"

Lance let out a burst of a laugh that drifted into a fit of low giggles. His eyes never left his work. He began sizing up what looked to be awkward gaps, as if trying to imagine what might fix them.

"She's a little eccentric. She gets worse when she's here, thinks she still runs this place. She will be commanding us from the grave. She was just sizing you up."

"My hair and butt is an important factor?" Lance shrugged. "Okay well what did your mom say?"

"How should I know, I wasn't there."

"She looked at my forehead and said something like ‘cejas gruesas’?"

Lances laugh was too fast for his lips to open, making an odd fart noise with his mouth before giggling again.

"It means, 'thick eyebrows'"

Keith was never self conscious, but he felt his hand fly and nearly smack himself in the head to cover them. He felt that nauseating heat rise in his cheeks again.

"It's not a bad thing. It's just a striking feature that they stuck to."

"Okay..." Keith apprehensively put his hand down, and relaxed again. Lance had now grabbed a few white lilies to fill the gaps, grabbing a white medical glove from under the table and picking off
the pollen pods before taking a paint brush and brushing the stray pollen off. The work seemed nearly done, and Lance was now grabbing a spool of twine to wrap around the neck of the small vase; a small piece of tape holding it in place. "How come your sister knew me?"

Lance nearly knocked the vase over. Scrambling he grabbed it and hurried to the back, and Keith could hear the rushing echo of water running through the pipes and into a container. It sounded Lance didn't appear for several minutes, now holding the finished creation. It was the most detailed work Keith had seen him do so far.

Lance once again began to obsessively clean his work space, letting Keith gaze at the creation.

"So, what were we talking about again?"

Keith could feel Lance was trying to change the subject, rather than having actually forgotten it. But Lance's reaction made Keith press even further.

"I was asking how your sister knew me."

"Ah well.. That." Lance started. Far more composed than Keith had expected. "She uh.. found my phone? And was kinda trolling through my contacts."

"Why would she do that?" Prank or no, he wasn't really sure he could understand the expected gain from the action.

"She's... She is messing with me. More or less. She calls it 'checking up on' me. She's kind hearted, just meddling."

"I can't imagine that combo of character traits." Keith said, allowing the sarcasm to drool off every word.

Lance must have decided to ignore him, and instead try to look for something to do. He seemed oddly lost, the shop was in perfect working order, no doubt with the extra help, so now that there was a pause Lance just stood still; his eyes roaming in the search for something to do. Keith felt a bit awkward as well. He usually just sat around when he talked with Lance, but Lance always had something to do, so now that there was nothing, the full focus of the moment was being to on whatever they were going to talk about, and suddenly Keith could not think of anything worth interest. Well, besides the hovercraft he was helping to build that was sitting up in his apartment. Somehow talking about how he was building and planning to test something with Lances two closest friends after they had not managed to get Lance himself to join in might split more hairs than Keith wanted. Sure he had been itching to invite Lance along regardless. Lance had after all, shown Keith his garden, and the shack out in Nevada in a sense an equal to Keith.

He wanted to, in a completely non romantic way, stargaze. Keith understood the need to do something with his time, and while it looked like Lance threw himself completely into plant work at work and at home, and Keith was known to dabble in slightly obsessive behavior, stargazing had been something so completely calming. Maybe he would invite him. But that would mean having to tell Lance about Sparrow.

He wasn't even sure how to bring it up. He watched Lance bounce, hearing a slight creak from the artificial leg, before Lance seemed to give up finding something to do. He checked his watch and looked over at Keith.
" You want me to get out of your hair?"

" What? Not. To be honest I'd love to talk like normal but..

" but'?"

" I got this feeling that my family might be listening in." Lance offered Keith a shy smile. Keith turned his gaze to the door just barely visible beyond the back room entrance. He saw it shift just slightly. He wasn't sure if Keith's 'feeling' was mock or genuine, regardless Keith beckoned him down closer to Keith, which Lance obliged instantly. Keith swallowed that itch in his throat trying to focus on the matter at hand.

" So..." Keith whispered. " I have something to tell you, a secret, but you can't freak out."

" no guarantees, I've got a thing for being over dramatic." Lance whispered back, a shit eating grin stretching across his face. Keith could feel Lances warm breath and smell a hint of mint coming from him.

" Well.. Pidge, Hunk and I... we're..." He faltered, swallowing hard. It's not that he didn't trust Lance. He was sure if he asked Lance would keep this from Shiro.

" Building an Illegal hover bike in your big ass apartment."

Keith gapped.

" That's a secret?"

" We've been keeping it from Shiro for weeks."

" ...and I've known Pidge hacks into anything with a motherboard and Hunk mechanical and bio smarts don't end with awesome food creations and being a handyman. While this may be the farthest the two have gotten " illegally" building something it's not really news."

" How could you tell?"

" Hunk can't whisper. He can pick and choose keywords to say instead to throw people off, but I know him too well. If he does try to whisper, it's like a stage one. He also has been letting his staff take over more and more, he usually freaks when he's not there to run the place; but something has him obsessing enough that he’s taking more evenings off. Which will be good for him, he needs to get out of that place more. Pidge is too happy. Like I’m sure I heard them whistling the other day which isn’t news but they weren’t messing with someone or being a little shit and that is different. So that means they are up to something, and it's probably illegal. I saw the plans on Pidge's desk a few months ago while she was working and put two and two together."

Keith swallowed hard, lowering his head feeling guilty.

" I know my own friends."

" You're not.. upset?"

"Upset that you guys didn't tell me? A little. But we've all been busy, and you just did try to tell me so I guess that's okay.”

Keith remained quiet, his head hung low in an odd shame. Lance had known that they weren't including him, and it felt wrong.
“Really, Keith. It’s okay. I’ve been busy anyway.”

“Y-yeah.”

“Why bring it up anyway?”

“Well. It’s still being built, but they wanna test it and the site we picked out is where I used to live.”

Lance quirked up an eyebrow. Keith’s own past had usually been single words or sentences. So despite knowing Lance was interested and had questions, he never asked them. So this was kinda a big deal.

“Yeah?” It was hard not to see the bubbling excitement on his face.

“Yeah. I own a small bit of land out there. It’s not much room in terms of my old place, so Pidge and Hunk were planning on getting a hotel. But I was gonna just stay at my old place and you’re welcome to join us.”

Lance’s eyes seemed to vibrate, hyper focused on his own as if trying to read his mind. Keith wasn’t sure if it was selfish to extend this offer, he just wanted to spend more time with Lance. To see him outside of their normal environment, and share at least something on a deeper level. Maybe then he could accept that Lance was interested, because as it was now, he couldn’t understand why. Really that whole bundle of thoughts from the conversation he had overheard was best left to not think about, lest he lose his shit in front of the first person he was attracted to possibly ever.

The grin that blossomed on Lance's face was deadly, sending a gust of heat bellowing from Keith’s stomach to his face.

“I’ll be there. When’s the big road trip.”

“In about a month probably. We can wait till you’re done with work, and I gotta finish testing till they put me on hold again.”

“That isn’t what happened today?”

“No, I called in sick.”

“W-why?” Lance seemed frozen. They both knew Keith was a workaholic, they both knew that him being in the shop now meant he wasn’t sick.

“Didn’t feel like working today.” Keith said, feeling himself grin ever so slightly, and sending Lance apparently off balance. His weight seemed to shift and soon Keith was darting around the table to catch Lance before Lance’s face smashed into the counter top. He just barely made it, and was met with a familiar warmth and smell. His hand was placed over lance's chest, pushing upwards to help Lance back into place. Through the shirt fabric he could feel the sporadic heartbeat that matched his own. Looking up he could see deep blue eyes gazing at him, wide eyed and panicked but also soft.

Keith felt weak, and instead of helping Lance up he lowered them both to the floor, Keith gaining a stable Place on his knees. He couldn’t break away. The gaze was just too intense, Lance was too close, smelt too sweet; it was all slowly murdering Keiths voice of reason. He felt himself leaning in, when thundering steps came down.

“Lanceeey, se acabo el tiempo con tu pareja, llevatelo.” The two broke apart like either one had caught fire, and Keith felt himself groan in frustration. Alice had just leapt down the stairs with Blue riding on her shoulders.
“We… we’re not-” Lance shouted. Keith fell back a bit, watching the two siblings battle it out. Lance had always held a tired look to him, one that made Keith feel Lance looked more like a young father to Alice then an older brother; but in this moment of bickering Lance seemed ten years younger. There was no denying the two were siblings and close at that. It was almost addicting to see him so full of life, almost like when they were back at the arcade museum.

A strong part of Keith wanted to stay, but he knew better and opted for reaching for the vase, clearing his throat in a soft attempt to grab their attention. The act of grabbing the flowers alone grabbed Alice’s attention, her gaze seemed fixed on them as they rested in Keith’s arms.

He felt a rise in tension as suddenly Lance was the only one shouting in Spanish. He stopped looking between the two.

“I was… Gonna head out.” Keith started awkwardly. “Thanks again, for… this.” He motioned to them and noticed how Alice’s eyes followed it.

“Oh, yeah. Of course. No problem. I’ll see you around.”

No one moved, not even Keith to leave, in fact Alice was the first to stride forward her hands finding one of the wrapped stems and trailing along it. Blue seemed to recognize Keith and with his free hand, Keith willingly pet the cat sat on the girl's shoulder.

This drew Alice’s attention away from the flowers and to Keith. She was studying him, there was no other way to phrase it, it was as if he was foreign, or she had never seen him before. Suddenly the door chimed, drawing everyone’s attention, and there stood the woman from before. Maria. Keith looked around, gaging expressions, Lance was stoic, rage hiding beneath a mask so fast set he looked unfamiliar. Alice was wide eyed and worried. Before he could pull back she grabbed his arm and pulled him to the back of the shop to the stairs leading up to Lance's apartment. She spun around him and pushed as he tried to pull back and leave, not listening to any of his cries of protests. Lance hadn’t turned to acknowledge the two of them as they left.

Back in the apartment he was greeted by Rosa and Elena.

“Oh! Hello Keith! Would you like some tea?” Rosa offered.

“Este niño es de nuestra familia ahora. Lance es astuto.” Elena chattered on.

“Alice, what's wrong?” Rosa seemed to acknowledge Alice, who looked somewhat panicked, and much like her brother, holding back rage.

“Maria.”

“MARIA?!” The two woman gasped. Keith set the flowers down and took a seat, trying not to hide but to remove himself from what felt like a family moment.

“Esa perra. Tiene que ser estupida para pensar que puede entrar aquí. Sí fuera veinte años más joven yo-”

“But you're not.. Mama.” Rosa looked distressed. Without thinking, Keith stood and began fixing tea for the three woman. In the minutes it took to prepare he lightly listened to the discussion, his Spanish only allowing him so many words. Like Lance, Maria, and whore. When the tea was done he almost seemed to startle the woman who seemed to forget he was even there.

“Ah.. gracias Keith.” Rosa.
“So, this Maria is bad news?” He tentatively asked.

“The worst!” Chimed Alice.

“Sí, en el infierno tienen un espacio reservado para las almas como la de ella.”

“She… Nearly tore this family apart. Lance… Lance was always a boy who would wear his heart on his sleeve, in many ways he still is today. He met Maria when he was young.”

“y tonto.” Elena sipped her tea.

“- He fell in love with her, because he trusted her lies. Maria wanted this shop. She often spoke of how much she loved it as a child, but we soon discovered these lies. We don’t know what draws her to this place, but she is stubborn. She offered to buy it fair and square years ago, when Elena still owned and lived here. Of course we turned her down. She took it personally and has since wanted to see to this places destruction. She won Lance over, pushing him towards his dream at the same time in a far more… drastic way.”

“Send Lance off to die at war so she could take over the shop.” Alice joined in. “A shop he wouldn’t have owned if she didn’t push him to take over it before they got married.”

Keith choked.

“Married?!”

“Oh my, you didn’t know?” Rosa looked distressed. “Please do not think less of him, he was… so trusting. It’s complicated.”

“Whats complicated. She pushed Lance to inherit, pushed him to join the airforce instead of saving up for schooling, and pushed them to get married. Then Lance doesn’t die enough and she breaks it off when he decides he’s gonna run the store. You know, cause he can’t follow his dream now.”

Keith could feel the bite of nails in his palms. The ridged muscles tensing under the skin of his shoulders and neck, holding back, holding back something.

“What’s the full story.” he found himself growling. Rosa looked sad, but obliged him.

“Years ago, when Lance was still in college, he worked in the shop part time. At the time we didn’t know but weeks prior Maria’s boss had offered to buy the place but we refused. So in comes Maria, innocent looking, nothing like she is today, asking for a partnership. We refused again, but she seemed polite and began visiting more and more often. Lance is often swayed by looks, but she had some sob story set up to tug on the boys heartstrings. The two dated, and to our knowledge she quit working at her company and started helping around the shop, she was…. Family.”

“But she wasn’t.” Alice picked up with bitterness, savaging her words. “She had everyone fooled. But then she talked Lance into taking over, and it seemed odd, but she said it would help him with money to save up for school. So he did. When that didn’t pay off she convinced him to join the Air Force after they got married.”

“Now Alice, be fair. Lance had considered that idea long before Maria. It’s not her fault what happened to him.”

“She convinced him! She was gonna run the store while he would be a test pilot and sabotage it from inside. Bankrupting us!”
Rosa said nothing against this. But continued.

“When Lance came home, after the injury, he was.... “ the silence was heavy, thick with emotion.

“Estaba destrozado.” Elena said solemnly.

“He was different.” Said Rosa. “The shop and the family was all he had. He looked to Maria, his wife, for comfort, and she changed. She left that night. Leaving him to recover alone. Anyone would guard their heart after that.”

Keith agreed in his head.

“pero Rosa, las flores.” Elena said, and the three woman looked at Lance’s latest creation. Keith felt confused but looked along with them, searching each blossom for an answer and only finding an odd peace settling in his heart, causing him to relax.

“Yes,” Rosa said. “You would think anyone would guard their heart, but not him. He is still trusting.”

For the most part, but Keith didn’t want to bring up how they first met. It made sense now, how irrational Lance’s mind worked when it came to Maria, because Maria was that demented. She married Lance for a flower shop.

“Now she works back at that company. She probably owns it by now. And our Lance is beginning to walk again.” Rosa spoke with a smile, looking over at Keith. He felt a rush of heat as though she was looking through his very soul. Silence filled the room again and they could hear a distant door chime. No shouting. Not like last time. A minute passed and Lance was at the door, limping through and landing on the couch. Blue fled Alice’s shoulder and opted for her masters stomach, purring softly.

“Ya se fue la perra?”

“sí, abuela.” Lance sounded tired.

“Well, Keith. You are welcome to stay for dinner. Lance you better get back to work. We can be down in a moment.”

“Just…. Give me a minute. I’ll meet you down there.”

“Don’t feel defeated Lance.” She spoke calmly, walking over and resting a hand on his shoulder.

“Do I look defeated? Just tired mama. Really. I’ll be down in a bit.” With that the room cleared, say for Lance, Keith and Blue.

“You really are welcome to stay.”

“I really feel like I should go.”

“… Yeah. Okay.”

Lance sat up, and Keith could see that familiar, premature age about him. The two walked out in silence, and Keith found himself glancing at Lance’s hand trying to imagine a wedding ring on his finger.

They reached the door and he bid Rosa, Elena, and Alice goodbye, apologizing for not staying.
Outside he turned to Lance.

“Call me when you’re done with your weddings, I can work out a trip with Pidge and Hunk.”

Lance nodded and hummed in agreement. But his thoughts were distance. Keith buckled down, stelling every ounce of courage he had and leaning forward, placing a small kiss on Lances cheek. He could feel the warmth blossom in Lance's skin, under his lips, in such a short moment. His own cheeks felt just as, if not, hotter.

“For the flowers.”

“Anytime.” And there was that life again, in that shocked, flustered, and awestruck look. There was the real Lance. Untarnished by cruelty of others, unbroken by a destroyed heart. The Lance that was so hard to pull away from.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is taking me so long to get out. I've been busy! I don't want to rush it but I may have to or this will never get done. Thanks for all the great comments so far!

Also working on a character piece for Lance if you're interested in that, very light Klance.

:: EDIT! 2-6-2017::
Updates to the spanish within the chapter along with translations! Thanks so much to all the people who have been helping me out with that!!

"El de las cejas gruesas."-" The one with thick eyebrows."

"Sip, el novio de Lance..."-" Yup, Lance's boyfriend..."

"Abuela, el atractivo novio de tu nieto vino a visitar, ven a ver lo bonito que es."-" Grandmother, your grandson's very attractive boyfriend came to visit, come look at how pretty he is."

"El novio de Lance? Ohh debo verlo!"-" Lance's boyfriend? Oh, I must see!"

"Demasiado largo."-" Too long." In reference to Keith's hair.

"Bueno, Lance tiene preferencias con sus amantes, no es así."-" Well, Lance does have a preference when it comes to his lovers doesn't he." Referring to Keith's tight butt.

"Oh mamá, no te burles del pobre chico."-" Oh mother, do not make fun of the poor boy."

"y tampoco le pellizques el trasero."-" Or pinch his ass." Continuing from the last sentence.

"... Trabajas muy duro."-" ... You work too hard."

"Que esta haciendo este chico acá?"-" What is the boy here for?"
"Esta aquí porque quiere más de las flores de Lance." - "He is here because he wants more of Lance's flowers."

"Oh Dios, tu hijo es bastante bueno. Se gana esa cara bonita con flores. Cuando se van a casar?" - "Oh my, your son is quite good. He wins this pretty face with flowers. When will you be getting married?"

"Casar?!" - "Married?!"

"Controlate Lance, estas paredes son delgadas y hay ventanas acá." - "Behave Lance, these walls are thin and there are windows."

"Lance, si cojes a tu novio, trata de no dejar un lío." - "Lance, if you fuck your lover Keith, try not to leave a mess."

"Regresa acá! Te voy a lavar esa boquita con jabón" - "Come back here! I'll wash your dirty mouth out!"

....

"Lanceeeey, se acabo el tiempo con tu pareja, llevatelo" - "Laaaaancey. Your time with your lover is up. Send him away."

....

"Este niño es de nuestra familia ahora. Lance es astuto." - "This child is family now. That Lance is so clever."

"Esa perra. Tiene que ser estupida para pensar que puede entrar aquí. Si fuera veinte años más joven yo." - "That bitch. She has to be stupid to think she can enter here. If I were twenty years younger than I would -"

"Sí, en el infierno tienen un espacio reservado para las almas como la de ella" - "Yes, in hell they have a place reserved for souls like hers."

"...y tonto." - "...and silly."

"Estaba destrozado." - "He was broken."

"pero Rosa, las flores." - "but the flowers Rosa."

"Ya se fue la perra?!" - "Is the bitch gone?"

"sí, abuela" - "yes grandmother."
Crushing Anemone

Chapter Summary

Road trip!

Chapter Notes

Here come excuses. I am so tired, I have tons of free time at work but no access to proper word docs and spellcheck. I write this by sending emails back and forth.. take it out and throw it all in one big doc. I'm so tired when i get home that I try to read through it but my brain is so fried I miss stuff. I don't really have anyone editing for me. Time differences make that hard on me.

One day I promise I will make this pretty but right now I will go mental if I don't put it out. I am taking in every piece of advice offered and note added to spelling in the comments. they help out a lot. Somethings get changed in my auto spellcheck programs that I don't want to... and my Spanish is just google robot. So I'm gonna try to avoid it from now on.

That's just my set up for excuses. A million apologies. Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Keith smiled as he watched Lance stretch on a gloomy October morning. There was a timid chill carried in from the bay, and the clouds overhead created an ominous white void of any sense of sky or space. Lance had been the last to show up and fling his old Air Force duffle bag into the back of Keith's truck, along with the rest of the camping gear.

Pidge was already curled up, headphones strapped on tight, in the passenger car of the moving truck they had rented. Hunk would be driving. They had to sneak the bike out in parts just to make it from Keith's apartment to the street and do it at 3am to avoid ever suspicious shiro.

Lance had managed to finish out his last major job the night before while Keith had been temporarily excused from work a week ago. At first, Keith had thought Lance was tired from his family and the long hours, but offering to help showed him that Lance was also delivering and arranging on the spot. Dealing with wild brides and their backup crew of bridesmaids, getting stiffed out of tips, getting into arguments about what they ordered.

It was all chaos, and Lance was often gone before the wedding started, only sometimes showing up later to move the arrangements to the next location. Keith had originally offered his truck when the one they had been using, owned by Lance's father miguel, stopped working due to a mangled transmission.

Keith had stepped in, and while Lance seemed awkward about it at first, soon the two were comfortably driving around in Keith's truck. Not long after he started helping with setting arrangements, or copying them, and at night helping Lance's father work on his car.
Keith hadn’t been trying to interject himself into Lance’s family, but he had just slid so well into place after that first time meeting them weeks ago. They seemed more than open to welcoming him in, which was odd given their past dealings with non-family.

Alice had explained that while Maria was the worst, Pidge, Hunk and the rest of the street were considered family too, and not by blood.

Watching Lance command his family, running from wedding to wedding, was a sight to see. Somehow in his head, Lance could make sense of the mad chaos.

They hadn’t talked about the kiss. Lance never brought it up, but sometimes Keith would catch looks from Lance. Not longing, although there were those, but a confusion, a debate. A small hurt part of Keith could understand why.

After he had found out about Maria, a few nights after, Rosa had managed to invite Keith over for dinner. Dinner with the family was as wild as you would expect. Keith could only imagine what it was like normally, or when Lance was younger, with the rest of his siblings. Or at a family reunion, which was described by Elna’s best English as “the size of a Block party.”

He seemed to fit. Alice liked how the two of them could gang up on Lance, Rosa loved his manners, Lance’s dad enjoyed the respect and knowledge of cars. His uncle seemed to like everyone and while they never spoke much his grandfather seemed to like him enough. Of course Lance’s grandma likes butt.

He was oddly endearing, trying to snuggle deeper down into the hood of his jacket.

"We live in California, Why is it so cold?"

"It’s not like we’re in LA, even the desert gets colder during the winter. You’ve lived here your whole life and you’re just now figuring out it gets cold in the winter. Don’t you understand weather?" Keith tied down the final strap, locking their supplies in place.

"First of all, global warming; and Dude, no one ever understands the weather, that’s why it’s such a heavily discussed topic of conversation."

Keith didn’t argue, there was nothing to argue about and he was itching to get on the road.

"Okay Hunk, follow us as close as you can, and text me if you get separated. It’s this exit.” He pointed down to the map that Hunk had been examining. "From there its highway 88, which is almost always empty, so it should be easy to follow, and around here... that’s our turn off."

"Where is your place?"

Keith vaguely circled an area just north of a small ravine. "Here-ish, the land is practically worthless, so my folks had a lot. Make sure you follow me close cause I know the terrain." Hunk looked like he was gonna turn green.

"Hunk why did you even offer to drive when you know you get car sick?” Lance chimed in from the other side of the truck, leaning over the carriage.

"I’m fine on well-paved government funded roads which meet tons of specs before any rubber touches them. Those I’m okay with, they’re smooth, nice and no one gets hurt." Hunk defended.

"Hunk, tons of people get hurt.” Said Keith
"Yeah, well, they're not safe drivers like me." Hunk huffed before stomping back to his car. Keith and Lance traded glances and then shrugged.

"You can ride with me after the change! My car will be a smoother ride!" Keith hollered back in offering. Hunk turned around to consider the offer, but before he could answer Lance cut him off.

"Just trade with Pidge when you go off road. And bring a barf bag."

Keith rounded the car looking over at Lance who had already climbed in, buckled tight, and snuggled into the seat. Keith followed suit.

"So why do you want Hunk to vomit?" Keith said turning on the car.

"I don't, I just really don't want to drive." Lance mused looking out the window.

"What makes you think you won't be driving at some point?" Keith spoke with a chuckle, smiling at Lance as he pulled out. Lance gave him another confused look.

"You'd let me drive? You wouldn't let me drive all week."

"I believe you were asking to ride my motorcycle. Not drive my truck."

"No I asked about the truck too, you said something like ' there are few things I'd kill a man over, and one is driving my truck.'"

"I did not say that."

"You did though, and then you flicked out your knife and I was soooo scared!" Lance squirmed in his seat, his voice pitched higher and moving to guard himself half-heartedly.

"Dude, you're ex-military, pretty sure you could handle me."

"Naw dude, I've seen you at the gym, you look like you could kill half the guys in there at once."

"You've seen me at the gym?"

Lance blushed.

"We may or may not go to the same gym. They have a good pool."

"I didn't know they had a pool. How come you never said hi."

"You were usually deadlifting twelve children or out-boxing a heavyweight camp."

"Don't over exaggerate."

"The scary thing is, I'm not. " Keith felt himself blushing.

"Shiro is way stronger."

"And mount olympus on mars is bigger than any mountain on earth, but a mountain is a mountain."

"You have a way with words."

"Yeurop, I learned English talk good." he rattled out, giving Keith a joking smile

A silence fell between the two. Keith couldn't help but try to picture his last few weeks at the gym, when Lance could have seen him.
"So you swim?"

"It's about all I can do."

Silence again, and Keith's eyes strayed over Lance's leg. It was never an odd discussion between them. Lance was one of those guys who found humor in every situation. He would joke, you would laugh and then he would joke about you being horrible for laughing. It was his dynamic and it worked. You laughed as he bet his leg in strip poker, or removed it and threatened to beat you with it. Lance made it work, he made it funny. Now Keith just felt tense, knowing there may have been a cause behind it, not just fate, or war, but it was tied to something deeper, more personal.

"Dude, I'm just pulling your leg. I do other stuff."

"O-oh. I just.... Yeah.. Sorry."

"Don't apologize." That seemed to upset Lance even more.

"Okay. So what attracts you to water?"

"What doesn't attract you to water?"

"We are currently driving to the desert where I used to live."

"I'm not following you..."

"I... can't swim?"

"You're joking..." Lance was staring at him, straight faced but eyes wide in a mild surprise.

Keith shook his head, feeling his cheeks flare up.

"Oh... man... I'm gonna teach you how to swim."

"Why does everyone do that? Every time I tell someone I can't swim they insist upon teaching me. Shiro's bad enough."

"If it pleases the court, my reason is strictly self-serving."

"How so?"

"One, I get to show off. Two, you will owe me. Three, I get to see your cute buns in a swimsuit."

Keith blushed looking over at Lance. He seemed amused by Keith's reaction, but not nearly as much as he should have. Implying maybe that he was serious, or testing the water. Keith shifted and squirmed under Lance's gaze, trying to focus on the road, but his mind kept running through what to say. If Lance was testing him, for what, and what did he need to do to pass?

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Okay, if you want to, you can teach me to swim."

"And you will wear a cute swimsuit?"

"Only if you do."
They continued in low conversation and comfortable silence most of the ride. Or at least what could be considered not having a conversation as the two bonded over a mutual love of classic rock. Head banging to Queen or belting it to Kansas as the hours passed and soon they pulled over to a rest stop. Hunk and Lance fled inside to the 'Fast End' Convenience store to stock up on road snacks, cup noodles and sandwiches. Half way through the trip, Lance had discovered, through stimulating and tactful conversation, that Keith was planning to live off the land. There was a fridge, but not much of a kitchen and most diners were quite a drive away. Lance protested, not against the idea (so he claimed) but saying it would be impossible to find enough food for Hunk 'to live off the land'.

Keith had finished topping off his truck and now squatted outside, back against the convenience store glass. The warmth from the sunlight burned in the ever familiar way that his skin had never gotten used to. When they had left San Fran, you could look back and see the area as it dipped under mountains, hidden under low clouds and cool air from the bay. It was like leaving another world.

He closed his eyes, bathing in the sun’s rays, the familiar smell of dry bleaching sand and dust filling his thoughts. A bell chimed to his right, bringing with it three seconds of top 40 hits before vanishing with the muffled sound of a door closing. He could hear the scraping shuffle of shoes, twisting and grinding with each step onto the pavement, growing louder and louder and then...

Cold.

He yelped, trying to jump up, but his legs were asleep. He spun from his perch, falling on his butt.

He heard the warm laughter that often set fuzzy heat oozing through his chest. Looking up, he saw Lance with a can of Coke in his hand held out in offering to Keith. He had ditched his jacket in the car, enjoying the sunlight like the rest of them. He was wearing a warm familiar looking white and blue baseball cut t-shirt. His leg had been covered by long pants all day, and Keith could almost find himself forgetting that Lance had a fake limb.

"Jumpy much. Figured you'd like a drink before we hit the road." Before Keith could take the can, Lance held out an open hand to help him up.

"You're not getting out of driving." Now standing he accepted the can. He cracked it open and took a long refreshing sip.

"Who says I want to get out of driving? I just figured you were a coke man."

"Who isn't?"

"Uhh... me? Pepsi generation dude."

"We're part of the same generation."

"Yeah, and you're an outsider. Pepsi blue forever."

"What's your stance on Dr Pepper?"

"Pep MD and I are not on speaking terms."

Lance lowered himself to the ground, Both legs stretched out. Keith joined but kept his legs tucked in. Lance pulled out his can of Pepsi from the plastic bag he had twisted around his hand. Keith
could just barely make out jerky, sandwiches and many other tasty treats.

"So where's Hunk?"

Lance cracked open his Pepsi.

"Buying half the store. I hope your fridge is big enough."

Keith tried to glance around through the window, but he couldn't see much say for some holes of products in a few of the shelves.

( Maybe this instead)
Keith tried to glance around through the window, but his view was blocked by shelves filled to the brim with old corn chips and beef jerky.

"He busted out the credit card. So you know he's not holding back."

"I was planning for us to go to the diner for a few nights."

"Yeah... but there is still Lunch, and breakfast, and second breakfast, seconds, afternoon tea."

"You're pulling my leg right?"

"A little." Lance winked, grabbing Keith's ankle and tugging lightly. Keith felt a desire to test the waters and match Lance's humor.

"Pull too hard and it will come off."

"Great, I've been looking for a replacement." He tugged a bit harder, moving his leg from its spot. Keith couldn't hold back and laughed heartily from the gut when Lance pretended to measure out where to cut before miming a chopping motion with his hand.

"Quit moving! The cut needs to be clean. I have to adjust for the size difference." Lance pulled harder and soon Keith was on his back, propped up only on his forearms, his leg in Lance's lap.

"We're the same size." He protested, killing his coke and setting it down. Lance stopped miming the cut and gripped the spot. Turning his attention to Keith's face.

"No way, I'm taller."

"How tall are you?"

"6'6" he said leaning in with an eyebrow wiggle."

"I'm the same."

"Mullet puff doesn't count."

"I'm not counting it, and it doesn't puff."

"Well I'm really 6'6.5""

"It doesn't matter."

"It does so matter."

"Where in life would half an inch matter?"
"I can think of several places."

When had he gotten so close Keith had no idea. Suddenly Keith was there with sweet Pepsi in his breath. Sunlight was not the only thing warming his face now. Keith felt his breath hitch.

Lance kept smiling as if he had won some great battle of the minds. Keith merely pouted, his eyes flickering between each of Lance's own eyes. They were almost flush against his skin, in the shade. They heard the familiar bell of the store doors opening but made no move. If anything, Keith felt Lance get closer...

Cold again.

Not quite like last time, the cold condensation of the can hitting his cheek had been refreshing, this was only a few drops of something. Keith hadn't realised he had closed his eyes. When they opened he saw Lance, drenched in red slush. His face turned down and hidden from Keith.

"FAGGIT!"

Boomed a deep, objectively stupid sounding voice, it sounded slow and slurred. Keith looked over to their left and saw some jackass looking proud and his buddy snickering beside him. The dude was huge. He had intense sunburned skin and gross, bleached shoulder-length hair that was barely controlled by a trucker hat offering free mustache rides. A wife beater and overalls completed the stereotype with gusto. The snorting fellow beside him was lanky, hunched, and wearing a “Three Wolf Moon” shirt with knee length cut offs. He was also sporting a rather horrid looking mustache, too strange to categorize.

Keith found himself helping Lance up, the two jerks laughter couldn't be ignored anymore. He spun around to deliver his harsh punishment, but found a hand on his shoulder stopping him.

"Keith, buddy. I got this."

A few reassuring pats and Lance stepped forward. Keith felt himself boiling, he wanted to deal with it. Lance be damned. But he held back, it took almost everything he had, but he held back.

"Oh shit."

Keith turned to see Pidge next to him, having come from the bathrooms. Hunk soon followed from inside the store, arms full of bags, holding a big glug and sipping in interest.

"What happened?"

"Some redneck asswipe slushed Lance."

"Oh shit. You let him handle it?" said Hunk in surprise.

"...He.. Insisted. I'd rather myself." Keith felt himself move forward, fists tightening.

"Dude, don't worry. Lance can handle himself." Hunk reassured.

"I- I’m not saying he can't, I just... wanna.. help?"

Keith watched as Lance approached the two in a long slow strut. Broad shoulders fixed in
intimidation, yet his hips sashayed side to side, popping in emphasis with each step.

"Hey there big boy. I noticed you spilled your drink, you big goof."

His tone was flirty, but in an odd fake sort of way.

"I was just tossing' it with the rest of the fag trash like it belongs." He barked, no laughter this time. His face was red as if he was holding his breath, maybe to seem intimidating like Lance. It wasn't working. His friend laughed every time he looked at Lances state. Keith wanted to jump the two of them then and there, but he could feel Hunk and Pidge holding him back.

"Just wait." Pidge said, a wicked grin on their face.

"My dear man," Lance was nearly stepping on the fat redneck's toes, his tone developing a bite. "If you wanted my attention, you could always just say 'hi'."

"Hi?" he questioned, his friend stopped laughing.

"Hi there." He was now reaching that 'way too close' Keith had experienced before with Lance. The three watched as a long tan hand, a little sticky and wet from the Slushie, reached out for the man's chest. It slid across the wifebeater up to his neck, playing with the gross hair before sliding down, down, down.... okay that was too far down. But both assailants seemed frozen in place. The red in the idiot's cheeks may have still been caused by lack of breath, but not on purpose. Keith couldn't imagine the guy getting that kind of attention from anyone.

The three noticed a shaky meat glove snaking around, making a move to grab Lance's ass. Keith again felt that bite to fight and protect, and yet again Hunk and Pidge shushed and held him back, enraptured by what was taking place.

Lance dove in slow to the neck, his other hand joining the first, he didn't turn to face the matted hair and sunburned skin but instead turned to the friend, who and clenched his own drink in shock.

"I don't think that mustache is helping your chances with your friend here, I think he prefers smooth skin.” Lance turned and nuzzled his nose into the dude's neck. Keith found himself jolting again, but Hunks grip was strong enough to keep him in place.

The friend, after being acknowledged, seemed to come to and blow a fuze. He swung, and Lance pushed away, causing the blow to land on the big guy.

The punch must have been fairly weak because the two recovered soon enough. Lance turned to take a bow to his three friends, Hunk and Pidge were clapping and whooping. The big guy seemed offended and dove for Lance, who dodged again and allowed the offer to eat pavement. Turning, Lance finally swung and landed a punch on the friend that was trying to sneak up behind him. Lance bowed again. He took off his drink covered shirt and began whipping it around. When Big Red woke up, Lance edged him on like a bullfighter, allowing him to charge before jumping out of the way, swishing his shirt around.

Lance glowed under the attention, so much so that he had underestimated Big Red's recovery time. Keith felt a hand let go and he was there in a flash, pulling Lance back away by the rest and letting the idiot charge right into his fist, pushing him back with all his strength. Big Red rolled a few feet before he passed out back on the ground. Hunk tossed Lance the empty slushie cup and Lance stuck it on the awkward tent that was noticeably showing in the big guys overalls.

Laughter broke out instantly as they all gathered round, Pidge snapped a photo as Lance posed in front as though he was showing off a freshly hunted deer. Once the laughter died down Lance
assessed the damage.

Hunk bought him a water to wash off with, which was an added interest to Keith. He watched the shirtless man pour water over his hair, where it escaped down his neck, across his chest and back, dripping down to his waist.

He managed to dry his hair on a clean part of his shirt, but it was now too filthy to wear. So he balled it up and tossed it in an empty plastic bag before throwing it into the back.

"You gonna change?" Keith found himself saying as Lance started climbing in.

"Into what? My shirt’s wrecked and I didn't bring a spare."

"You didn't?"

"I didn't see the point. It's a week. If I get sweaty I take it off."

"Then wear your nightshirt."

"What nightshirt?"

"Whatever it is you wear to bed."

"Okay, well, that will be really inappropriate."

"Just... buy something inside. You might want more than one shirt anyway. We'll be out for a week."

Lance frowned in consideration.

"Yeah, I guess."

Twenty minutes later and Lance finally emerged. In the time it took for Lance to emerge, the sheriff had already come by. Not surprised they had knocked out some troublemakers, but at least the sheriff seemed nice about it, letting them go after hearing the story.

Now, Lance was driving in a tank top that read "Mother Trucker" along with the pair of aviator sunglasses he bought that had the American flag painted across them. Insisting on blasting Sweet Home Alabama and American Pie.

"That shirt is horrible."

"The other one was better, but someone wouldn't let me buy it."

"It was a girls shirt."

"It fit me better."

It had. It hugged his frame drawing attention to his ever broad shoulders and tiny waist, bright red, and reading: "Sorry, but this girl is taken by a trucker." Okay, so it was better in theory. Getting Lance to settle was like pulling teeth.

"So, what was that back there?" Keith found himself asking.
"Hmm?"

"With those guys, before the fight."

"You mean the slushie slingers? Dude, against idiots like that, mental warfare is best. A bruise will fade, and he could walk it off, maybe get some action out of it; but now he will spend the rest of his life thinking about the fact some fag gave him a boner and his friend might be into him. Far more destructive.

Keith found himself to be amazed. He had always handled things with his fist, not because he was a brute, it was easier to swing a fist and be done with it. Lance understood how people worked, and while it seemed he could hold his own enough in a fight, his real weapon was against the brain. Keith thought about all the tests Lance had been putting him through, all the considering and analysing. He wondered what conclusion Lance would reach.

"How did you know they wouldn't punch you out straight?"

"Hmm... I didn't. I kinda just risked it. That's what you do when you play gay chicken."

"Uhh... what?"

"Oh my gosh! You've never played gay chicken?"

"...No?"

Lance considered him... "Oh, right, well.. I always forget cause I'm a cheater. You gotta be straight to play."

Keith did not respond, trying to understand. But Lance grew uncomfortable in the silence.

"I'm not saying you can't play. It's just... it's a thing I saw straight guys do in my high school. I was champ because I'm bi and they didn't know that. So basically, you try to flirt with a guy until one gets weirded out and backs down."

"That sounds, kinda rude to gay people."

"You would think, but none of the gay guys I knew had an issue with it, except that they wanted to play, but that's kinda not fair. And it was kinda hot to watch." Lance winked. "It's more or less harmless. Got my first kiss from a straight boy that way."

Lance was smiling and Keith found himself chuckling.

"You proud of that?"

"Very, he kissed me."

Silence fell again.

"Lucky those dudes were closeted."

"I'm not sure if everyone is at least a little gay, but yeah.. they were pretty deep in the closet."

Silence filled the car again, and Keith let his head lean against the window as he watched the road wiz by under their tires. He always felt calm in motion. Driving gave him clarity, someone driving him gave him peace. Yet he found himself unable to fall all the way asleep. It wasn't the usual strain in his neck or the seat belt cutting into him. It was his driver. Lance had his right leg on the gas while
the artificial one rocked against the clutch as need be.

"Do you wanna play?" He asked, a wicked smile playing across his face.

"Hmm?"

"Gay chicken, wanna play?"

Keith for once didn't move. He felt himself freeze, a warm flush just under his skin. His mind buzzing. Was this another test?

"Wouldn't that be unfair? I'm actually gay."

"And I'm half gay, which is enough."

Keith locked eyes with Lance, who had been smiling down at his slumped position. It would just be flirting then, wouldn't it? Like a flirting competition. Something about phrasing it like that made him relax, shooting a look at Lance that could only be described as 'bring it.'

One might suppose that two gay people can't play gay chicken, but remove the latent homophobia in the game and have whoever first blushes lose. A fun game for all you can play with anyone. Just don't challenge an asexual.

Lance had shimmied in his seat in response to Keith's look.

"Okay, I'll go first." He winked. Keith was used to this by now and simply smiled back before licking his lips. This... caught Lance off guard. He stumbled, looking back out onto the road before turning and throwing a kissy face at him. Keith rolled his eyes and then gave him a sultry look, biting his lower lip in fake restraint.

Another stumble for Lance. He took a few moments to ready himself, his eyes trailing up Keith in a way that was far better than his moves so far, but was obviously not his move by the way he tried to be subtle about it.

"Did you sit in sugar?" Lance asked in a normal tone, Keith sat up checking around his seat when he felt a hand on his thigh, "Because you got a sweet ass..." His voice had trailed but not in the way he probably meant to, in a weak broken way. The spot where his hand rested felt like it had been lit on fire, and the two just stared at it. Then, it seemed Lance couldn't help it, he squeezed a little.

"Jesus christ." Lance said in a harsh, breathy whisper. Keith looked up and Lance was completely focused on him, his face bright red, eyes looking... hungry.

They felt the drift at the same time, as the smooth road turned into bumpy gravel, one larger rock sending the truck into a rattling shake that caused Lance to let go of Keith's thigh in a chorus of choice curse words.

Lance had only drifted slightly, but the two now sat frozen, peering over the edge off the pavement to see a twenty foot drop. Keith didn't even look at Lance as felt the words leave his throat in a cold but far nicer tone then most would have received.

"Get out. I'm driving."

By the time they arrived it was midday, not Keith's favorite time but he couldn't keep from smiling as he saw the endless blue sky, clear and deep, stretch over the orange rock. His shack was still standing, looking no different than when he had left it six months ago.
They made their way to the cave where he stored his biplane to unload the parts, and while he was excited to see it again, he couldn't help but find himself distracted by the way Lance's eyes lit up, the urge to offer a ride sitting on the tip of his tongue. Yet they had work to do, and when it came to flying, Lance was an enigma.

Once the large red biplane was pulled out they began unloading parts of The Sparrow into the cave, Pidge and Hunk setting up their workshop to assemble Sparrow. Hunk and Keith dragged the spare generator from the shack over to the cave while Lance made himself at home and Pidge buried himself in work. It would take two days to assemble and do base engine tests before Keith could fly it. He was more than itching to, it was exciting to fly something new, but he wanted to fly now and he knew Sparrow wouldn't get more than a few feet off the ground.

As Pidge and Hunk worked, Lance and Keith could only hand over tools for so long before they got bored.

"So how much money do you have?" Lance said examining the biplane out in the sun.

"My biological mom and dad left me with a fair amount, I didn't have access to it till I was 18. The land was theirs, so I built the shack and after I got the motorcycle, I got the plane."

"Yeah... you say that all like it's not a big deal, but it is. It's a huge deal."

"Not around here. Biplanes run cheeps as cars in some areas. This thing isn't new, She's even had a few paint jobs."

"Really? She's in great shape."

"Yeah..."

Keith looked off into the slowly setting sun which was turning the sky a beautiful shade of purple. It was his favorite time of day. He wanted to fly, he wanted fly with Lance, maybe even show off.

"Would you... want to?" Keith paused, trying to find the words. "It seats two, and I've been dying to fly all day."

"... I... yeah. Yeah, let's do it." Lance smiled. It was shaky but honest.

"You sure you want to?"

"Yeah... a... ummm I... Would you let me... fly it a bit?"

"Uhh... sure." It wasn't like he did not have controls in the back. He bought the plane off a local who had used it for flight school so it had the spare set. Keith explained this to Lance who seemed to light up.

"Okay! You got spare gear?"

Geared up in some old jumpsuits and Keith's old helmets the two headed off, shouting out a quick goodbye to Pidge and Hunk who started singing 'I can show you the world,' but soon their laughter was drowned out by the roar of the diesel engine. Keith felt the familiar rush of excitement as the plane jerked into motion. Lance letting out an excited whoop. Keith drove the plane over to his familiar take off spot before kicking it into high gear and slowly lifting them into the air. The pit of warmth seemed to explode into his system and he felt alive again. As they climbed higher and higher he could hear Lance cackling through the speakers.
"Ready?" Keith called out to Lance over the radio. Lance didn't even have a second to answer before Keith tilted and dove turning right, spreading up to straighten out and then gracefully flipping the other way spinning as he continued forward. Lance was whooping the entire way along with some choice curse words of excitement. He finished by tilting the plane up and just as they were straight, flipping them over into a loop.

"You wanna take over?" Keith called out.

"Does God fart thunder?"

"What?"

"Never mind. Yes, of course."

"Okay. Three... Two..." And he flipped the switch.

Lance grew silent all at once, the plane coasted along, dropping and rising along the waves before turning sharply. The excitement Keith felt was entirely new. Trusting his plane and his life to another person was such a rush. Lance seemed to fly rather shakily, and lacking Keith's usual grace, but the wild nature of it made it exceptionally fun.

"This is one of my old favorites from dog fighting..." Lance added. He turned up to loop like Keith but instead falling into the loop he straightened out, keeping them upside down before spinning, and suddenly they were flying the other way. Keith found himself laughing before he realised Lance was shouting at him.

"Take it back already!"

"You.. you sure?"

"Yeah.. Please.. just... It was fun. Thanks. I'm done. You've wanted to fly for a while right. Take over."

Keith knew Lance was telling him he could continue, but when Keith took the controls back, he instead began to fall into their descent. Lance didn't say anything to this. They swiftly landed and when they stopped Keith opened up his top window and looked forward at Lance. He was still there, gripping the controls, looking forward.

"Lance..."

Lance's hands shot from the controls like fire, but he didn't turn around.

He climbed out pulling off his helmet and throwing it up to Keith before walking off. Keith felt guilt rise in his chest, a guilt he had felt before. He didn't want to confront Lance, to cause issue. But it was his fault for asking. He had to make it right. As the sky grew darker and darker, he followed Lance, briefly grabbing a flashlight before heading after him.

"Lance!" He called out but Lance just kept walking straight, ignoring him. "Lance, I'm sorry. It was selfish to ask you to fly with me..."

Lance paused, instantly swinging around. "Selfish?"

Keith felt tense. Lance was mad, but Keith couldn't tell if it was directed at him.
"Selfish? How... if anyone is sorry... it's... Look, I have my issues, no doubt you have heard or figured some of them out."

Keith lowered his head.

"It's fine. I get it. It honestly means a lot that you care. My friends and family know I don't mind talking behind my back. It makes things easier. I... I'm not mad. I just need to clear my head."

"I knew flying might be taxing on you, and yet I still offered."

"And I accepted Keith. I'm over the moon that you offered. I had a blast. The things holding me back, my issues, won't get solved by just sitting around. I just... I need to... have a moment. To be alone." Keith nodded in understanding, but never more has he wanted to ignore someone and stay by their side.

"Lance!" He called out, Lance halted again. Keith ran up.

"Just this once. Next time you're not off the hook." He had meant it to be comforting but it came off as a threat. He pushed the flashlight against Lance's chest, "Be back soon."

Lance just smiled and nodded, turning back away.

Keith arrived back at the shack to find Hunk and Pidge had managed to hook up a tv antenna and were watching old episodes of Happy days.

"Where's Lance?"

"Cooling off." Keith said tearing his helmet off his head and throwing the two to the side. He was used to the couch being there and regretted the action when they clattered to the ground, but did nothing to show this. He instead began stripping off his jumpsuit.

"He'll be okay. He knows how to handle himself." Hunk reassured.

"Yeah... but that doesn't mean he has to, at least not alone." Keith said slumping down against the wall, too lazy to pull out his sleeping bag.

"Look, we love that you are ready to swoop in there and fix Lance's issues with the power of love and understanding..." Pidge started.

"I'm not-" Keith sputtered but was cut off.

"The fact is this isn't some physical thing you can repair. He's not your motorcycle or your truck or your plane. He got fucked up and he likes to manage it himself. It's one of the only things that keeps him going: the fact that he can manage himself."

"Pidge is right. None of us like to watch Lance suffer, but he has prided himself on pulling himself out of the danger zone and keeping himself out. He could write a book on mental health tricks, and has helped us in some scrapes"

"But..."

"The most we can do, is act like everything is normal because deep down it is. We're just happy he's alive."

Keith let out a sigh and agreed, but he still felt a hole in his gut. He rolled out his sleeping bag. Hunk and Pidge followed suit. There was so much room now on the floor, he didn't realize how large this
shack could be. Soon he was drifting into sleep.

In his dreams, he stood in his desert home. The sky was a cloudy silver blue, dulling the bright red soil of the earth to a rosey deep red. He gazed at the sky, he knew there was going to be a storm. He welcomed it, feeling warmth in a single drop of rain that grazed his cheek.

The following morning he woke up to a chorus of snores. From Hunk’s snotty booms to the nasally squeaks of Pidge, and even the mid tones of Lance gargling drool as it slowly dripped down his cheek. The joy that Lance had returned safely had been wiped almost instantly when Keith checked his phone seeing that it was now five am. The sky had grown a warm pink and it was still too early to be up. He looked over at Lance who at that moment shut his mouth, mumbling some happy noise while a stupid expression crossed his face. Keith couldn't help but smile at.

He supposed he would make a coffee run.

By the time he had arrived back, Hunk was already up, cooking eggs on the hot plate to go with everyone's odd frozen dinner of pepperoni pizza. While Pidge and Hunk continued working, Keith and Lance walked around resetting all of Keith’s old animal traps. The conversation was a light and simple exchange of stories. From Lance's family camping trips to Keith's years out in the desert. Mostly the two found themselves in content silence. By the end of the day, Sparrow was built and running just as planned. They went over the controls that night, prepping for an early morning test.

That night Keith woke up to a warm feeling. Lance had wiggled his way over closer in his sleep sometime during the night and was now inches from him. Keith’s heart rate skyrocketed as he watched Lance, his face smushed against his arm which was tucked under his head. His hair was a wild mess, and his open mouth full of drool lended to that youthful image of Lance that was such a treat to Keith.

Without thinking Keith found himself snuggling into the warmth. He felt an arm drift over him, and when he looked up he saw Lance, his eyes staring boldly at him, a small smile played across his lips in the most subtle of ways. Keith ignored the embarrassment, he ignored the fire, the voices in his mind telling him to go back and he closed his eyes. Accepting this moment. Accepting Lance’s willingness to let him close.

He dreamed of the desert, and the silver blue storm, and flying into it. Feeling warm, and weightless, and feeling the plain shake as he dove through the clouds, breaking through to the sunshine on the other side.

No one spoke that morning, he was sure everyone was too excited to speak. Or maybe no one wanted to jinx anything. Lance didn't talk about the night before, but as they left behind Pidge and Hunk to the cave he had taken Keith's hand swiftly, giving it a squeeze before running ahead.

There it sat, the finished Sparrow, red paint shining in the early morning light. It was like a sleek paint streak. Resembling a bike without wheels, but surrounded by two massive flat turbines. Well, massive compared to a bike and what Keith was used to anyway. The back rose and extended upward slightly adding the feeling of a shark out of water. Keith straddled it, feeling the stiff leather under him sink with a squeak due to his weight. He leaned forward and gripped the controls, splaying his legs up along the sides.

"Testing engines in 3... 2..." There was a jolt of thrust as Pidge flipped the switch and the bike lifted.
A little higher than expected but it soon lowered itself into place hovering at their estimated height. Keith hardly felt like his weight did anything, it might take a whole crew of himself, Lance, Pidge, Hunk and maybe even Shiro to weigh this thing back. Still, it was exciting.

"Okay set her down for a second," Pidge called out. Hunk went over to check the physical edge while Pidge reviewed specs.

"How long have you guys tested the engines on their dexterity?" Lance asked. The tone of his voice was different, as though he had been replaced suddenly, his military background shining through.

"Four hours, last night. We couldn't really test them in Keith's place for longer than standard short bursts." Hunk called back swiftly, okaying the right edge to go and moving to the left.

"What's the estimated time before she gets hot?" He asked again, pulling on a spare set of gloves before approaching the right turbine.

"There isn't one, she's not supposed to." Pidge answered.

"Every engine gets hot Pidge. You're not letting Keith fly on a bottle rocket with a hidden wick." Keith marveled at the stillness of his voice, watching him inspect The Sparrow. He acted as though it was completely normal, and maybe it was for him being friends with Pidge and Hunk, but for him he this was his first time on a completely new piece of tech, not in a simulation, not surrounded by 500 sentences.

"Keith."

Keith jolted to see Lance staring at him.

"How was it? The hover? Was anything shaky?"

"No, the early thrust kick off was a little much but it corrected itself."

"Hmmm."

"Lance, the bio makeup of the paint is designed to prevent excess heat from building." Hunk explained.

"It's not that I don't trust you guys, but more tests couldn't hurt. We are here for a week."

"Honesty most of that was probably gonna be Keith getting used to it and the seeing if we can test its Land Speed. I got twenty on Hunk we can break the sound barrier."

Lance seemed uneasy, but he fished out Keith's flight helmet and shoved it against Keith's chest, before walking over to review the data with Pidge. He watched Pidge explain each spec and detail and Keith couldn't help but admire Lance. He could see Lance being a great leader, the kind that troops would love to have. Smart, funny, caring, he shared many of Shiro's qualities. Unrefined sure, but when the occasion called for it, Lance was amazing to watch.

"Let's do a hover test with Keith on it. Pidge keep a close eye on the readers and Hunk, you and I will do glove tests every half hour. Keith settle in."

To Lance's seeming disappointment the endogenous held out, all okay, and it was time for the Land test. They sat around and ate lunch, Pidge and Hunk still reviewing sheets after sheets and Lance and
Keith sitting in silence looking over the bike. Lance being as quiet as he was was the most unsettling thing about the situation. Without thinking, Keith took Lance's hand in his own.

Lance jumped but his face softened as her fingers intertwined.

" I don't know why I'm the nervous one, when that should be you." Lance said smiling

" Says who?"

" Says common sense. If you want an adrenaline rush, there are better ways than cowgirling untested turbines." This said from anyone else would have pissed Keith off the second they got past common sense. But this was Lance, and he said it with a tired version of his wicked grin, adding a wink for flair, and Keith couldn't help but smile back and laugh.

" I've done most of the safe stuff."

" And something about a safety harness is a turn off?"

" Completely destroys the mood."

" No adrenaline boner if there are paramedics and a protégé."

" Hardly even a chub."

The two burst out laughing, earning some knowing looks from Hunk and Pidge but Keith could feel the tension roll away. Lance turned to him.

" For real though, I know I've probably said it enough but be careful dude."

" Yeah..."

" If you don't die I'll let you wear my leg," Lance said excitedly unhinging the leg joint from its mount. " Hmm.. maybe we should start with the normal one first."

" I'm not wearing your leg, Lance."

" Why not? What's wrong with it? It's a perfectly good leg!"

" I'm not sure I can..?"

" Not true, Pidge has worn them before. Both at the same time!"

" I had two right feet!" Pidge called out with glee.

" How drunk are you?" Keith asked.

" Why does me offering my leg for you to try on make me drunk?"

" It doesn't, I'm just hoping."

" I may have had an Irish coffee for breakfast... with more Irish than coffee." Lance stood back up as they walked back over to start the land tests.

" You hide it well." Keith put his helmet back on.
"Hmmm... needed the courage." Keith swung his leg over the bike and sat down as Pidge and Hunk disconnected the cables.

"For what? I'm flying this thing." Keith said, checking his seating. He was turned making sure his right foot was locked into place, when he spun around, Lance was there hands on either side of his helmet. And then he leaned in, and Keith could see Lance’s knit brows, shut eyes, and lightly puckered lips pressing just barely against the glass. When Lance pulled away his eyes look tired, but he had an earnest wide grin and an over exaggerated wink ready to great Keith's stunned silence.

"For luck, big boy." He stood back, standing between Pidge and Hunk, ignoring their catlike grins. "Pidge, count him down already! This is getting awkward." Lance cried out suddenly, they had all been just sitting there watching the blush crawl across Lance's skin, or maybe that was just Keith.

"Ignition," Pidge called out, and Keith flipped the switch. The engines began to hum in appreciation, he could feel its want to go. "Lift in three, two..." The turbines started to rise and Keith was floating in a soft hover. He leaned and finally turned the grips as they clicked into their new position.

In explanation of The Sparrow. While many hovercrafts before work in lines with coupling lift and thrust from behind, physics usually dictates this odd dynamic of force sends the craft flying like freshly toasted bread. The design by Pidge has one engine per turbine, as well as mechanisms to adjust their position. That way instead of having a sudden back thrust, and counterbalancing it, you change the direction of the existing force to angle. This causes the ship to glide forward ever so slightly and with the ability to change the power and angle of each turbine independently, a wider range of movement is allowed. So if you had a decent pilot, it could be done.

Keith was an ace.

He had almost wished the helmet was absent as he raced through the sandy rocks he used to call home. Ducking and diving around bends and revenues. Unlike when flying where he could barely hear the radio chatter, the engines were hardly making any noise. Pidge, Hunk and Lance’s commands came in loud and clear. They must have busted through twice as many tests as they had planned that week just in an hour alone. Now, most of the tests they had left, were mostly for endurance. But Keith was far more excited about testing the limits.

He found his take off site for his biplane and let loose. He felt the force ripping into his skin and pulling out a laugh that was so wild and familiar to these moments. If he had a full covering for aerodynamics he may have broken the sound barrier. He spun back around and started heading in, same speed, planning to leave them in dust, to impress Lance, to call out to him, to tell him...

"Oh shit" Keith heard Lance whisper through the radio.

"What?" Keith called back.

"Keith!"

But it was too late, as he passed them the engines suddenly burst with an unknown force sending him far higher than expected, he tried to control the wings but he was flipped, he landed and felt the drag of the earth has his neck forced his head against his chest and all he saw was darkness.

Chapter End Notes
Pepsi or Coke

Vote now on your phones.
Pink Snapdragons

Chapter Summary

Will Keith wake up?

Chapter Notes

Props to the editor for helping me get this out without it looking like trash. Trust me it looks like hell when it comes out my hands, but they make it look awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Light and noise faded in and out for what seemed to be an endless amount of time. Keith felt as if he lay frozen in space. He could hear voices but not name them. He could see flashes of images but not place them. He could feel a warmth and a worried whisper but could do nothing to console this person. And then... he was awake.

His eyes flickered open and burned from the light and color that filled his vision. Everything below the neck felt frozen. He strained to move his neck, blinking rapidly to adjust his eyes, letting out a tired grunt. The when they cleared, they focused on the figure standing closest to him, gazing down.

Shiro.

" Ah, shit..."

" Shit is right, shit is deep. As in your in deep shit kid." Shiro said, in his most stern dad voice.

Keith closed his eyes again, willing himself to return to the coma.

" Where do you get off, seriously? You had me worried sick. I was suspecting you were up to something, maybe something healthy like secretly dating Lance. I didn't push..."

Keith had felt himself blush at that, eyes opening wide but too tired to react much further.

" But this is where I find you. Actually no.. I find you out on a rocket! In Nevada!"

Keith stayed silent. He took a moment to avoid the scolding by looking around. He was in a hospital, but he wouldn't have guessed before his eyes adjusted, due to the blurred color. Now that his eyes adjusted, that blur of bright colors had shifted into flowers. Arrangement upon arrangement. Varying in size, style and flourish. Some simple, some experimental. If Keith didn't know any better, there was a shop worth of flowers in his room.

Shiro must have seen Keith's eyes take in the room and let out a tired sigh.

" You want to explain why you, Pidge and Hunk were out in Nevada with Lance and an illegal... craft? What even was that thing?"
"Hoverbike. Pidge and Hunk designed and built it. Last I checked that’s not illegal."

"Maybe not, but you need a permit to test-"

"Not on my land we don’t."

"... You could have at least had a paramedic, anyone... me even? On standby. You weren't in an easy spot to get to the hospital."

"So where am I?"

"Back in Cali, we moved you when we knew you were okay. Gave us enough time to come up with a shit story anyway."

"So... you haven’t ratted me out?"

"You're joking, right? Yeah, what you did was shitty, but putting you out of a job and back in Nevada won't solve anything. Besides... Lance would kill me."

"Lance... is he okay?"

"More or less. You freaked him out, but nothing the kid can’t handle... Well, he has his methods of stress relief."

The two now looked around the room again.

"All his?"

"He spent the first three days by your side. After we kicked him out we told him we would let him back for a few minutes if he wanted to bring flowers. He went overboard, but it gave him something to do."

"How long was I out?"

"’Bout a week. That helmet of yours is regulation and is built to take some pretty heavy forces, but you passed out on impact. Good thing too, if you were tenser, i.e. awake, you might have broken more."

"What’s broken?"

"You can’t tell?"

"It’s... Just kinda numb."

"Can you wiggle something? Like a toe?"

He did and Shiro breathed a sigh of relief. "Probably the painkillers. You cracked a few ribs and broke your sternum, which is nothing new for you. Your arm could be in better shape, a few small breaks. You will have to take it easy."

"Before you try to give me my list of what I can’t do, I think I’ll talk to the doctor."

"Fine..." Shiro shrugged but he was holding back a bitter edge in his tone.

"When can I see Lance?"
"You gotta get that melon checked out, heck I probably shouldn't even be talking to you, but I feel like I got to. I’ll leave you to them... and I’ll check in later."

The following hours were filled with constant prods and pokes from a team of doctors, student doctors, nurses, local sick kids and one old lady who kept saying how much Keith looked like her husband. He was beyond sick of being stuck in one place and longed to just walk around on his own two feet.

He rolled his head around to stretch out his neck, everything seemed sore now and he wondered if he should call the nurse for more pain meds.

"HE WHAT!?!"

He heard a shriek down the hall followed by fast loud steps. His door burst open with a bang and there was Lance roses in hand looking wide eyed and out of breath. He said nothing, making Keith squirm under his gaze.

"Uh... Hi?"

"'Hi'? You've been in a coma for a week and that's all you can say?"

"Umm..."

Lance threw down his flowers in rage and then began pacing the room. He was limping more than usual, each hard strike of his fake right foot causing his whole body to bounce into the next step. His hand was tight over his mouth as if making sure nothing slipped out.

"Lance..." Keith called to him. Lance stalled, but didn't turn to face Keith. "I'm okay, I'm sorry I worried you. But really, I'm okay."

Lance was shaking, Keith was sure part of this related to Lance's own accident, but he didn't want to bring it up. He wasn't sure how. Lance had said the incident hadn't left him bitter but that didn't mean it was easy. He did the only thing he could think of, he held out his hand.

Lance glanced at him briefly out of the corner of his eye and melted. His head swayed as his shoulders sagged, pulling him into an oddly twisted bend. He tried to turn away, to recover but Keith watched as Lance walked over to him, still stomping, and pulled up a seat. Once he sat down, he took Keith’s hand in his own and leaned over against the bed, the top of Keith's hand now touching Lance's forehead.

"Don't do that again... Please."

"Lance... You know that won't happen."

Lance shot up looking offended and hurt, a look that made Keith's soul ache, but he stood his ground. He knew himself, he wouldn't turn away from test flying after one and crash. And he wouldn't lie to Lance. He could see Lance's eyes flicker in concentration but it faded away into a sad sense of understanding and he returned to his spot resting his head on Keith's hand. Keith, feeling daring, slipped his hand out and before Lance could protest Keith ran his fingers through Lances
short hair. Lance fell back, face first onto the edge of the bed. Keith couldn't see his face but Lance wasn't protesting, so Keith assumed it was all okay.

Several minutes passed before Lance raised his head up again, looking at Keith with a want and a fire Keith knew too well. A similar fear hidden in his brow as the day before he took flight on Sparrow. He leaned... and Keith found himself leaning too, will all his energy.

"Lance! Did you flip your lid yet?"

"OH COME ON!" Lance shot up and stormed past Hunk and Pidge who had just entered the room.

"Sorry?" Hunk said looking at Keith who felt not only red in the face, with his heart dying of exhaustion inside, but a similar twang of annoyance towards the people in the door. Still, he softened, since the two of them looked distressed. Pidge especially, they hadn't moved or looked up at him.

"It's... fine. He'll get over it. How are you guys?"

"Us? We're fine. We're more worried about you." Hunk was calm, but Pidge looked so much smaller than before.

"Pidge?" Keith called out, Pidge jerked at their name. "I'm okay Pidge, really."

Pidge mumbled, something Keith couldn't hear and Hunk sighed, distressed.

"What?"

"I said... IT'S ALL MY FAULT!"

"Really Pidge, it's not. I'm okay-"

"I misread my own readings. We coated the outside but that basically trapped the excess heat in with the firepower and once enough had built up it caused an energy burst. I just thought all was fine because 'HEY we estimated a drop in power by now but that's not the case!' BUT NO! That power read was just... it wasn't what we were supplying but an excess of uncontrollable energy. You flipped....and if Shiro hadn't happened to show up..."

"Really, Pidge. It's okay. Come here..."

Pidge walked slowly towards Keith and he could now see the tears brimming each eye. He took Pidge’s hand and squeezed.

"I'm alive. Sparrow was awesome. Definitely will do again."

Pidge looked at him shocked, too shocked for words, thankfully Hunk stepped in.

"Seriously? You were in a wreck and you wanna go again?"

"It was awesome. I'm thinking you should add a longer back to weigh out the forward dip because I had to adjust for it a lot. And maybe, if you coat the insides too, that heat will roll right out into a controlled power burst."

"It's not controlled though, its excess." Hunk said. "Why are we even talking about this? Even if you're up to it, Pidge, Shiro and Lance wo-"

"It could work," Pidge said, still holding Keith's hand. They had long since stopped crying.
eyes focused on Keith but still seemed distant. "If the heat can't stick to anything, it wouldn't be an excess energy. The force of the heat would make it more energy efficient by 78%, that much additional power... I'm glad your okay, I better work."

Pidge kissed Keith on the cheek before scrambling off.

"Am I the only one who hasn't kissed you?"

"Shiro hasn't..."

"Cool... I'm gonna opt out if you don't mind, but I will hug you when your arm and clavicle are better. "Keith laughed in agreement, which hurt.

"So you... you're really okay?"

"More or less. I've had worse."

"I guess I'm just happy Shiro did show up. Otherwise we would have lost our heads."

"So long as he didn't attempt to do anything medical..."

"What do you mean?"

"He failed basic first aid. He kept forgetting stuff like 'do not move the body.' It was really funny. He hardly fails anything."

"Uh... Yeah, no... Lance took care of most of that stuff. Shiro just kinda... got our heads together."

"Oh..." He felt guilty at being attracted to the idea of Lance taking care of him in an odd commanding way, his focus narrowed in on Keith like he was a tricky arrangement... one that was set to die but still.

"It's not like I almost died, though. The area there has soft enough ground."

"Still..." Hunk picked up the flowers Lance had tossed on the floor, and set them on the small area of the bedside table that was left. "We're happy you're okay."

While Keith didn't feel tired, he assumed the medicine knocked him out shortly after Hunk's visit. Again, he was met by a dreamless sleep, bringing him a timeless darkness. He could hear whispers and clattering. When he finally awoke to the sunlight of a new day, he spotted the roses that Hunk had picked up, now sitting in a vase in the spot they were set yesterday. Keith knew Lance had been there, he knew Lance was frustrated, and he felt frustrated with himself. He couldn't lie, he was going to fly again, Lance's words be damned.

It's not like he didn't respect Lance, or understand where he was coming from, but Lance had to realize that Keith was going to keep at it until he was grounded, whatever that would mean. There were few things in life that gave him such a peace, such a feeling of freedom, that there was no way he would stop so soon.

Lance had a fear that kept him from flying. Fear of flying itself? He doubted this. But something was stalling Lance in a way Keith couldn't figure out. A mental block. Maybe if Lance got past that, Keith could really share something from his world. Keith could open up, bringing something new to their friendship.

There was a knock on the door, and Pidge entered, laptop in hand.
"Hey! You're awake."

"More or less. What's up?"

"Just paying my favorite crash dummy a visit."

"Hardy har har." He smiled though, Pidge had been so distraught the other day, it was relieving to see them acting like their old self. Pidge pulled up a chair and pulled over the rolling tray table, which had a meal set on it.

"You gonna eat?"

"... I guess?" He opened it. It was some brothy soup and bread, with some over steamed vegetables.

"Ugh... You'd think I'd get a decent meal considering what my medical bill will be."

"I'll have Hunk swing by later with something better. You need help with your arm?"

Keith looked at it, he kept forgetting it was broken. It wasn't the first time he had broken that arm, they hadn't put him in a full cast, just a brace. It was probably some minor fractures.

"Naw... I'll be fine. I can use my left."

"Ambidexterity... Cool... I'll keep that in mind. Anywho... Thought you'd wanna see this."

They opened their laptop and set it by Keith's leg, he looked at the small video window where he could see the test grounds from the other day.

"Each test was dated and marked, but eventually you just kinda did your own thing. Obviously we kept the camera rolling..."

Pidge played the video and Keith watched as he zoomed around in the distance. Rolling through donuts, figure eights, and small jumps, finally building speed and roaring past. Keith knew what was next.

An alarm blared and the camera for a moment moved away from him. Hunk had been holding the camera, so he could see Pidge and Lance huddled around Pidge's laptop.

"I thought it was efficiency but it's excess."

"Okay so what does that mean?" Shiro questioned off screen, he must have arrived before the video had started.

"It could blow."

"Oh... shit." He heard Lance whisper.

That's what Keith remembered... and then he saw the worried look on Lance's face and it tore his heart out.

"KEITH! STO-"

Too late, the bike was in the air. It kept going, rotating. Keith watched as he saw himself unseated, while both him and the bike kept some momentum, the Sparrow with its still bursting engines carried on further. The two touched down nearly twenty feet apart. Both kept going. Keith was surprised he wasn't a lot sorser when he watched his body bounce like a rag doll across the dust. Lance was
already racing out to him, and he heard Shiro calling 911.

After that the video cut.

Pidge looked at Keith with excitement in a way that if he hadn't seen Pidge crying the other day he would have thought the kid had a screw loose.

"Did you see it?"

"See what? Me eat shit?"

"Before that! You let go. Didn't you realise?"

They replayed the video, it was small, hard to tell, but it did look as though he let go. Or kicked off really?

"I wonder if it was just your instincts. If you had stayed on, Sparrow would have flipped, landing on you and dragging you underneath at... well at this point you were going 180 miles per hour. So at least 160. With drag, it would have taken you about 10-20 seconds to fully stop. Look here."

Pidge pulled up a photo. The Sparrow had drifted off camera but now he saw how far it had pulled away.

"You were one decision from death, and you made the opposite choice most would have made. In most accidents, it's the fact people grip the steering wheel tighter and tense up that shit gets broken. You released and let yourself fall, may have gotten knocked out on contact but that played to your advantage... You tumbled with no tension, therefore your body was able to absorb more blows through moving freely through each impact. It probably saved you from having a lot of problems."

"... I... okay?"

"I'm saying you're awesome! Also, your crash, only because you're okay... is now kinda funny."

Pidge replayed Keith landing head first before flopping around like a rag doll. Keith might have agreed if Pidge muted it and he didn't have to hear Lance's heart-wrenching gasp every time.

"Oh, also, we may or may not be facing legal issues with how the engine designs were kinda too much like S.N.I.F's basic copyright junk..."

"What!?" Keith jumped, choking on his first bite of shitty soup.

"It's fine. Coran had a rebellious stage where he went to law school, so he's a licensed attorney. We technically used them for a different purpose so it's not too bad? S.N.I.F is even dropping the charges if we share the specs. So no one is going to jail."

"Your job on the other hand..." Shiro walked in, with what looked to be donuts. Ahh Shiro, wonder of the world. "You're in trouble."

"Ah..."

"Not serious trouble, you're lucky that someone..." He looked over at Pidge, "set the bar high enough that it's really hard to get fired if you're good enough at what you do. So, you're suspended."

Keith shrugged and Shiro let out a sigh.

"Here's some breakfast. What are you guys watching?"
"Keith eating it. I'm gonna make a remix."

Keith snorted. Shiro looked disapproving but looked over to rewatch.

The donuts were, of course, Heaven. They were from this donut shop he fell in love with after Lance introduced him. Soft and sweet in a way that didn't hurt his teeth. Pidge let the video play a few more times before leaving with laptop in hand and the promise to return with some movies.

"So..." Shiro started.

"'So' yourself."

"I feel like you've got more to talk about than I do."

Keith took a large bite of the donut.

"I wouldn't say that," His words muffled by the tasty pastry goodness. "You never told me how your date with Allura went."

Shiro froze but didn't deny anything, he just turned red.

"Went about as good as your date with Lance went."

"Wasn't a date." He said still chewing.

"Then what was it?" Keith took his time to swallow and muster a glare.

"We just hung out."

"And slow danced after he made you dinner."

Keith took another large bite.

There was a silence as Keith found himself reflecting on that night.

"So it went well?"

"Yes. It went very well."

The two paused to look at each other before breaking out into loud boisterous laughter.

"Why do we suck at romance?" Keith asked as the laughter died down.

"I wouldn't say we suck at it... just maybe suck at admitting our feelings?"

Keith gave him a blank look.

"I don't know," Shiro said, "runs in the family I guess?"

"We are not actually related."

"Being good at romance is not a genetic trait."

"I beg to differ."

"Well, the only other answer I have is fate. Which you tend to be against." Shiro stood up. "I'm gonna talk to the doctors, see when we can get you out. Your injuries were minor enough that we
might get you out in a few days."

"The sooner the better, my inheritance can only cover so much uninsured hospital time."

"That's your fault for crashing off the clock. Get some rest. I'll be by later."

"Bring more donuts."

And with that, Shiro was gone.

He stayed awake, hoping to catch Lance in a visit, but he never showed up. Instead, Pidge and Hunk both swung by with food and DVDs. Keith demonstrated a desire to watch sci-fi and both Pidge and Hunk insisted on the martian due to its scientific accuracy. The main character made him think of Lance.

"The book’s even better though, waaaay more details." Pidge explained.

"Isn't that usually the case?" Keith asked shifting. He could feel himself growing tired again, probably due to the tasty sandwiches Hunk had brought. They were grilled, cheesy and sat in his stomach like a warm weight, pulling him to sleep. Maybe Pidge and Hunk could tell because they excused themselves with the promise that they would be back the next day.

Keith tried to stay awake but the urge to sleep was too great, and his eyelids shut against his will.

He was sitting in the Lance’s flower shop, atop the table like always. Lance was in back, looking for something.

Keith noticed that on the table there was a vase with vibrant blue roses. He remembered Lance saying something about blue roses being bread, because that pigment did not occur naturally. He had never seen such a stunning shade of blue.

As he inspected the color he noticed the vase it was in. Normally, Lance arranged in rather plain glass vases. He never provided anything too fancy, but this one was carved and engraved with swirling lions which were dancing in a field of flowers. The closer he looked, the more he saw that it was cracked. One testing push against it and the whole thing fell to pieces. It had been broken before, and the pieces stacked together to make it look as though it was fixed.

"What did you do?"

Lance was in the doorway. There was something odd about him that Keith couldn't place. Lance charged at him, screaming familiar accusations... like the day they had first met. His eyes were wild and his voice screeching, and suddenly Keith pushed Lance to get away. Lance fell and his leg... The leg, the one he had known to be gone, lied there, shuddering beneath him.

"What... did you do?" Lance spoke in a broken voice. Keith felt his heart break as he tried to stand up to leave but everything around them started to fracture, to shake, as if the very earth was trying to shatter them. The floor cracked, gave way and the two fell.

Keith woke up, drenched in cold sweat. He tried to raise his arm to wipe his sweat soaked bangs from his eyes but hit himself in the head with his brace by mistake.

He heard a snort.

Keith looked down to see Lance sitting there, trying not to laugh.
"H-hey..." damn that dream, he couldn't help but remember the accusation on Lance’s face. His eyes flitted down to Lance's prosthetic as if that would be enough evidence that he was awake.

"Hey, nightmare?"

Keith nodded.

"Wanna talk about it?"

Yes. "No, it was mostly nonsense anyway."

"Oh. I know those dreams! One time I dreamt that knives were outlawed after guns, and some guy tried to break into my house with a slap chop. So I tossed veggies at him and we were both in awe of how well it worked."

Keith snorted.

"And that was a nightmare?"

Lance shrugged.

"What time is it?"

"Just after 5. Hunk’s got dinner rush, so he asked me to bring you something."

Keith saw the familiar take away bag.

"I'll have to tell him thanks."

Silence. Keith found himself looking around at the flowers in his room.

"You moved your store into my room."

Lance chuckled softly.

"I tried to."

"I'm surprised the staff let you do this."

"They know me pretty well."

"Right." For a fleeting moment, Keith wondered if this had been the hospital he recovered in.

The tension was odd. It's not as though they had been fighting the other day, but he could see Lance restraining himself.

"Shiro tells me you will be out in a week."

"That so?"

Lance nodded.

"I'll probably keep visiting... keep up with your flowers."

"Right..."

Lance stood, and Keith watched as he methodically clenched and unclenched his hands.
"I better head home, Blue is probably hungry."

Keith nodded. Lance returned it and then left.

Keith sunk into his pillow. Was Lance still angry at his recklessness? It made sense that Lance would be more sensitive to what happened, but what if this was the thing that kept them from being friends. Keith couldn't lie and say he could just hold back, lying would do even more damage.

He used to thrive in silence, and his time alone was something he held dear, but now he felt truly lonely and stuck, and just wanted to get up and follow Lance home.

He fell into a dreamless sleep, for which he was thankful.

The following two days he saw his fair share of visitors. Pidge and Hunk were fairly regular, and Shiro checked in every day before and after work. Keith wasn't fond of doctors, so Shiro did most of the communication back and forth between Keith and them. On the third day, Pidge brought along her older brother Matt, who Keith recognized from the engineering team. Due to how well the Sparrow had performed on its first flight, S.N.I.F. were interested. He was still suspended, but they were bringing in Pidge for a top secret project. As well as Hunk, who was leaving his restaurant to the care of his staff and his mother.

Hunk claimed once this indulgence was over, he would go back to cooking. Keith couldn't understand why Hunk was setting but he couldn't complain if Hunk kept cooking. The dude was talented.

Allura managed to sell a line of winter clothing and claimed the shop was now bursting with people buying her clothing. She even stopped by with a new winter coat for him. Red wool with long tails, little clasps and a fur lined hood. Allura really had a knack for knowing someone's tastes, he loved it. Coran gave him a trim and a shave, which he needed desperately. He had not seen a mirror in weeks but if he knew one thing, it was that he could not grow a full beard. It came in patchy and weak. Shiro said it was all his years welding without a mask. Pidge said it was probably genetics, Lance said it was to keep him from looking too badass.

Lance visited him usually after everyone else had left. Both attempting to defuse tension without discussing what was causing it and leaving to some awkward starts. But the two could relax easy enough and fall into tearful chuckles and spiteful jabs.

"Shiro says I can start moving soon."

"Not fond of the bed?"

"I've never been one for vegging out."

"Maybe if you had some TV to watch in here..."

"And where would they put it?"

Lance laughed at that.

"Enough with the flowers..."

"That's what I'm saying."

They laughed quietly, and Lance checked his watch.
"Better head off. Mouths to feed. Also I have a cat."
"G’night."
"’Night. See you tomorrow."
Keith dreamed about the shop, the blue roses and the shattered vase again..
"Keith! My dear!"
Keith awoke to the familiar face of Rosa Mclain.
"My dear, you were having a nightmare."
"Mrs. Mclain?"
"Oh please.. call me Rosa"
Keith saw that alongside Rosa was Alice, her eyes flitting between each arrangement in the room.
"Lance is a bit obsessive, you should run while you still can."
Keith chuckled.
"We are so glad that you are alright." said Rosa.
"You didn't need to worr-" Rosa smacked him upside the head, which may have not hurt on a normal day, but it almost made him dizzy.
"What do you mean not worry!? We care about you, yes? Tú serás la causa de mi muerte."
Keith was confused. The one word he picked out of the spanish didn't seem to fit with her expression. But Alice seemed to be laughing.
"Mom!"
Lance was at the door, and if Keith had watched more TV, he would remark on how this seemed to be turning into a Spanish, but he hadn't.
"What are you doing here?"
Rosa smacked him in a similar fashion as she did to Keith.
"Honestamente, we find out last minute from you that you close the store. Then, that he is in the hospital and won't wake up? And when he does you don't tell us!? Tu naturaleza será la muerte de mi."
"Sorry Mom, I've been distracted."
Rosa huffed.
"Got any cool scars?" Alice said hopping onto the bed.
"Alice, get down."
"Not that I can tell, I don’t think I got any this time." Keith replied.
"What do you mean this time?"

Keith sits up and pulls off his shirt, showing several scars on his right arm.

"Cierra tu boca, Lance..." said Rosa glaring at her son, who in turn snapped his mouth shut.

"Motorcycle crash when I was 18. Mangled my foot up pretty bad too. Not really scarred, but I've got a weird toe."

"Can I see!?"

"Alice! Quit bothering him." Lance protested but Keith could see a spark of interest in his eyes. Keith smirked pulling back the sheet. His foot had been given the medical term of "crushed", it was more like powder. So many breaks it was hard to control how the bones healed. He had to wear a special cast to make sure his foot stayed foot shaped. Now the two fingers next to his big toe stretched out another 2 cementers.

"Freaky!"

Keith chuckled.

"Ah, I brought some home cooking. When you get out we will have a party for you!" said Rosa.

"You really don't have to."

"Keith, my dear, let me have a reason to party."

Keith couldn't help but laugh.

"Yeah, okay."

They excused themselves, but not before Rosa kissed the top of Keith’s head and told him how glad she was that he was safe. He felt his mind flutter, care wasn't something he was foreign to, but it wasn't something he was used to either.

"Doing okay?" Lance spoke up.

"Yeah."

"Wanna move around?"

"Yes."

Keith had hoped Lance would let him walk but Lance sadly knew better, pushing him along in a wheelchair with several vases placed in Keith's lap. Before they had left they had argued slightly.

"I can't keep all of them, we can distribute them around."

"But... they're old, they won't last as long and they don't look as good."

"They look fine, there mine anyway. Hand me that big one."

So now, Keith and Lance made trips, delivering most of the flowers to other places in the hospital. Lance knew his way around, giving Keith even more reason to believe that Lance had recovered here. Then again, he could just deliver here often. There were now arrangements at every nurse station and major ward where they were allowed. The final one, not counting the one Keith had kept
back in his room, would go to the children’s ward.

"LAAANCE!"

Keith was met to roaring screams as every able bodied kid moved from their bed to the entrance of the room.

"Where have you been?"

"Lance! look at what I was for Halloween!"

"I lost a tooth the other day!"

"Who’s that guy?"

The questions seemed to swarm in a hurricane of noise and Keith was in the eye of it. Lance, seemed to understand and respond to each question tossed his way. Lance did a quick head count and stalled, freezing slightly. His face filled with confusion before it relaxed into a wicked grin.

"Did you steal him?"

"Yes..." Lance answered, boasting and proud.

"Are those for us?"

Keith nodded, wheeling himself over and setting them up.

"What do you guys think? My best work or what?"

"I liked the one with the pinwheels."

"Tough crowd."

Lance explained his frequent visits to the kids but not explaining when they started. They played games, looked at drawings and told stories. One particularly bright girl, who had been rather quiet, knew what happened to Keith. This let forth a ton of new questions. Lance must have been put out by Keith’s sudden gain in attention and affection that he locked his leg joint into place, grabbed a sheet as a cape, and began pretending to be a pirate.

Keith couldn't help but laugh as he saw Lance waddle with the locked joint, treating it like a peg leg, walking with a different swagger as the kids tried to copy. Keith chatted with some of the more stationary kids. Talking about planes and showing pictures on his phone.

The hours flew by, and soon a nurse came in pulling them away so that the kids could rest.

"Thanks again Lance."

"No problem Rebecca. But uh... I noticed Ben was missing... is he?"

"He was transferred to a hospital in Chicago. To try a new treatment."

"Oh yeah? That's awesome. If you contact him, tell him I said ‘hi’."

"I'll put a word through. I'm sure he would like that."

They pulled away.
"So, you visit often."

"I like kids."

"I think you’d make a good dad."

"Really? I think I’d rather be a fun uncle forever."

"How often do you visit?"

"Once a month. Sometimes more... I get bored easily and they’re a great audience. Plus, we were able to get that room to be a Pokémon stop for the kids to lure in Pokémon."

They got back to the room and Lance helped Keith back into bed.

"Every time I come, I do a headcount. Just to... keep tabs. But I can't ask how they are, they get that enough. No illness talk while I'm there. That's the rule."

"Jesus dude..."

"What?"

"It’s like you walked out of a daytime drama show."

"I thought you didn't have TV out in the desert, or your apartment for that matter. Which is messed up, you need to get a TV."

"I sneak down and watch Shiro's, he has no idea. He thinks his recorder is busted because he's got episodes of Jag recorded."

"Jag? Seriously? What are you 90?"

"I feel like it with you pushing me around. Can I please walk?"

"No," Lance let go, "But you can drive yourself. It's fun."

It was. Freedom was nice but the trip back to his room was far too quick for his liking.

Keith could tell the nurses were a little annoyed with him. He kept getting food brought to him and would wonder off frequently, finding quiet spots to hide in. He would appear again when they would call over the speakers that he had a visitor. He took his time wandering around and was usually greeted by an angry Shiro upon his return.

"I brought you some clothes from your place, you leave tomorrow morning."

"Why’d you bring them tonight instead of tomorrow?"

"I can't pick you up, I've got a meeting. I'm gonna take your stuff home though." Shiro pulled out Keith's clothing, his red jacket laid on top.

"I was sure they would have cut that off." Said Keith, the thought had occurred the previous night and it had let him unsettled.

"After we called 911 Lance and I did medical checks. We were able to cut along seams so that Allura could stitch it back together."
Keith felt his face twist in skepticism.

"What? You should be over the moon that we saved this ratty thing."

"I am... But..."

"But?"

"You could have killed me."

"Oh come on! My medical skills aren’t that bad!"

"You picked up the practice dummy and cradled it..."

"So!?"

"Whatever... I’ll thank Allura next time I see her. And thank Lance, for keeping you from snuggling me to death."

Shiro gathered Keith’s stuff in the bag, the books Pidge brought, the games and movies, and his laptop. Finally the remaining flowers. He couldn’t help but laugh at how mad he had managed to make Shiro.

"Shiro, come on dude. You are annoyingly a perfect human, with so few character flaws that Pidge and Hunk have a bet going on how you may have been made in a lab. You were bound to have one flaw. Embrace it. It makes you believable."

Shiro had been shocked into silence before chuckling lightly.

"Yeah, okay. I’ll see you later."

"Wait, is anyone picking me up?"

"Later Keith!" And Shiro was out the door.

Keith was a little mad Shiro had taken his stuff early, he was no longer put under for the night and a familiar insomnia crept in. His laptop and his work had been nice to get him through, tire him out, but now he was left to the silence of the room, and his thoughts.

Maybe he could try restraint. If at all just for Lance’s sake. It was an odd thing he had never considered. Shiro had always been trying to teach him, show him how to think before diving in. Intense moments and his irrational nature led to frustration or injury. Despite all that, the action of learning to hold himself back seemed like an unnecessary thing to learn. Not worth the trouble. So, he pushed it aside. He could handle where his mind led him.

This felt different though, and it wasn’t just Lance. Shiro had been there, always the voice of reason, something similar to a parental figure enough to fuel a desire to rebel.

He knew Shiro cared, but Shiro cared about everyone. How could he see his worth when he was one of the many?

But now he had many friends, and people who cared about him, visited him. More than he saw anyone else visited in his time there. Keith felt as though he could say that Pidge and Hunk visited out of guilt, but they seemed to enjoy hanging out, and were no longer tender to the idea that they got him in this mess. Allura, Coran, and Lance’s family showed up when needed, they seemed to know when they were needed and stepped up to the plate. Those naturally giving people. Lance...
Lance was reliving a trauma.

But was he?

He was worried about Keith, yes, this much had always been true. The fact that Lance understood the risks made him more susceptible to worry in this situation.

Keith understood himself and had an explanation for his actions, which is why he never really dated. If there was anything time alone gave you, it was time to organize your thoughts. He was a person that saw practicality. He had never needed company or a companion. Sure, sex was a need but at his age, it wasn't hard to obtain with no strings attached. Relationships were work, after the credits roll they still have to work hard to be together. It never appealed to Keith. He could obtain company from friends, and sex from strangers.

Keith knew it was something he could have lived without until he got a taste of it. Not to sound cheesy but Lance was special. There was a natural rhythm the two had, whether they were going butting or eating lunch together. Keith with his odd presents didn't deter Lance. Lance didn't constantly explain stuff that Keith didn't respond to under the assumption Keith had misunderstood. Lance didn't shrink at an insult, and instead returned fire.

That was the word, there was a fire. Natural fire. Like a spark from lighting.

And it had ignited like a dry forest fire.

It would still need work. Everything did but never had it sounded so appealing. He was sure he could have gone through life without the desire or will to fall in love. The him months ago would laugh at the him now, because this wasn't just some first time crush; he wanted something out of it.

Lance wasn't perfect, Keith would need to work on himself maybe. Maybe they could meet halfway.

Morning came without Keith sleeping a wink. His thoughts consumed him as the heavens rotated above, shifting to early morning light. He hardly noticed till a nurse came in with Lance at his side.

"Dude, did ya sleep in? You're not even dressed yet."

Keith checked the clock, it was ten in the morning.

"Right..." The nurse unhooked him from his monitors and did one last check before the doctor came in and allowed him to go. Both the doctor and nurse left Lance and Keith in the room. Lance turned around while Keith changed.

"So Shiro sent you to pick me up?"

"More or less, I offered. The shop’s closed today." Keith hummed in response. There was a beat of silence before Keith spoke up.

"Hey, Lance?"

"Yah?"

"I... I can't make promises, for the future I mean. I know myself well enough to know that sometimes I don't have restraint. Especially when flying. I’m instinctive by nature and... It’s hard to ignore. But... I'll try."

He turned and saw Lance standing stiff, staring at the wall.
"That's the most I can say, I'll try. No promises."

Lance turned around and their eyes met.

"Thanks." His voice was warm and soft and Keith wanted to wrap himself in it, he felt a breeze. He was still only in his boxers. Lance noticed.

"Dude! Save the chick flick moments for when you got pants on!" He shouted out but it was hard not to hear the amusement and delight laced in his voice.

Much to Keith's displeasure, he was wheeled out those hospital doors for the last time by Lance. The doctors and nurses insisted, and as Lance pushed him out the doctors rattled off rules of care. No drinking for the next week, no strenuous activities, at least attempt to get eight hours of sleep. The list kept on going and Keith zoned out, Lance accepted a packet of the rules on Keith's behalf.

"You know... I've always wanted a wheelchair." Lance said in amusement, before Keith felt the two pick up speed down the hall, away from the doctors yelling after them. Laughter ripped through the two as Keith leaned forward, pushing his wheels forward with great force. Lance was hopping up and balancing just so, leaning forward as to keep it from tipping back. One big sweeping turn and the two nearly rocked over but managed to pull it around.

They finally had to stop to check Keith out of the hospital permanently and one of the male nurses snatched the chair out before they could take off again.

"Quit pouting, you can buy them online." Keith laughed as Lance sulked about the loss of the chair.

"Who buys a wheelchair for themselves?" Lance shot back Keith shrugged.

"Maybe a guy who is missing part of his leg?" Keith suggested.

"Now, don't be silly." Lance said smiling.

"Maybe, I'll get you one for Christmas."

"Yeah?"

"Maybe."

The two laughed. Lance, who had no car, started leading the two home. Lance ruled the public transit system and knew every back alley shortcut, train and bus schedule and even some of the drivers names by heart. So Keith couldn't really complain when they began making their way home in record time. The only odd thing was how quiet Lance was, not that it was bad, the silence was content and comfortable. A few words exchanged in passing moments as they both checked their phones.

When they got off at the bus stop, about 6 blocks from their street, Lance opened his mouth.

"About earlier..." Lance started as they began walking.

"Hmm?"

"Thanks again, for apologizing. I feel like I should too though."

"You don't-" but Lance cut him off.

"No, I do. I overreacted. What's going on with me, isn't what's going on with you and... I don't
know, I got worried."

"Lance, you were in a bad wreck, I'm sure. So, of course you would worry about me. You probably know how wrong it can go."

"My own wreck bothers me, yeah. But it's not... It's complicated. I lashed out and I don't want you to change just 'cause you think I will worry over you."

"Could you maybe explain then?"

"Maybe another time, I'm in a really good mood today. Don't wanna mess that up."

They both smiled at each other, standing at a light waiting for it to turn. Keith felt something hit his face.

It was like a wave, gentle and then all at once it was pouring rain.

Not the kind of nice, warm summer rain he was used to, bathwater warm water that fell in big, happy drops, or even a cool mist. It was harsh. It beat against his skin sending cold shivers down his spine as they both ran. Lance again letting out a mad laugh, only being drowned out by the sound of thunder cracking above.

As they neared Keith's building, he felt a need for them to continue. He wanted to run around the block several more times. He could see Lance checking traffic, ready to make his move across the street.

"Wanna come up for shelter?" It came out in a rush, and Keith immediately felt a sense of regret wash over him as Lance stopped dead.

Keith watched Lance's eyebrows quirk, eyes scanning Keith, and then shifting in thought to across the street. In the time they took to think about it, Lance could have been home and dry. Keith felt stupid for asking. He just didn't want Lance to go yet. It was such a stupid way to ask too, he should have just asked for help, ma-

Keiths thoughts were cut off as Lance took one long stride to bring them face to face, and in a continuing but slower motion, he leaned down and kissed him.

Keith, who had just been frozen from the rain was now ignited, he felt every nerve twitch and spark until he was flooded with a wild heat, all blossoming from one point. His eyes were wide, looking out unfocused at the tan, warm skin in front of him. He could feel drops from Lance’s hair hit his own cheeks, and puffs of hot breath from Lance’s nose. He felt himself take in a large breath through his nose, filling his lungs with cold air, kickstarting his heart and his brain. Lance pressed harder, and Keith could just barely make out the knit of worry and want in Lance’s brow. He felt Lance start to shift back and that's when he responded. His eyes shut in a flash and his hand grabbed at Lance's collar, correcting Lance’s shift and pulling him in closer. Chests met, and the cold from their damp clothes sent shivers running up his spine but they continued as warmth pooled in the places they touched. The hand gripping Lance only gripped tighter as the other found the nape of his neck. Lance's own hands wrapped around Keith's lower half, pulling them even closer, keeping them steady. The kisses broke and melded into others, each a different length and pressure, bodies pulling and following each other’s motions.

If it was awkward neither noticed, too distracted by each other, each small noise from the other, the weight off their chests.

They broke apart, not for air, but the momentum seemed to slow as their brains collectively clicked
"Wow... I mean... Holy shit." Lance gasped. Keith felt his mouth shut tight, the heat that was there seemed to rush to just his face, make it feel three times hotter than naturally possible.

"Yeah..."

They were still hovering close, eyes half lidded, Keith damned his skin which could so easy shift color while he could only just see the darkening on Lances cheek's. They were both breathing heavy. Keith placed his hand on Lance's chest and felt the pounding beneath his fingertips. His hand gripped the wet shirt and he pulled. Lance must have thought Keith wanted another kiss because his smirk turned into a look of confusion as Keith stepped back, pulling Lance through the door.

They walked like this for several feet, Keith walking backwards and Lance being pulled along by the shirt. Then Keith's hand let go, sliding up Lance's chest to rest on his shoulder and pulling him in for another kiss. A fiercer one. One that left his heart swooping and spinning and diving right into his stomach. Lance had let out a shuddered moan, his long skilled fingers slipping into the unused belt loops of Keith's pants, tugging lightly. With Lance's mouth open, Keith went in. Teeth, tongue, grunts and moans, groping hands, they all melted together into one motion.

Keith broke away, relishing in the sound of the sad whimper he pulled from Lance with his absence. Keith's hand found his and started to pull again as their fingers interlaced.

Keith jabbed the button on the elevator so hard he was afraid he would break it, hearing the creaking of the plastic beneath his finger, but he paid little mind to it as the pause had Lance coming up behind him, pressing into him, teeth on his neck. Keith moved his head to the side, opening up, letting out a sigh as he felt the tension leave with each nibble and lick from Lance.

The elevator dinged, calling both their attention forward. Keith all but threw Lance inside, against the back wall, and haphazardly slapped the general area of where his floor button was. With Lance up against something solid, Keith was on him again; working his hands up under the wet shirt. Lances skin felt like warm smooth stone under his fingertips. Hard but velvet like. Lance broke the kiss to let out a moan as Keith's fingers caught a nipple. Keith could hear Lance's head hitting the glass behind him with a loud thump, and took the moment to attach his mouth to Lance's neck. They rode up, the small pull of movement causing an extra sense of delight. The door opened several times, a soft voice calling out the floor number. Keith keeping an ear out for his own.

Twice before they reached Keith's floor, the doors opened, and a conversation that had existed ended, leaving nothing but gasps and silence. Lance and Keith didn't stop, and the people didn't join on the elevator.

"Holy shit! That lady had kids!"

"So?" Keith took a small break to speak before reattaching himself to a sensitive spot on Lance's neck, eliciting a moan that was criminal. Keith wishes he could record it.

"Man, they're gonna have so many questions...." Lance mused.

Keith didn't say anything. He was listening for his floor.

When it dinged, Lance yelped as Keith, powerful as ever, pulled him out and down the hall. They felt a surge of laughter bubble between them as they ran down the halls hand in hand. trying to be fast but also silent. Keith fumbled for the keys as Lance ruthlessly ground into him. Keith's head thumped against the door.
"Holy shit."

"I know right?" Lance was trailing hot kisses down Keith's neck. He finally got it open and the two fell inside. Lance shrugged off his jacket while Keith did the same, immediately after tossing off his wet shirt. Lance was looking at him wide-eyed.

"What?" Keith hardly recognized his own voice, it was hoarse, out of breath, and higher pitched than he would have liked.

"I feel like I need to pray, but I'm not sure if it's for thanks or for forgiveness."

"What?"

"Keith, your body is a gift or a sin."

"I didn't know you were religious."

"I'm not a man of worship, but I am overcome with a desire to worship you." Lance winked.

"OH my god!" Keith felt his cheeks flood with with even more color. He grabbed at Lance’s shirt, pulling it off. "You're an idiot."

"Maybe, but I'm.. ohhhh shit."

Keith had attached his mouth to the new planes of open skin across Lance's chest. He relished in the feeling of Lance convulsing beneath his tongue, twitching and twisting, forcing Keith to hold him down.

Lance, in retaliation, ground his knee into Keith's crotch, eliciting moans of his own and distracting him from the marks he was trying to leave behind.

"Bed..." Lance breathed out.

"Don't have one."

"Seriously?! Where do you sleep?"

Keith ignored the question, but Lance must have put two and two together spotting the bedding arranged neatly on Keith's sofa.

"Fffuuuck." Lance pushed Keith away, and before Keith could ask why, he was being led by Lance to the couch.

Shiro had no doubt laid it out for him not wanting Keith to strain himself, which was a sweet thought in theory, despite him straining himself in other ways. They kicked off their wet pants, leaving their boxers on. Keith felt the cold snake through his apartment and quickly grabbed the remote for the heater, switching it on. Lance sat on the couch first, pulling Keith along by the tips of his fingers to straddle on top. The two let out near matching moans at the new friction and tension their position provided them.

They met again in a hot kiss as Keith rolled his hips over a hard spot and he moaned at the dull nails scraping at his back.

"Wait..." Lance said breaking away.

"What?" Keith said, unable to stop his hips from continuing there grinding. Making it very very hard
for Lance to speak.

"N- not tonight, can’t. You should rest."

"Fuck that, I’ll just wind up jerking off either way."


Keith moaned, moving to nibble on Lance’s ear.

"Can’t… Quiero desgarrarte toda tu ropa… Te sientes tan bien. I.. can’t, not all the way. I can’t."

Keith sat back for a moment and pondered. Maybe he felt uncomfortable with the leg? Keith nodded and continued his assault on Lance’s well-being while two strong, skilled hands gripped his behind.

Before Keith could ask what ‘part of the way’ meant by Lance’s definition, he felt warm hands on his dick. The shuttered breath he let loose felt new, and old. Like he hadn’t made that noise since his first time touching himself. He found himself gripping the couch, trying desperately to keep his cool, trying even harder to keep his eyes open and fixed on Lance. Lance, who looked like a man on mission, wiggled slightly before freeing his own dick.

The cocks met and Keith felt as though the earth had swallowed him whole. He kissed Lance as though Keith would disappear if he didn’t, as though Lance would disappear. Fear that this was all some wet fever dream and he would wake up in the hospital. Or maybe he was dead, the hospital was limbo and Lance was the angel coming to bring him over to the other side. Lance’s hand wrapped around both their dicks and Keith stopped caring if he was alive or dead. The only thing that mattered in this moment was Lance. The moment swirled around and blurred in pants and moans and strings of spit, grinding, pumping, clawing and biting. He felt Lance’s hand tuck around to his backside, just one of his long fingers found itself inside before Keith lost it, unloading onto Lance’s chest; Lance following soon after.

Keith collapsed, the bridge his nose slotting into the crook of Lance’s neck, letting pant after pant trail down Lance’s slick skin. Keith could feel Lance shiver beneath him.

“Holy shit.”

Keith hummed, letting out a strangled whine as Lance removed his finger. The two stayed like that for a while, catching their breath, only adjusting to make for a more comfortable embrace.

“Keith…”

“Yeah?”

“Could you get off me for a second, loosing feeling in my other leg.”

Keith quickly got off.

“Sorry, do you need anything?”

Keith watched as Lance attempted to stand up, only to fall back on his butt.

“Yeah… help me up. I need to clean off.”

Keith pulled Lance up, letting some of Lance's weight fall on him, he felt so light for a grown man.

The two made their way to the bathroom, which was past Keith’s unused master bedroom.
“ Seriously? This room is awesome! There is so much space. Why don’t you have a bed?”

“ I didn’t have room at the shack, I’m kinda used to sleeping on couches anyway.”

Lance stretched, cracking his back and neck slightly.

“ Maybe you should upgrade… unless you’re not planning on staying here.”

Keith didn't answer.

The two cleaned up with some damp towels, by then Lance could walk right and made his way back to the couch where he stretched out, Keith picking up their wet clothes and putting them into the dryer.

“ Doing okay?” Keith asked looking down at Lance.

“ Almost. Come here for a second.”

Keith leaned in and Lance wrapped his arms around Keith’s neck, pulling him back onto the couch.

“ Awesome. Much better. Time for a nap.”

Keith didn’t fight it, he lay there, at Lance’s side. Content to trace the lines of his Airforce tattoo, breathe in the still lingering sweet scent of their deeds. The rocking of his chest, each breath and beating of his heart, lulled Keith into a deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Is it just me, or does Keith need to see someone about his dreams.

This is, for sure, one of my longer chapters. I actually started it twice, one version never made it to the edit. It was a fraction of the size of this one.

One of the things that's been keeping me going is all the great feedback, constructive criticism or praise, its all welcome and appreciated. I treat fan fic writing as a way to practice my story telling, so hearing back helps me a lot. ( Not that I'm asking you to force yourself to comment. It's just appreciated.)

Translations! ( Looked up some Spanish this time instead of using google translate )

ROSA
"Tu vida no es sólo para ti, Señor Cejas!"
Your life is not your own, Mister Eyebrows! ( Eyebrows seems to be Rosa's nickname for Keith)
"Honestamente"
Honestly
" Tu naturaleza será la muerte de mi."
You will be the death of me.
"Cierra tu boca, Lance"
close your mouth, Lance.

LANCE "spicy"
"Eres divina...Te deseo...Papacito rico. Voy a devorarte"
You are devine.. I want you... hot boy/Rich Daddy. I will eat you."
"Quiero resgar apagado toda su ropa... Se siente rico."
I want to rip your cloths off... you feel so good."

Any other filler moments he's probably saying dios mio. Which when you google translate it translates to 'OMG' no joke. Just did it.

Sorry for any miss translations. This time I went to a website and asked for sexy things to say to a lover. I think it was ment for a girl talking to a boy? ( not like that should matter lol)
Keith was in a field of lavender, its sweet smell drifting in the soft breeze under the warm sunlight. He could feel sparks ignite a feeling of happiness under his skin, sending joy and filling him. He felt whole, at peace, the same kind of peace he achieved when flying, when riding his motorcycle, yet it was absent of adrenaline.

He looked around, expecting to see someone, someone who had to be there. But no one was. With this realisation the sky turned gray and Keith looked up and saw a raging storm above. Yet he felt no colder, felt no rain. The skies and heavens opened up and released a strike of lightning.

Keith woke up to the thunder storming outside. It really was quite the storm. He shifted in his dreary half awake state before realising something was supposed to be there. Someone. Lance was gone.

Keith felt his heart wrench. Confusion and shock washed over him in an instant. He fought back against his thoughts, standing and searching his apartment. But there was no use. The moment he noticed Lance’s missing jacket he couldn't deny the evidence. Lance had left. No words, no note, Keith had opened up and was left. He knew he was jumping to conclusions, Lance wasn't that type. If he was, Keith would have noticed long before. But there was that part of him, the part that wouldn't shut up.

He regrets it.

He took pity on you.

You were the one asking for it.

You pressured him into it.

It's not like he said he actually likes y-

Keith’s hand, his busted hand, was flying before he knew it. Flying fast through the air at the front door he was now standing by, the open door, with Lance on the other side.

"Woah!" Lance grabbed the punch, Keith could feel a gentle grip pull him causing him to fall
forward. Lance quickly took advantage of Keith’s decent, and wrapped his arms around Keith’s midsection to hoist Keith up in the air and onto his shoulder. The more than awkward grab however, led Keith to be belly up in Lance’s fireman's hold. Bending his spine in a way it wasn't meant to go.

Keith let out an undignified yelp.

Lance, realising Keith's painful position, with the skill and grace of a fireman, readjusted Keith so that he was laying over his shoulder. Which was good because Keith was pretty sure his face caught fire.

"What the heck are you doing? Swinging your fist around..."

"Put me down." Keith began struggling against Lance’s grip.

"Are you always this bad after a nap? Or was the almost sex that bad?" Lance winked and Keith froze in his wiggling. Lance taking that opportunity to drop Keith back on the couch.

"You... left."

"To get food, your fridge was empty."

Keith noticed Lance was a little damp from the storm.

"I borrowed your umbrella, it's drying outside. Oh!" Lance walked back over to the door grabbing the food he had dropped and closing the door. "I hope the eggs didn't break. I'm gonna borrow your kitchen, okay?"

Keith nodded dumbly as Lance closed the door and went over to the kitchen, pulling out pan and bowls as needed. Keith found himself following in a daze.

"So, I'm making something my bro taught me. Bacon pancakes. Super tasty... it's usually for breakfast though, ah... well."

Keith felt his feet drag in disbelief and relief as he approached Lance, watching his back as he cracked eggs into a bowl and started mixing.

"The trick is to have enough bacon to cook in the pancake and sprinkle on to-"

Keiths arms wrapped around Lance, burying his face in his warm and very real shoulderblades.

"Keith?"

Keith just squeezed tighter. Lance patted his hand causing Keith to release a little and give Lance room to turn around and then Lance kissed him.

It was simple, sweet and real.

The kiss didn't lack any passion from the day before, but instead of a raging forest fire, wild and out of control, this was a soft candle flame burning softly in the night.

When Lance pulled away, Keith pushed forward again wanting more. Keith had never felt so needy. But Lance let out a delighted hum before breaking off again.

"Stop it... foods gonna burn."

Keith let go, but the draft against his bare chest and legs made him want to dive back in. Instead, he
made his way over to the couch, snatching up the comforter and wrapping it around his shoulders. After, he headed back towards the kitchen leaning over at the counter to watch Lance cook. When they were finished, they sat down at the island counter to eat.

"How long till you can head back to S.N.I.F?"

"Two months. Shiro says it’s for my help or punishment, Pidge says it's because they want to rebuild what they were working on."

"Not up to snuff with what you guys were making in here?" Lance smirked.

"Guess not." Keith smirked back. "I’m surprised two minds like theirs aren't working in that field."

"I know right? They could make mad bank. Pidge says they don't like restrictions or being told what to build."

"I can relate."

"Hunk had this thing with his dad? Like... His dad wanted him to take over the restaurant and why shouldn't he cause’ he's so talented? But Hunk was also mad good with engines. Turns out Hunk digs praise more than you would think? ‘Cause you get more praise for cooking than designing and building a rocket ship."

"I would think building a ship would get him tons of praise."

"Yeah, maybe? But like.. not from real people. He's more down to earth then immortalizing his name. I can relate, like my flowers. It's always worth it to see how excited someone looks when they get my arrangements. I made their day. Hunk’s the same but with food."

"Huh..." Speaking of food, which American dreamed of bacon pancakes? They need to be honored with a day off dedicated to the heart stopping creation.

"Anywho... I'd better leave you to rest." Lance stood up clearing his plate and washing it off in the sink.

"Oh..."

"Don't ‘oh’ me. When you're feeling better you can come visit. Like tomorrow at lunch." Lance was already halfway out the door, leaving Keith with a peck on the cheek, a wink, and a sleepless night.

A week passed without a visit from Lance, and Keith was housebound by Shiro who was practically guarding his door. When asking Pidge and Hunk who dropped by, why Lance had been absent, they explained he was making up for time lost spent at the hospital.

Keith would watch as at the end of each day, the lights in Lion’s Rose would turn off. He would wait for the lights to turn back on upstairs, but they never did, Lance having probably gone straight to bed. Hunk had said Lance was waking up earlier. While Keith understood the trouble he must have caused Lance, he still missed him, and at the end of the first week, he couldn’t help it, he had to go visit Lance.

When Keith headed over to the Lion’s Rose he was greeted by not Lance, but Rosa.
"Keith my dear! Are you well?"

"Fine. Thank you." He said before jumping at a familiar pinch at his butt.

"Muy bien..." said Elena. Keith found his hand gardening the tender spot and Lance’s grandmother hid her giggle behind her hand.

"Mamá, deja eso."

"Is Lance around?"

"Of course dear, we just sent him up to change, he got water all down his front."

"Parecia que se orino a sí mismo," Elena chuckled again.

"Right... I was just stopping by to-"

"Keith!" Lance ran across the shop and put himself between Keith and Rosa.

"Mamá, I'll be back!" Lance hollered, while pushing Keith out the door.

"Huh? We're not staying here?"

"With my family nosing around? No way, I need a break from them. It's not even thanksgiving yet and I'm already up to my ears in blood relatives."

"Oh yeah... Right."

They continued down the street, Lance claiming Hunk wasn't in Yellow roll due to him being sick, and that they would try a coffee shop a few blocks down.

Bitter bean was warm, filled with earth tones, beanbag chairs, struggling artists and playwrights. The decorations looked like they had been cut and pasted from a trendy magazine. Window boxes of cactuses on the wall below mirrors that looked aged. Segments of the wall were painted with chalkboard paint, the evidence of a skilled calligrapher present listing all the specials. The air was toasty with the relaxing scent of freshly crushed coffee beans wafting through the air.

The tense feeling in his shoulders, that Keith wasn't even aware he had, melted in an instant.

"Okay, so they do some pretty tasty mixes, or if you're not down for coffee they do tea. Pidge said their sandwiches are good."

Keith hummed in response, his eyes scanning the menu. The barista was at a far table, serving at the moment, and Keith was glad there was no rush.

"Coffee for sure," he started, "The salami blt looks good."

"True, I'm eyeing my own chicken with spicy mayo though. Got a thing for anything on sour dough bread."

"Oh. Huh." That did look good, Keith hated eating out like this. He was so used to picking one thing and sticking to it, going to the same places, ordering the same food. It was simpler. He still holds fresh memories of wondering if his money would stretch him till the end of the week, and the idea of ordering something and not enjoying it just seemed like a waste. He could get both, but would that be weird? Lance would probably make fun of him, and he wouldn't be able to finish...
"Hey, how about we do halfies?" Lance suggested.

"What?"

"The sandwiches? They come in like, half parts. So we just trade one half part so we can try both."

"..."

"Or ya know, if I'm overstepping my bounds we don't have too, we can ju-"

"I'd fucking love that."

Keith spoke flatly, but gave Lance such an intense look that Keith could see him buckle under it. He felt proud in that, flustering the 'flirt'.

Lance cleared his throat, looking away from Keith, back to the menu.

"Hey, Lance."

A tall tan woman, with shockingly long bright blond dreadlocks, wrapped up in a bandana, flashed a smile at Lance. They looked to be the same height even.

"Hey Nyma." Lance spoke softly.

"So what? Come crawling back for my coffee but no second date?"

Keith stiffened. Lance seemed to as well, but he collected himself quickly.

"What can I say? You're just too much woman for me to handle." He chuckled, and she play pouted in response. Whatever the situation was, it was far from as awkward as Keith was painting it in his mind.

"What if," She started, looking over to Keith. "I take off with your little friend here? He's cute." She flashed Keith the same smile she had flashed Lance, playful and wicked.

"You're definitely way too much woman for him." Lance laughed, jabbing Keith lightly in the side.

"I don't know, he looks like he can take some..." She paused biting her lip. "Punishment."

"Woah okay, Nyrma no! He's playing for another team."

What?

"Oh... he wouldn't happen to be on your team would he?"

"He may or may not belong to a team that can play games with my team.

Huh?

"Have you signed him on yet? Given him that big contract? Put him up in your hall of fame?"

What the heck?
"I'm not sure I follow." Lance responded.

"Yeah same here." Keith piped up, glad he wasn't the only lost one.

Nyma rolled her eyes, making a tight fist with her right hand in front of them, slowly pushing her left index finger into the curled up fingers. Keith was still confused, but Lance seemed to get it, slapping her hands down to get her to stop.

"So, is he?" She asked again, Keith had managed to forget the original question though.

"Working on it. Can we order now?"

"Rawr, you big grump. He's not topping you is he?"

Lance rolled his eyes and started spewing off his order with bite, Nyma unfazed punched it in.

"What for you sweetheart?"

"I'll have your house dark roast, black, and the salami blt."

"Yuck, you can drink that stuff black?" Lance asked in disgust.

"You don't like coffee?"

"I dig teas, cold and sweet."

"Kinda like you sweetpea." Nyrma chimed in again, Lance started scrambling for his wallet to pay, possibly with the desire to get away fast. Keith was faster.

"But I was gonna-"

"You brought me a hospital's worth of flowers, I'm gonna at least pay for some meals in return to your lost product."

"Oh my god Lance! You gave him flowers?"

That was it for Lance it seemed, as he gripped Keith by the shoulders and began pushing him away. Nyma’s laughter carrying after them.

They sat in a booth near a shaded window, the warmth of sunlight bleeding through, you could just barely make out the people walking around outside. After a few moments of silence, Keith decided to bring up the one part of that conversation that he had understood.

"So..." Keith started.

"Don't say a word."

"You're into punishment?"

Lance's head slammed against the table.

"Noo! I just... I didn't really know what I was walking into."

"What do you mean?" Keith leaned forward and Lance peaked up.
"It's a long story."

"So you two dated?"

"NO! It's more like we met, and flirted, and you know what? I am hungry, hope that cook hurries."
Lance punctuated his thought by sitting back up and patting his belly in a summoning fashion.

Keith found himself laughing as Lance squirmed. Thankfully for the both of them, small talk came easy. While they chatted, Nyma started to walk over with their drinks, Lance jumped up, not wanting her to come over and start causing trouble again. Keith couldn't hear the words exchanged, but once he had his hands full of drinks and was turned to head back to Keith, Nyma gave him a ripe slap on the butt.

Lance muscled through it like a champ. Keith was irritated, somewhat with her for being that open, mostly with himself. He didn't want to admit that he wanted to do the very same thing.

Thankfully, the warm flavor of the coffee helped him relax.

Not long after, a tall man with short green and white hair poking out of a brown bandana that was similar to Nyma's, and a black chef's apron came walking through. He looked like a potted plant mixed with a Japanese cartoon character.

"Lance!" He said, laying the plates down.

"Hey Rolo."

The man was taller than Lance, and looked to have a decent amount of upper body strength.

"So what's the deal? No second night of fun?"

If not for the casual indie rock and the noise from Nyma making coffee at the front, you could hear a pin drop.

"Hahahaha..."

Lances only response was to laugh. Keith made eye contact with him and mouthed 'him too?' to which he didn't respond, just looked away.

"You know, Nyma and I had a lot of fun. It gets more fun the more used to it you get, maybe invite your friend here too? It could be buckets of fun." When Rolo smiled, Keith's eyes caught a flash of a gold canine.

"AHahaha, but then when would you two have time for each other?"

Rolo just smirked and walked back to the kitchen, and Lance let his head hit the table again.

"So... you and him?"

"And Nyma."

"And Nyma?"

"One night."

"ONE NIGHT?!!"
Lance hands flew to Keith's mouths to cover them.

"Look, it was one night, I hit on Nyrma at a bar, she doesn't wear a wedding ring, she finds out I'm bi, next thing you know I'm in a bitter bean sandwich. I had no idea they worked here but I bet you all my plants that Pidge did know."

"Keep your plants. So you had a threeway?" Keith asked bluntly, Lance blushed.

"More or less. They are married, have been for years. When the fire started dying, I guess they thought bringing other people in would ignite it."

Keith was, well not really, stunned. He was never one to kinkshame. So long as it wasn't against the law do whatever you had to do to get yourself off.

"So, is that what she meant by punishment?" Lance let out a sigh.

"No... Punishment came in the form of a pair of handcuffs, a bed post and a shit ton of teasing."

Oh...

"Was it alright?"

"Yeah? I mean you kinda zone out, but yeah. Still that kinda shit can get complicated fast. No way I'd make that choice completely sober. It was just a one time deal for me."

"Huh..."

"What?"

"Nothing, just learning things about you."

"Yeah well, what's your sexual history?"

"Woah, I get to hear one event and you get my history?"

"I gave you a highlight, honestly that was the tip top of interesting for me. Go, who's most interesting guy you've dated?"

"Hmm.... I've never really been much for dating so a lot are one nightstands or friends with benefits."

"O-oh..."

"Hmmm.. Most interesting would have to be... oh! I had a guy that was super into like... hands and feet. Just hands and feet. So I can give a really good handjob."

"Now that's a marketable skill." Lance joked, but his tone lacked its usual sparkle. Keith watched as he set into his sandwich, seeming to forget their promise of a trade off, and Keith to worried to ask for it.

When they parted ways, Keith caught up with Rosa again at the entrance to Lion’s Rose.
"Keith, you must come around for dinner tonight okay? At 7."

"Okay sure." He watched the two enter the shop and felt a kernel of worry seed into his chest. Lance had been fairly quiet for most of lunch after the whole Rolo, Nyma thing. Keith wondered if it was okay.

He pushed the thought aside, not wanting to ruin his new choice and his ability to follow through with it. Back at his apartment he met up with Shiro who was waiting in the hallway in front of his door.

"So, what did you need my help with?"

"I need to buy something."

"A bed?" hours later found the two standing in front of a simple box frame designed bed, sleek and modern and supposedly durable.

"I've never bought one before."

"And you want me to help move it?" Keith shrugged, it was true. Even with Shiro's one damaged hand he was still had killer strength.

"Now, I'm not one to shut you down, but I feel like this motion is fast for you two."

"What? I just want a bed."

"You're buying one with Lance in mind."

"Who says that?"

"You made sure the bed wasn't raised too high and you spent a good twenty minutes bouncing on mattresses to test their... comfortableness."

Keith blushed.

"I know you guys kissed, but this seems like a fast move, doesn't he have a bed?"

"He does, it's just... If the opportunity arises I don't want us to have to walk back to his place."

"You're excited."

"Shut up."

"It's a good thing. Really. It shows you care. First boyfriend, I'm so proud."

"R-right."

"It's official right? I mean, if you're picking out a bed for the two of you that sounds fairly domestic."
"I don't think... it's official?"

"And yet you're buying a bed."

"Maybe I have other reasons for buying a bed."

"Other reasons like, if it's not official, you want it to be?"

Keith didn't say anything. He just picked up the price tag for the frame and studied it.

"You want to stay here?"

"I wonder if this comes with a box frame..."

"You want to stay with him."

"Okay, Shiro, you got me. I like Lance. A lot. More than I should. I feel like I'm 15 years younger and that's not a good thing. The man could do things to me with his voice alone and he's a decent human being. I'd have to be stupid to pass that up."

Shiro looked a mixture of shocked and amused.

"I'm happy for you."

"Really? Because you keep being weird about it. Like I'm gonna ruin it or something."

"It's your first actual relationship, you probably will mess up at some point."

"Thanks."

"That's not an insult to you, everyone does make mistakes. Honestly, if Lance finds out you bought a bed because of him I think he would be touched. He would never let you live it down, but he would be touched."

"Right," Keith paused, studying the bed one last time. "I think this one will work."

The bed frame and mattress fit into his truck fine, however, getting it up into his apartment was another story. They had a large enough elevator but they kept receiving dirty looks when people saw they couldn't hop on. Once it was in the apartment, Shiro left Keith to build it. The work was slow, and a bit of a headache, but when he was done the result was great, and he found himself flopping onto the new bedspread. This big thing would be annoying to move or throw out, such a hassle. He better not have to.

He moved the bedding he usually kept on the couch over to the new bed and felt a huge need for a nap, but it was nearly seven. So he pried himself off it, promising to drag Lance to it tonight, even if it was just to cuddle or something.

Knowing he would be eating with Lance’s family he tried to put together a nice outfit, his usual black skinny jeans now coupled with his nicer pair of brown dress shoes, a red and black plaid button-down shirt and a gray sweater over it.

Across the street he looked up to see a dark apartment, and not a soul in sight. Had they meant for them all to go out to dinner? Keith checked his phone. He was early, by about 5 minutes, so they wouldn’t have left without him.

“Oh Keith! My dear,” Rosa seemed to pop up out of nowhere, looping her arm around his to ever so
lightly guide him inside. “Come in dear, come in. Why are you outside without a coat?”

“It’s not a long walk.” He found himself smiling at the fondness she showed him.

“That’s no excuse! You think a cold cares how long you're walking around?”

Inside was warmer, yet still very dark.

“I just had to run and grab something, the family should be upstairs. Go on up.”

“But the lights were off.”

“Oh that silly bunch! Just go up, I’m sure they’re playing a game.”

Keith felt his skepticism showing, as Rosa continued to push him up the stairs. The door was unlocked at the top, and he opened it slowly.

Stepping into Lance's dark apartment felt strangely cold, its usual warm tones were now painted in monochromatic blue, no light say for the orange light pollution pouring in from beyond the garden.

“Hello?”

He turned around, he could no longer see Rosa either. He stepped along, feeling as though he was drifting through a dream or a nightmare. He heard a rushed whisper and spun around to see Blue’s eyes shining in the dark, blurred in movement as the cat made its way toward him.

He picked up the cat and it purred in his arms happily.

“Where is everyone blue?”

Suddenly the lights were on, and blinding, and a roaring cheer sent him jumping backwards, and Blue leaping out of his arms and onto his shoulder.

“SURPRISE!” Everyone shouted. Suddenly he could see them, Lance’s family, along with Hunk, Pidge, Allura, Coran, Shiro, and Lance himself. The space now feeling more claustrophobic than cozy.

“What?”

“It’s your ‘We’re happy you’re not dead!’ Party!” Laughed Pidge, pointing to the sign hung up on the far wall above the fireplace reading ‘You’re not dead! Yay!’.

“It’s a welcome home party,” Shiro added in, “We just made the poor choice of letting Pidge be in charge of decorations.”

Keith noticed one of the many balloons that had writing scribbled on it, this one reading “Take that death!”

He felt Rosa touch his shoulder.

“We told you we would throw a party.”

“Yeah...I was kinda hoping you would forget.”

“Oh, nonsense! Lets eat!”
The table was more crowded than ever, even with Pidge and Alice eating at the kitchen bar. Rosa had outdone herself, the table spilling over with both cuban and korean dishes.

“I wasn't sure what you liked, so Shiro helped.” Rosa explained.

“Really? Shiro, this is so scrumptious!” Praised Allura sitting next to a bashful Shiro. Keith smirked.

“Showing off, Shiro?” Said Keith, he felt a sharp kick under the table.

“Only for you little bro.” Shiro spoke through gritted teeth and a pleasantly fake smile.

Keith was never one for talking in big groups, he enjoyed listening far more. Besides, if he was talking he couldn’t eat all the delicious food made for him. Once he was full he turned to Lance, who he realised was being unusually quiet.

“Hey,” said Lance upon being spotted.

“Hey yourself. Did Blue eat your tongue this morning? You’re so quiet.”

“Just tired. It’s been a long week.”

“I bet... Sorry about that.”

“Why are you sorry?”

“You’re behind on your work ‘cause of visiting me right?”

“Oh... Yeah? I guess. It doesn’t really work like that? I wasn’t taking orders but I still had a goal to meet and break during this month, so I stayed open later. It’s not your fault. I thought me being there with all my flowers would help.”

“It might have?” Keith’s voice sounded unsure. It’s not a concept he would reject, but not one he had any strong evidence for either. In fact, he woken up while Lance was gone. Lance seemed to understand well enough and offered Keith a weak smile.

“It was more me being selfish than anything. Actually…” He stood up suddenly, and Keith noticed all of a sudden how full his plate was. His eyes followed Lance’s figure up to his face, which looked torn and apologetic. “Sorry guys, I’m gonna have to call it a night.”

“What?” came many voices from around the table, Lance just smiled and offered them a simple ‘goodnight’ before walking off to his bedroom and shutting the door with a soft click.

It was as though he took all the joy and noise with him, and left Keith feeling as though something was pulled from his chest. No one spoke as Rosa stood from the table and followed after him. Lance’s father attempted to resume conversation, and Keith felt himself relax back into the situation, despite Lance’s absence. Yet it all dropped again when they heard Rosa’s muffled spanish shouting from behind the door.

It only lasted a few moments, cutting through the budding conversation, leaving an awkward pause in its wake. Seconds later, she burst through the door, grabbing at her coat. Keith couldn’t understand a word of what she was saying. Looking around the table didn’t help either, everyone looked just as confused and shocked. Rosa marched out the door and Alice followed, calling after her mother.

In silent agreement, the party ended. Keith offered to help clean, but Hunk and Elena shooed him
away. Elena even offered up the cake they had made in apology, and with a promise that next time would be better. Well, Pidge translated that part.

Shiro walked out with Keith.

“ I feel like I messed up?”

“ I don’t see how you could have?”

“ He was fine this afternoon before lunch, and then after that he was super weird.”

“ Did something happen at lunch?”

“ I found out he had a three way..”

Shiro choked.

“ Recently?! ”

“ Oh, I uh... Didn’t ask?”

“ With whom?”

“ The two workers at Bitter Bean... Oh shit that was probably a secret?”

“ Oh! Nyma and Rolo? That happened ages ago. No secret, Lance was butt hurt over that for weeks, in more ways than one.”

Against all willpower, Keith found himself laughing.

“ I don’t know then,” Shiro added, “ If that’s the only thing that happened, he could really just be tired.”

“ I just wish I knew what Rosa was saying.” Keith sighed.

“ From what I caught, it didn’t make much sense. She’s angry at him for being happy? I think I just misheard. I’m sure we’ll find out soon enough from Lance, try to get some rest.”

“ Yeah, Goodnight.”

Keith couldn’t sleep. He had never attempted to sleep on something so soft and perfect and every atom in his being was crying out for rest, but he was awake. The big bed was just that: too big. His plans to drag Lance back for cuddles and pillowtalk ended at the soft click of Lance’s door. Now, he was wide awake, trying to replay every moment in his mind of the past few days, weeks, months. Whatever his brain could remember.

Lance, to him, was the type that would wear his heart on his sleeve. This much was obvious. He was not afraid to show his anger, or his happiness, his worries or his fears.

In the distance he could hear a noise he recognised, but couldn’t place. His head filling with lazy
thoughts and scenarios of better endings of tonight. Lance would have cleaned his plate, and helped Keith with his own, with or without permission. They would have enjoyed the cake together, instead of it now sittin on his counter. He would have pulled Lance away as members of family and friends cleared off, across to his apartment, to his bed just for them. For them, and yet Lance was absent from it.

What was that noise. It sounded like a crack?

Lance would have trusted Keith enough to remove his artificial leg, and they would have climbed under the sheets together, cuddling close for warmth in the cold night air.

Or more like a crash. So far away.

They would have awakened in warm sunlight, a tangle of limbs and lazy kisses. Keith would beg him not to go, Lance would smile, and stay by his side long into the afternoon.

High pitched, in the distance, another crash.

Keith rose out of bed, that noise... Crash after crash after crash, like something breaking. He walked out into the living room, shivering in only a t-shirt and boxers, the cold floor causing him to pick up speed in an attempt at warmth. He walked over to his balcony, stepping out onto it, feeling the wind cut through his very being. It swept through his hair and carried him forward, forward towards the edge, to his view of Lance’s garden. He could now see Lance, who was crushing plant after plant under his feet.

“Lance!” Keith cried out, but the wind was too strong, he knew he wouldn’t be heard. Thunder cracked in the sky and Keith felt the prickle of newborn rain. He ran back inside, but didn’t stop once he had reached refuge. He kept going, out his door, down the 15 flights of stairs and out the front door back into the rain.

Across the street, the main door to the Lion's Rose was locked, but the side door wasn't. Up he climbed, seeing Lance’s front door open, banging in the wind that had swept through Lance's apartment. He looked around most of the pots inside were broken or knocked over, dirt and plants strewn across the floor.

Smash, crash, cries.

He rushed out to the balcony to see Lance had slipped in the mud that now splattered along the garden path. He had removed his leg and was now using it as a bat to smash everything he could crawl to.

Keith ran out to him.

“LANCE!”

Lance spun round, looking at Keith with eyes wide, shining in a fresh strike of lighting, soaked to the bone, like he had been when he apologised those short months ago.

“GO AWAY!” He hollered over the wind, chucking his leg at Keith, the wind carried it with more power than Keith had expected and it knocked him onto his back, he could feel the cold rain and mud seep into the thin cotton of his shirt. He pulled himself up, feeling himself shudder in the rain, and made his way over to Lance.

“LANCE!”
“Fuck OFF!”

“NO WAY! GET INSIDE!!”

“SHUT UP!”

Keith wrapped his arms around Lance and started to pull. Lance fought back, writhing with what little energy he had left. Keith was thankful Lance was so tired, not even able to land a proper blow. Just as they had made it past the threshold, Keith pulled him in, rolling Lance over himself so Keith could have access to the door; both shutting and blocking any chance of escape. Lance’s front door slowed with the lack of wind, now only softly creaking in a small draft. Keith could feel the carpet that was now drenched and covered in mud, squish under them. Before Keith could take a breath, Lance, who was still in his arms, head butted him in an attempt to free himself. Keith winced, eyes shut, seeing stars. His head had struck the glass door causing the pain to come in surround sound. He felt Lance still as his own arms went slack around him.

“Shit! Shit! Your head! Are you okay!? I’m sorry, I didn’t... Dammit.”

He felt icy wet fingers take hold of his face, holding it with such care. Keith’s hands found Lance’s wrists, and he forced his eyes back open. Lance's eyes were downturned, hiding his face as best he could, as his grip tightened on Keith’s face.

“Why are you here?” His question came out shuddering, high pitched, and broken.

“I saw you across the street,” Keith answered simply. His hands gripping Lance’s wrists loosely, thumbs making the smallest of movements to stroke his smooth skin.

“I mean, why are you here? In my life. What fucking gave you the right to just perfectly shove yourself into my life?”

Keith’s thumbs stopped along with his breathing. The hole that Lance had ripped open that evening at dinner widened, and he could feel all the cold air being sucked through him.

“Do you… Hate me that much?” Keith said. His eyes shut, as if it would keep the answer at bay.

“Yes.”

It came out in a small voice, a whimper, forced. Keith heard it clear as day, over the roaring storms, over the thunder clashes and the wind. His grip on Lance’s wrists diminished, and he let his hands fall to the floor. Lance followed suit, letting his own grip of Keith’s face fall slack. They were completely separated, and the void between them never felt so large.

In Keith’s mind was a flurry of ideas, questions, actions. Things he wanted to shout and scream and punches he wanted to throw. But one clear thought stood strong.

If Lance really hated him, then why wouldn't he look at him?

He weighed his responses, different choices of actions. Keith was never a man of planning his words, more often or not he just spouted off whatever he-

“I think I’m in love with you.”
Shit.

That caught Lance’s attention in a heartbeat. Suddenly the eyes that had captured his heart time and time again were on him, intense, wide and scared. Lance’s mouth hung open, possibly prepared to say words that had yet to be formed in his mind. Keith stood his ground though, meeting Lance’s gaze. Feeling the first warmth grace his body as it flooded into his face.

“But,” Lance spoke, “But, I…”

“I know, you hate me.”

“No!” He shouted.

“No?” Keith felt his anger rising. “What do you mean no? I just asked you-”

“I hate,” Lance cut him off, wild gestures filled the spaces where words seemed to fail him. “I hate that you’re here!” he said finally.

“What’s the difference?” Keith felt frustration rising up and catching in his throat, he tried to swallow it down with a deep breath, but he couldn’t help the hole in his chest from tearing ever wider.

“It’s a huge difference!” Keith felt a spark ignite in his chest as he heard Lance's voice returning.

“Why? WHY is me being here something you HATE?!” Rage got the best of him, he was trying so hard not to shout, not to add to the heavy anger and emotions that hung dense in the air.

“B-because…”

‘Because’?” Keith was beyond irritated. He was frustrated to the point of madness.

“Because I can’t…”

“You can’t what?!”

“BECAUSE I CAN’T BE HAPPY!”

As the words were still ringing in the air, Lance seemed to realise what he admitted and his eyes grew once again with fear, and he cowered behind his hands.

“I… don’t… what?” Keith was flabbergasted. It wasn’t the answer he was expecting anyway. But to be fair, he wasn’t sure what he expected. He was not someone who would often sing his own praises, but he had not been able to come up with a reason that would make Lance hate him. But this…

“I don’t deserve it. I had my chance. I had a chance to get everything. I went after my goals because I was selfish, I wanted it all. I wanted… I wanted my happiness. I lost it. I rushed to it and fucked up and I just decided to be settled with the life I got. This was my punishment…”

Keith knew the statement was vague, but he couldn't help but watch as Lance gripped his stump leg. “I haven’t done enough yet, I’m still asking for help, fucking up, I’m still a mess… I don’t deserve-”
“Why is it your choice!?” Keith's hands gripped at Lance's face, moving it upward so their eyes could meet again. “Why the hell don't you deserve to be happy? Who decided that?”

“I had my chance.”

“YOU think you only get one? Lance, if you really think that, then what about mine!?”

“What about— but you said—”

“What?”

“You said dating isn't your thing!”

“It wasn't!”

“What—”

“I, in my whole life, have never romantically liked someone as much as I like you. Love, for me, was my brother or my adoptive family. It was never something so tangible, something I could go get. I couldn't see why I would want to get into the nitty gritty of a relationship when I could just have one night stands or my right hand.”

“Dude,” Lance’s voice was somehow back to normal. Keith found himself nearly breaking out into hysterical laughter.

“Then, some fucking weirdo, shows up soaking wet at my door after having just kicked me out of his flower shop and I'm trying to figure out what is going on in my life. This dude is sexy and funny and interesting and somehow this feeling isn't losing its kick. Before you know it, we have an amazing night together that it leaves me waking up for the first time hoping to see someone beside me. For the first time in my life home is not a shack, out in the desert, it's a person. How scary is that? I bought a fucking bed for you!”

“What? Why?”

“Because I thought you couldn't fuck on a couch.”


“Then why didn’t you?”

“I didn’t want to rush you, you just got out of a hospital.”

“I told you I was fine. You said ‘YOU’ couldn’t do it.”

“So you thought it was my leg holding me back?”

“Fuck, dude, I don’t know!? I didn’t want to pry into it. I was kinda just focused on having sex with you.”

“So you bought a bed? Who does that!?”

“I DID!”

The moment hung heavy between them. Keith could see his embarrassment reflected in Lance, but it didn't last. A few moments and it was twisting from embarrassment to regret, and his head swung downwards again, hiding his face.
Lance’s breathing was still deep, Keith knew it well, the panicked rage, like being trapped in a small box, the only feeling left in you is to fight. Keith would be lying if he said he didn’t feel that way now, just not to Lance’s extent. He wondered how long it would take Lance to fully exhaust himself, he couldn’t be far from it now, at least he had stopped breaking things.

Smash.

He spoke too soon. Lance's hand had found one of the few intact pots remaining in his apartment and corrected it. Keith grabbed at Lance’s wrists, holding him in place.

“Talk to me.”

“NO!”

“Something is wrong, everyone knows it, you’re not hiding the fact you’re in pain. Just let me help. Or help me understand. Talk to me.”

Lance struggled more, but the fight was less potent, and Keith could see his eyes brimming with tears in the small light they had.

“Okay.” Lance’s voice sounded tired and defeated, but he relaxed, and Keith kept his grip tight as he began to stand up.

“Let’s go get you cleaned up first, before you catch a cold.”

Lance nodded, and allowed Keith to hoist him off the ground. One of Lance's arms wrapped around Keith's shoulder, while Keith supported his waist as the two steadied themselves.

“Where’s your leg?”

“Broke it. I’ve got the other ones in the bedroom.”

Keith took the bulk of Lance’s weight as they made their way to the bathroom, Keith leaving Lance to sit on the edge of the bathtub while he went to grab fresh clothing and towels and another leg. Upon entering Lance's room, he heard a soft mewing from under the bed.

“Blue?”

Keith bent down to see Blue’s eyes shaking under the bed.

“Come on out... It’s okay.” He spoke softly, extending his hand out to her. She didn’t come. Keith knew she would at some point, she was probably scared of all the noise Lance has caused. He let her be, gathering up the basic spare leg and some clean clothes and towels for both of them.

He had flicked the light on in the bedroom to find the clothing, but hadn’t noticed the specs of blood now spotted in the hallway. Opening the bathroom door and flicking on the light he saw Lance sitting with his foot in the tub, water running over his hands.

“Let me see your hands and foot.” Keith spoke calmly setting the items down.

“Just some paper cuts.”

“Yeah, caused by pottery. Let me see.”

Lance spun around. Keith looked over the cuts on his foot, none were too deep, just scrapes from where he had probably stepped on some shards. His hands were another story, knuckles battered,
bruised and cut up. Keith cleaned them as best he could, before letting Lance shower. Once he was clean, they switched, and Lance got dressed as Keith showered off the mud.

“Why were you in your boxers?” he heard Lance ask from the other side of the shower curtain, in a slightly amused, yet hoarse voice.

“I was sleeping, or trying to anyway.”

“You didn’t think to put on pants?”

Keith turned off the water, poking his head out to see Lance meeting his gaze with a tired smile. He grabbed a towel.

“Nope,” he answered, popping back behind the curtain to dry off.

“Wanted to see me that bad huh?”

“Yeup.” Keith tied the towel around his waist and stepped out, grabbing at the shirt and borrowed boxers from Lance.

“Your boxers are so cute,” Lance said holding them up, “They’ve got little aliens on them.”

“Shut up and move. Blue’s whimpering under your bed and she won’t come out.”

“Ah, dammit,” that got Lance moving. He stood up, his gait shifting on the new leg, and made his way to his bedroom while Keith took some toilet paper to mop up the drops of blood he could see. Lance had managed to bandage his hands up after his shower, which was good because Keith was never too great at that kind of thing. When Keith made it to the living room he quickly gave up, it looked like a storm had come through, a few drops of blood would do no more damage to this place.

He stepped into the bedroom looking at Lance laying flat on the floor, his face and arms stuck under the bed, calling out to Blue.

“Sorry sweety, really. I forgot you don’t like big noises. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, please come out. Keith is here and he wants to see you,” a few minutes of coaxing like that and Lance sat up with Blue shivering in his arms.

The two sat on the bed, Blue in Lance’s arms, with only Lance’s dumb novelty desk Leg Lamp lighting the room. Still freezing from the November rain, Lance climbed under the covers, removing his leg and the attaching part off under the sheets, and inviting Keith to join him in the warmth. Blue curled up between them.

“So,” Keith started. Lance let out a long sigh, focusing more on Blue, not meeting Keith’s gaze.

“So, I’m depressed.”

“Yeah. That part I got.”

“I’m not happy about it. I’m actually angry about it.”

“Right…” Keith wasn’t sure where to contribute, if anything he just wanted Lance to keep talking.

“I don’t know man. I’m just… it’s a lot of stuff.”

“Can you start from the beginning?” Keith asked.
“You sound like my therapist.” Lance spoke in an annoyed tone. Funny, you think Lance would like therapy, talking about himself all day. He was such an open guy.

“I’m not a therapist.”

“Then why are we talking?”

“I just want to know why you’re so torn over all this. It’s more for me than you.” Keith lied. “Otherwise how can I be sure you don’t hate me.”

“I don’t!”

“Talk to me then, make me understand why you—and because of this I—can’t be happy.”

“It’s late.”

“It was late when you decided to destroy your apartment. It was late when I came over in my underwear. Talk.”

“Fine.”

Keith settled in.

“I guess it started with Maria. I loved her when we were little. Our grandparents were super tight, and she loved spending time at the shop, and I loved her. I loved the shop too, but I had other dreams. I wanted to fly, I wanted to fly new and exciting things. I don’t know, the shop was nice but my mother was planning to keep working till after Alice finished college at least, then she or someone else would take over.

“Maria never accepted the fact she didn’t own Lions Rose. It was opened by my grandfather and her grandfather when they moved here together from Cuba. When her grandfather moved on to bigger things, they broke apart and they stopped being business partners. They were still friends though. No drama at all. We all knew this. Maria wouldn’t accept it.

“I went to college more or less. Public, community, online, nothing to write home about. I tested high enough to get into schools like the Garrison or even Stanford and Virginia tech. I even got some scholarships, but none were full rides, which is what I needed. I started working in the shop to save up money so I could go to school. Better late than never right? That’s when Maria showed up again. Fresh out of a two year business school, ready to take on the world, but she just wanted to work with me. I had a soft spot for her so yeah, I let her work. She was practically family, and my first love. I would flirt with her like I did in highschool, and for the first time in our lives, she flirted back at me. She was looking my way, romantically speaking. I was over the moon about it. Within a short year she convinced me to take over the shop, and take the military route towards better learning.”

“Wait. You joined the Airforce because of Maria?” Keith interjected, shocked.

“It was an idea I had on my own,” Lance defended, “It sounded like fun even, fly planes for four years in service, free flight school, and then get my way payed for at any school I like. Garrison, S.N.I.F., Air Force, NASA; they are all so tight nit. When I would have finished my service I would have had a world of options, and Maria would run Lion’s Rose like she wanted, leaving Alice to do whatever she wanted. Maria and I got married and a week later I had signed up to join the U.S. Air Force.

“Two years went by, everything was good. Perfect even. I was one of the best pilots and was already talking to people from the Garrison. Although, after seeing you fly, I get the feeling you
could fly laps around me.”

Keith shrugged. He knew he was good enough to get a full ride to the Garrison, even if they hated him in the end. But he hadn’t really seen much of his flying. Keith’s non committal answer had Lance chuckling.

“Right, well... Then I got a mission. My team and I were sent to fly over a highly active war zone. Just to take pictures. There were too many civilians that the higher ups couldn’t look the other way, thank god too. In theory, as we hit the border we would crank up speed, separating to capture as much ground as we could and gather tons of footage to see what the situation was before they sent in ground troops. During the flight the enemy caught wind, as was expected, and started to try and shoot us down. There was a missile launched right at one of my crew, I swerved to intercept and then quickly ejected.”

Keith felt like his heart was racing. It was amazing how calm and nonchalant Lance could sound as he explained how he nearly killed himself to possibly save someone else.

“The thing about ejecting and landing over an active war zone is this, just don't do it. I lucked out that civilians found me first and hid me, but it wasn’t long before a bomb went off that took my leg.”

“It didn’t happen in the crash?”

“It broke for sure. I’m not sure if I would have recovered fully or not, the bomb just kinda turned a coin flip to a for sure answer. A painful answer. What was maybe a few harsh breaks, turned into ribbons of me all over the place.”

“How did you get out?”

“Locals. War opposed and kind hearted. Ones who understood our mission was peaceful. They moved me to one of their local hospitals where they bound what was left of my leg. When my jet went down in a hot zone, and they knew I ejected, there was a chance to get me out, so foot soldiers moved in and secured the area. Myself and a handful of locals were extracted and moved to a hospital in the capital. As soon as they could, I was on a plane back home. I got medals, awards, thanks, and “healthcare for life” to an extent. When I made my home coming I was hoping to see my family, friends and wife, to be there for me as I struggled through this. Family and friends stayed there day and night. Maria showed up before and after business hours. One day, when she came by we talked about the future, and I figured it was obvious that once I could walk I would start working in the shop. Maria didn’t like the idea. I understood Maria better than anyone in my family. They say she is heartless, she doesn’t love anything, which is not true. She just didn’t love me. I knew this going in, I figured with time she would, but she only had eyes for herself, and she pictured herself running the shop solo. Me being around didn’t give her the full illusion that she owned the place. That’s when she broke.

“I knew she could be nasty and cold sometimes, but the side of her I hadn’t seen was how manipulative she could be. I tried to help her through accepting we would run the shop together, but she wouldn’t budge. She snaked her way around my family, around my friends trying to get them to see how weak I was, how much time I needed to heal. I put my foot down one day, told her she would never own Lion’s Rose. She told me it was over.

“Our divorce wasn’t clean either. She wanted to go to court over Lions rose. Claiming how I couldn’t run it, how I ran off and left it to her to follow my dream. She lied and went on about how abusive I was, horrible, beating her, never letting her speak her mind. It didn’t help. She overplayed her hand and in her dramas everyone saw how nuts she was. I thought I could help her. The Maria I knew was messed up, but the last thing I wanted to do was leave her. When she had lost the case, I
offered for her to stay, if we could try again. She cursed me out and told me she would own Lion’s Rose one day soon. That was about five years ago, I think. She sent spies to work at the shop, try to sabotage business so we would go under and she could swoop in for the buy. My family and I would never see each other go homeless over Lion’s Rose, it was a fair plan, we never quite recovered from a lot of the damage she has done to the shop. It's become misfortune after misfortune. We can’t hire anyone. We can’t trust anyone that’s not family. If you didn’t know Shiro, and take the time to get to know the neighborhood, I don't think I would have ever come over to apologize to you.”

“ Well, thank my being too nervous to talk to you.” Keith spoke, offering Lance a warm smile.

“ Eh? Seriously? What do you mean?”

“ I had seen you a few nights before-the first night I moved in- singing and working on your garden. I just felt drawn to you I guess. I didn’t want to be creepy, so I checked out everyone else first to ask about you.” Keith explained, and before this night he might have been embarrassed to admit it, but now he was just too happy to be ashamed.

“ Right, cause that’s not creepy.” Lance joked.

“ So, what else?” Keith said, now the two of them focused on playing with Blue.

“ What do you mean ‘ what else?’ that’s it.”

“ So you're depressed cause the girl you loved turned out to be a cold bitch you couldn’t fix?” Keith mused.

”No, I’m done with Maria. I gave her more chances than anyone would have, she's got family to pick up her pieces, she's off my hands.” Lance held up two empty hands to illustrate how ‘Maria free’ they were.

“ So you are depressed about your leg.”

“ Dude. I’m depressed because I can’t be happy.” Lance feeling frustrated looked up at Keith, who kept his own eyes fixed on blue.

“ Why can’t you?”

“ Because I just can’t.”

“ I don’t make you happy?” Keith looked up at Lance, he could see the frustration set into panic.

“ W-What? I… that…”

“ You make me happy.”

“ I… do?”

“ Yeah.” Keith smiled, and Lance went about 100 shades darker. Then he rolled over in an attempt to hide it. Blue lept up onto Lance's side.

“ But… you said…”

“ I said this was the first time I’ve felt anyway about someone.”

Lance sputtered, turning back around.
“Y-You d-didn’t say it like that!”

“You’re happy.”

“Shut up!” Lance turned over again.

Keith snuggled up to him.

“I’m happy you’re happy.”

Lance sighed again, turning in once again to face Keith, pouting hard to restrain an obvious want to smile.

“So what happens now?” Lance asked.

“Dating?” Keith shrugged.

“No I mean… I couldn’t… I don’t think I could…”

“You don’t want to date me?” Keith pouted.

“NO! Of course I do!” He yelled. Realizing what he said, he quickly ducked down and hid in Keith’s chest, gripping the shirt Keith was wearing tight. Keith found himself laughing lightly at the cute action.

“What happens when you leave?” Lance mumbled into Keith’s chest.

“Who says I will?” Keith asked.

“Who says you won’t?” Lance fired back.

“Me.”

“You don’t know that.” Lance strained.

“Neither do you.”

Lance stilled, Keith wrapped his arms around him, moving Blue who decided the corner of the bed was better than being squished.

“You can’t hide from happiness because you think bad things will happen. You might not be happy all the time, but you do care about us. Even if I left now, I think it would be a little too late to save either of us from heartbreak.”

There was a silence, long but warm, Keith could focus on the soft purring of Blue, the rain outside, and Lance’s slow breaths pouring onto his neck and collarbone.

“… I hate you.” Lance finally spoke up.

“I love you too.”

“Stay with me.”

“Only if you stay with me too.”

With that, Lance fell asleep, and not long after Keith followed suit. They never talked about why Lance destroyed his garden, but Keith found himself remembering something, maybe something
Pidge had said. The flowers, working in the shop, without thinking about it Lance had begun to find his own happiness again, all on his own. His flowers were the only thing that gave him joy that wouldn’t leave him. Maybe it scared him. Or maybe it stood for how broken he felt inside. As Keith nodded off, he started planning how they would do to clean up the next day, and how he would give him one of his cacti for Christmas.

That night, Keith dreamt of fields of wild daffodils, of a shattered glass vase with winged lions, but being slowly but surely reassembled. As the winds carried through the fields, it sounded like the waves of the ocean softly hitting the shore. It sounded like calm breaths, it felt peaceful and warm, and safe.

Chapter End Notes

Spanish time! ( prepair to cringe.)

" Muy multa" -- " very fine."
" Mamá, deja eso" -- " Mom, stop that."
" Parecia que se orino a si mismo" -- " He seems to have peed himself." ( I tried to keep it mimimul for everyones sake.)

Thanks again for reading! Just to wet your whistle, I really plan for only two more updates for this fic. A final chapter and an epilogue. Its usually how I roll in these kinds of things.

For spanish, both its useage and translations. Im sorry. Just in general. When I had the chance to take spanish in middle school they were like... NAW.. She's dislexic, lets teach her to read. And highschool had Japanese so no way im turnning that down. My point being I have access to websites and translators but not all the time. Usually when Im working on these fics. I cant always put in the translations ( and I know I need to go through and add some to other chapters I think) so sorry if my skills suck and an extra huge apology if I forget to add translations. Ive been going back and changing things so at least there is that.

Also this website keeps changing my formatting >
Arranged Gladiolus

Chapter Summary

Its the end... more or less.

Chapter Notes

Just as a note. My editor wasn't able to help me out on this one due to health conflicts. So apologies in advance. I did my best.. but I'm horrible.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Soft breaths, birds singing outside, the warmth of sunlight on his face, an arm wrapped around his side. As he became aware of these things Keith found himself slowly rise from the world of his dreams into reality. His eyes cracking open weakly to see the blurred vision of Lance, backlit in a halo of warm light, watching him. As Keith squeezed his eyes shut, trying to clear his vision, he heard a soft chuckle along with a raspy morning voice that was too good for this earth.

“Morning...” Lance spoke just above a whisper, just enough so that his sweet voice would vibrate down Keith’s spine. Keith squinted in the light, He could see Lance’s face in shadow, but shut his burning eyes and let out a groggy moan, turning back into the pillow and towards Lances warmth. Lance chuckled again.

“ You gonna wake up Grumpy?”

Keith grunted in response.

“ It’s already after ten.”

“ We went to bed around five.” Keith groaned into the pillow. Lance chuckled.

“ True.”

Keith lay on the bed, each limb warm and unwilling to move, he felt himself falling asleep again.

His heart sunk as Lance’s arm left his side, but rose higher into his throat as he felt bandaged knuckles graze his cheeks.

Keith cracked his eyes open to see Lance’s smile, as his hand open to cradle the side of Keiths face. Keith shut his eyes again, and leaned into it ever so slightly without hesitation, relaxing into the warm skin. He felt a thumb cross his lips before the thumb was replaced by Lance’s soft kiss. Keith leaned into it, feeling a coil that was wound in his chest relax. He let Lance pull away, wanting to chase after his lips but holding himself in place, eyes still shut, pretending to still be asleep.

Lance didn't pull too far away, as Keith felt his stomach bubble with each kiss Lance gave him. Peppering his face with kisses on the cheeks, nose, forehead, jaw line, down to his neck. Keith started to squirm. This might have been Lances objective, because the kissing went from 0 to 100
fast. Sleep being sucked out of him by Lances attack on his neck, soon moving down to his collarbone. He could feel Lance smile against his skin. Keith was getting impatient, and threw aside sleep for picking up Lance's face and connecting it with his own in a passionate kiss. One that carried on and turned into open mouth battles, hands roaming under the sheets, under shirts. Keith felt something grind into his crotch and he let out a rattled moan before singing into the crook of Lance's neck, whispering a slew of swear words as respective dull nails scraped against skin.

“Is it just the morning, or are you just happy to see me.” Lance smiled.

“Why not both?”

“Did… did you just meme at me?”

“God no.” Keith pulled him in for another kiss, rolling the two over so that Keith was on top, happily grinding into Lance. Lances hands roamed up Keith's shirt and found his nipples, holding him in place while also fiddling with them. Keith felt himself rock and bend against his will and Lance was letting out a slew of his own choice spanish frases.

“Screw this PG-13 grinding shit.” Lance said suddenly, rising up and forcing Keith onto his back. Keith was about to protest when he felt the hands slide down his chest to the hem of his boxers, and with a few quick tugs, they were gone. Keith was never one to be turned on by the simple placement of a person's face, at least not in the past. The idea of getting a blowjob always felt like settling with most guys, but with Lance this was a new kind of excitement. That mouth, which he loved so much, that beautiful voice, quick witted tongue, they were all going to worship him; and boy, did Lance look hungry. Lance teased his tongue around the head, seemingly toying with the concept, pretending he didn’t know what he was doing to Keith, who was white knuckling the bed sheets, letting out hissed curses like they were the only thing in his vocabulary. Lance pulled himself up, stealing one more longing kiss from Keith before ducking down again, ready to feast.

“¡LANCE! Qué... ¿qué ha pasado?”

“Fuck! Hide!” Lance said in a harsh whisper, right into Keith’s cock which felt oddly nice? He flopped over, off Keith, scrambling to the side of the bed to get his prosthetic.

“Hide? Where do you expect me to hide?” Keith whispered back, trying to hide his frustration.

“I don’t know? But I have the feeling if she sees you, she’ll think we had some crazy night together or something. Dammit.. I’m hard. Pants are gonna be a nightmare.”

“What’s worse, your mom freaking out thinking we had crazy sex, or your mom freaking out that you had a mental break down.”

Lance paused, only one pant leg tugged up his artificial leg, thinking. Then he dropped the pants, shaking them back off. Swiftly he grabbed his robe and tied it tight around his waist, managing to hide his erection. He leaned back over to Keith on the bed, kissing him before stepping away and tossing the sheets over Keith's lower half.

“You’re right. Sex with you is way better.” He laughed.

“How would you know?” Keith laughed back before Lance stepped out of the room. As he left Keith slipped his boxers back on. Blue hopped up on the bed and he played with her while trying to listen in on the conversation he knew he couldn’t understand. Only after a few minutes did Lance pop his head back into the room.
“Could you come out here and prove to my mother I’m not making this up?”

“But you are.”

“Help! Please?”

“Fine.” Keith stood, removing his shirt and messing up his hair even further, Lance looked at him with a confused sideways glance.

“What are you doing?”

“Making it convincing.” He wrapped the sheet around his shoulders and looked up at Lance to see he had looked away blushing.

“I can’t handle you right now. Please stop.” Lance left the room hiding his smile behind his hand, Keith left his out in the open.

While Rosa still seemed skeptical, she was more than a little shocked to see a bashful Keith step out of her son's room clad only in boxers and a bedsheat. Once Lance had her convinced enough, he tried to hint that they would like to be alone, Rosa put aside her shock to lay her foot down.

“No more until you clean up the mess from last time! Lance! I’ll run the shop. You stay here and clean!”

Rosa stomped out the door and downstairs, leaving the boys standing the crazy mess. Keith noticed how much of the carpet was now covered in dry mud. So much would be better off tossed.

“Should I… put on pants?” Keith asked turning to Lance who was also assessing the damage. His hand rubbing the back of his neck.

“As much as I hate to say it, yeah. I’ll lend you a pair.” Lance turned to look at Keith, and a tiredness fled from his expression when their eyes met. Lance bit his lip as his eyes roamed up Keith's figure.

“Uhh.. Lance.”

“I bet…” Lance said, approaching Keith. “If we are really…” Closer. “Really…” Closer still, only a few inches away. “Quiet…”

Lance's breath mingled with Keith, and Keith had to suppress a shudder. Lance was still shirtless, and Keith moved to reach out and touch him, sliding his hand up Lance's chest. Lance had a pained expression from his restraint. Reflecting Keith's own wanting.

“¡LANCE! ¡NADA DE SEXO HASTA QUE LIMPIES! ¡Tú, chico problemático! !” Rosa called from upstairs.

“Ma, No íbamos a tener sexo!” Lance yelled back, leaning towards Keith again.

“¡TAMPOCO se besen!” Rosa returned.

Lance pulled away, clicking his tongue. Looking at Keith with a sideways glance. Lance leaned in for a quick peck, pulling away before Keith could realize what he had done. Lance let out a sneaky giggle.

“Come on, I’ll get you some pants so you can head back home.”
“I was gonna stay and help.”

“You... It’s my mess dude, I don’t want you to have to deal with it.”

“Well what am I gonna do at home? Sit on my hands? Besides, your mom’s downstairs and she thinks I helped make this, so you’re stuck with me.”

Keith turned on his heel and headed back into the bedroom. He tossed the sheet onto the bed and searched for the shirt he had borrowed from Lance before. It was a worn out baseball cut t-shirt with blue sleeves and a white front. He hadn’t realized the night but it sagged on him. He was not small, not even compared to Lance, the shirt was probably big on Lance too. But Keith couldn’t help the odd feeling in his stomach as he looked at his reflection clad in nothing but Lance’s shirt and boxers. The way the shirt swallowed him whole made him feel claimed, and it didn’t help that Lance’s earlier ministrations had left a few marks along Keith’s exposed pale neck.

Lance came into the room, bringing along Blue’s food and water bowl. He had paused to watch Keith eye himself in the mirror.

“This is gonna be harder than I thought.” Said Lance.

“The cleaning?” Keith asked, confused.

“The not loving you.” Lance smiled.

Like a match struck, Keith felt heat whip around his neck to the tips of his ears and flooding his cheeks. Lance laughed, moving into the room and laying Blue’s food down for her.

“Just… give me some pants so we can get started.” Keith turned to see a blur of pants being flung at his face.

It was slow work, and hard to know where to start really. Lance started by trying walking out onto the sky deck and debating what was worth trying to save. All of it could be. The downside was that Lance had managed to break almost every pot they were housed in.

“Do you have any from the store?” Keith asked, looking around for any pots intact they could salvage.

“Every pot has a plant already, my supplies are kinda low. I used to have this great deal with this local pottery place but…. Whatever. I’ll just start from scratch.”

So they started bagging up plant after plant. Keith listened as Lance went on about each plant, the memory that went with it. This garden had been his therapy for years, his connection to sanity. Keith was worried that Lance saying goodbye to it would bring him more distress, but Lance seemed relieved to part with them.

“It kinda sucks, cause like… they deserve to live, but I’m also kind of excited for a fresh start. Not sure what I’m gonna do in my free time though.”

“I can think of a few things.” Keith said bending over to grab a large scrap of pottery to throw into a metal trash they had fetched. When he bent back up and turned around, he expected to see Lance either blushing like a teenage virgin or smirking. Like a teenage playboy. He saw neither. Instead he saw Lance’s eyes fixed onto Keith’s hip area. Eyes looking lost in thought.
“¿Es tu culo caliente tan dulce como parece?” Lance spoke in a strained voice.

“Lance?” Lance snapped up, and gave Keith the blush he had been looking for.

“Yeah?”

“What did you just say?”

“Huh? Nothing.”

“You said something like… culo.. culo caliente dulce como… P something.”

“I was just thinking out loud about donating the old clay to this pottery shop. Try to get a new deal you know?”

“Oh…”

Lance left it at that, turning back to his work. Keith did as well, but he couldn’t help but wonder.

“What was your mom saying earlier?”

“What you mean this morning? She was telling us to not f-”

“I mean last night. She stormed out…”

“I- I wouldn’t know. I didn’t really hear her. She was trying to convince me to rejoin your party. I was fighting back, we argued. She told me how happy I looked, and I asked her if I looked happy right then.”

“Oh.”

“That’s why she came over today, to help out, check on me… ya know?”

Keith nodded.

“I usually try not to let that kinda shit slide. I can handle it on my own for the most part.” Lance started gathering up a few plants by the roots and shoving them roughly in a bag.

“Why, you don’t have to.”

“I know I don’t.. I’ve been blessed. My family is awesome, my friends are awesome.. And heck, now you’re here…”

Keith smiled.

“But when I lost my leg they helped me so much. When Maria left me they helped even more. They have been there so much over the years, and still are. There is a limit to what you can ask for.”

“Okay.. I think you’re wrong, but okay. Let’s assume you’ve hit that limit with everyone else. You haven’t gotten there yet with me.”

“Don’t use logic.. That’s so unfair.” Lance wined.

“Sorry.” Keith was not sorry.

“Well I still feel like I gotta do something for you then…”
“Teach me Spanish.”

“...Really?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m tired of being lost and left out when you and your family slip back into Spanish. I wanna keep up at least a little bit.”

The two’s work had hit a stand still as Lance contemplated this answer, and Keith watched, trying to read his mind. Lance's hand was covering his mouth in thought, eyes focused on the floor, seemingly reviewing something in his head. Keith noticed the slight blush on his cheeks.

“Is it really that hard of a question? I figured you’d be for it.”

“I am... but. It’s risky?”

“How is learning Spanish risky?”

“I like that you can’t understand what I say.”

Keith gave Lance a deadpan look.

“What exactly have you been saying?” Keith spoke in dry tone.

“Nothing bad! Honesty! It's just... kinda embarrassing. I watched a lot of Spanish soaps when I was a kid, a lot of my more... romantic Spanish is... embarrassing.”

“Well fine.. Maybe I'll just speak Korean.. Or Japanese.”

“You speak Korean and Japanese.”

“Well I am Korean.. Even though I was raised mostly in Canada and Arizona, with no real contact with the language, I taught myself. Shiro’s Japanese American, and he taught overseas there for a few years. I met up with him a few times, and picked up enough.”

“So what raunchy stuff can you say?” Lance asked smirking, letting out a giggle of amusement and excitement.

“What raunchy stuff have you been saying?” Keith fired back. Lance’s laughing stopped. There was a pause were the two looked each other down. Lance caved.

“Fine. I’ll teach you some basics, so you can keep up with family.” Lance sighed, defeated, turning back to his work.

“Awesome.” Keith said excitedly. Moving to work a little closer to Lance. Flashing him expecting looks.

“What now?”

“Why not?”

Lance looked strained, but also amused by Keith’s enthusiasm.
“Okay.. first off. How to say hello.”

“Hola right?”

“Ugh.. yes.. Technically. Your accent is shit though. You put too much focus on the H.”

“Uhh.. Hola?”

“Hmm.. better.”

“Okay what about goodbye.”

“Hasta la vista. Or adiós ”


“Uh.. lets just try to remember them for now. We can work on pronouncing them later.”

“Okay…. How do you say ‘How are you?’ ”

“Cómo estás. Ah.. but maybe when you’re talking to my mom and grandma say ‘¿Cómo está usted?’ It’s a little more.. Polite?”

“Okay. Good morning?” Keith asked.

“Buenos días.” Lance smiled.

“Good night?”

“Buenas noches.” Lances smile turned sultry.

The two of them turned back to working on the small area of floor as they continued.

“I don’t know?”

“No lo sé.”

“I don’t understand?”

“No entiendo.”

“Which way to the supermarket?” Lance let out a bark of a laugh, pausing from his work to look up at him.

“You really grabbing the important phrases. So boring. Que camino al supermercado?”

Keith had just been borrowing phrases from his old textbooks. He thought for a moment while Lance continued cleaning.

“Red.”

“Rojo, or maybe ‘tinto’ depending.”

“Blue.”

“Azul.”
“I love you…”

Lance froze… Keith saw Lances grip on the bag tightened, and was shaking slightly. He couldn’t see Lance's face, and had worried if he was angry. Had Keith crossed some line.

He was about to retract when Lance looked at him, face splotched with red under that warm tan skin, eyes fierce.

“Te quiero… Keith.” Keith's heart leapt at the sound of his name preceding the foreign words which he could only trust would mean what he asked for. It still sent his heart racing. Keiths name at the end felt more like a declaration, Keith almost thought it was, but then assumed it was just Lance addressing him.

“Yeah?” Keith said. Lance turned back to his work.

“...Nothing. What else do you wanna know?” He asked, not turning to address Keith.

“I think… that’s enough… for today.” Keith responded, scratching his burning neck.

“Okay, Gonna teach me some Korean now?”

“, Lance.”

“What does that mean?”

“I said ‘I’ll teach you latter, Lance’.”

Hunk had been paying visits to deliver food while Lance had been working, and was surprised to not find him at the shop but instead upstairs in a wrecked apartment with Keith wearing Lances clothing. Keith at least assumed he was surprised as he dropped the soup upon entering the apartment in shock.

“Aw man! We just finished cleaning over there.”

“What happened!?” Hunk Shouted.

Keith looked over at Lance, who looked back at him panicked. He saw the smallest head shake from Lance and took it as his que.

“We fucked.”

“Jesus!” Lance yelped. Hunk looked startled as well but his eyes seemed to scan Lance and Keith thoroughly.

“Something’s not right here. My BS detector is going ‘ding’!”

Lance began shrinking into a corner. Hunk stepped over the spilled soup, and Keith decided if Hunk didn’t believe him, he would back off a bit from this confrontation and go clean it up.

Hunk crossed the room, Lance didn’t move.

“Hands!”
Lance showed the bandaged knuckles.

“Dammit Lance! Why can’t you just go to the gym and box someone. Hit a punching bag, scream into a pillow! Why do you always have to feel the need to wreck yourself. I mean. Come on, we all knew you were struggling, you never miss out at parties. Suddenly you don’t have the energy? You’re not the type that gets tuckered out. You didn’t sleep for 24 hours both before and after we went to see the Legendary Defender movie.”

Lance pouted. Looking like a kicked puppy ready to lick its mental wounds, just begging to be forgiven.

“Hunk…” Keith started. “We get it.”

“You were so messed up that week Keith was knocked out, why the heck would you not wanna spend every moment you could with him.” Lance was quickly turning darker shades of red.

“Hunk… I get i-.” Lance tried to interject, but Hunk continued, throwing his hands up in the air.

“Lord knows I’m getting kinda tired of hearing you two pining after each other.”

“We get it!” They shouted in unison. Hunk simply huffed and walked over to the couch, finding a clean spot to sit down.

“You are the worst when you’re right about something.” Lance commented, himself moving towards an open chair, not caring he was sitting on a pile of dirt and a crushed peace lily.

“Only when everyone else was so stupid to begin with.”

“Hey!” Lance and Keith again spoke in unison, realizing this they blushed and shut up.

“Honestly, hearing you pining after him and refusing to admit you’re in love.” Hunk gestured to Lance. “and you admitting it but choosing not to do anything.” his hand moved to Keith and he shrunk under it.

“I’m surprised the rest of us didn’t kill you two in frustration!”

There was a long pause.

“Lance!” Rosa called from downstairs. “I need you for a moment!” Lance got up without a word, silently excusing himself.

Keith looked around, he had finished cleaning the soup long ago, and he wanted to get back to work on the rest of the apartment, but Hunk was just glaring at him.

“Does he even know?”

“Know what?”

“That you love him.”

“Yes!” Keith threw down a trash bag in frustration. Looking up to see Hunks shocked face.

“Oh… well. That’s good.”

“Even if he didn’t he would know by now.”
“Oh… uhh. Right. So, if you don’t mind me asking. What happened?”

“I don’t know if I should be the one to explain, its really Lances issues. I saw him smashing up the garden and ran over to get him to stop. There was some confusion on our part. He mistook something I said, but there was some deeper stuff I guess? We talked after he calmed down and I stayed the night. Somewhere in the mix I had to tell him.”

“Did he say it back?”

“No… But I think he wants to. I’m not gonna push it.”

“Man,” Hunk said looking out onto the garden. “He really did a number on this place.”

“I think the storm added to it, but yeah. The man has got a lot of energy.”

“No kidding.”

Just then Rosa appeared, looking distraught.

“Rosa, what’s going on?”

Her hand was covering her mouth, shaking her head holding back sobs.

“Maria.”

Shit. Keith felt a pull as he rushed to get downstairs to the shop, a weight-full worry drove his heart into a panic.

“Lance!” He shouted, arriving downstairs, he made his way over to Lance who was standing stiff, guard raised high. Maria was standing, tight crisp black suit, pinstriped in purple, matching her purple shirt. Her dark hair tied up into a tight bun. She stood there smirking, a tall man with slicked back hair and a stern square face behind her.

“Oh hi! You’re Lance’s current play thing right? I’m Maria, his ex wife, and soon to be owner of this place, incase you forgot. This is Sendex. He’s here to help me buy you out for good.”

“You can’t do this Maria…” Lance’s voice was ridged and strained, like a bridge about to break. “This shop is owned by my grandfather.”

“It was owned by my grandfather too! They both signed the papers when they bought the place, but when your grandfather kicked mine out, with their alleged ‘verbal contract’, they failed to have that claim hold any water.”

“You knew they parted on good terms! It’s the only reason your grandfather brought you here as a kid!”

“Lies of a bitter old man who didn’t want to disappoint his daughter by showing how unwilling he was to fight for what HE DESERVED. But we’re not here to talk about that. We’re here to talk about rent.”

Lance gulped, and Keith took a step towards him, standing by his side ready to fight or defend if need be.

“Mr. Mc Clain. As you are no doubt aware, you’ve missed three full payments. Within these past few months, and have had more than a few part payments that are not really much to stand on.”
“I’ve payed you what I can, what do you want me to do, shoot money from my ass?!” Lance spoke in a desperate defensive tone.

“Maybe not waste a week's worth of flowers trying to get your dick wet.” Maria smiled at him before looking over at Keith. “He hardly looks worth the trouble, he probably suck you off for nothing.”

Lance's hands slammed into the table, drawing all other sounds out like a vacuum.

“Back off Maria, I mean it.” His voice was cold, and sharp, and despite the situation Keith couldn't help but feel excited at how it was used to defend his honor.

Maria rolled her eyes.

“Sure, whatever. It’s a waste of time anyway. I need to hire a decorator to come take a look at this place. I’m thinking more bridal looking. You can always charge extra when it comes to weddings.”

“Dammit Maria. You want the Blue Rose so bad, but you won’t even keep it as is? Why do you want it so bad! Why can’t you have any other shop.”

“I DO! Look down the streets of San fran and every mom and pop is owned by a us. We have deals with the pot and glass makers, we have access to the best flowers. You’re still grabbing your sets from Local farmers. Your limited. Blue Rose is the last jewel in a crown that is rightfully mine!”

“Miss. Flores would like to offer to buy your shop from you. If you refuse, you have till the end of the month, not counting the holiday, so the 30th, to pay the missing months rent and fees. All to the tune of 14,059 dollars and 23 cents. If you do not pay, you get nothing, you are required to leave and I can assure you Miss. Flores will buy the title.”

Lance stayed quite. Keith watched as his eyes, wide and unfocused, were cast down to his hands, clenched into tight fists, his whole body shaking.

“Now is the time Lance.” Keith looked up at Maria who had a grin so wicked it felt like it would wilt every flower in here. She laid out a stack of papers on the table, pulling back the pages to show the dotted line; setting a fountain pen down next to the stack. “You can wait, and get nothing, or get something now. I can pay twice what this place is worth. I’m doing this, because we were so close.. Deep down, I still love you.”

At her last words, Keith saw Lance flinch. He took one of Lance's hands, whose eyes looked soullessly at the stack before him. Keith gripped Lance's hand harder, causing Lance to look his way, forlorned, broken. Keith had had enough of sitting on the sidelines. Damn being civil to this bitch, if she wanted a war, she got one. He looked around and noticed an arrangement that Rosa had probably been working on previously. He grabbed it with his open hand and proceeded to dump the contents onto the stack of papers.

“Keith!” Lance yelped jumping back as water sloshed onto the table top along with red and violet Gladiolus. The green block added an extra satisfying wet thunk onto the top of papers. He had kept his eyes on her the whole time, and she had glared right back.

“Keep your money you frigid, psychopath, bitch. The day you get this place is the day that you decide to try to microwave that cold black heart of yours.”

Maria didn’t flinch, her face relaxed from a glare to an annoyed cold look that she seemed to have far too much practice in.
“Oh look Lance,” She started, addressing Lance but keeping her focus on Keith. “Your pet is standing up for you, I think it's time you get your mut fixed before he gives you an STD by humping your leg.”

“The only one who needs to get fixed is you and your fucking ‘nice guy’ mentality, burn the fedora and come to terms with the fact that no means no. You obsessed stalker witch.” Keith saw her nose wrinkle, and her right eye twitch.

“You know, I don’t know what’s wrong with you, but I bet it's hard to pronounce.” She shot back.

“Really then? Sounds like I know what’s wrong with you then, you're fucking stupid. I'm surprised you even want this place, someone with your intelligence and style would run it into the ground in a week.”

“Your collars showing, dog boy.”

“Your premature ageing is showing, hag.”

Maria’s eyes grew wide, and Keith felt a hand slap over his mouth. Lance looking at him sternly. Keith felt his heart sink slightly, was Lance really stopping him? Lance took a deep breath, looking down at the stack of papers, slowly dissolving under the green block. Then back up to Maria, a fire sparked in his eyes once more.

“The answer is no Maria. I’ll make the payments. The Blue Rose will stay with me.” Keith felt a swell of pride. When Lance removed his hand from Keith's mouth, Keith flashed him a proud smile. Lance offered him a small one in return.

“You really think you can make all that back, in a month. Don’t forget you still have this months to pay, and december isn’t exactly flower selling season.”

“Worried I might steal some of your customers?” Lance flashed his usual cocky grin, tipping his head to the side innocently.

A long silence held, were Maria and Lance stared at each other, willing the other to carry on. Lance stood firm, Maria buckled in anger.

“FINE! Keep this place an extra month. Enjoy it. I'll be waiting.” She turned on heel.

“Come on Sendex, were leaving.”

Sendex looked at them both coldly, but with a more broad look than Maria had offered, and followed Maria towards the door. When they reached it, Maria spun around.

“I should thank you Lance. Years ago I would have been happy with the Blue Rose alone, now I practically have a market on every flower in san francisco. I will bite and claw my way to the Blue Rose, and in the end, you’ll be lucky if there is anything left of you.”

Lance took Keith's hand, keeping his gaze to her firm.

“Bring it.”

And with a jingle of the shop bell, she was gone.

Lance waited a full minute to fall back against the glass flower refrigerator, sliding down it till he was sitting on the floor, face buried in his arms. Keith suddenly realised he had made the choice for
Lance, running this place was causing him stress and misery and he chose for him. Lance stood by him because, well just that. Lance was defending Keith. Keith head swung low, fists tight, he didn't want to apologise, but he suddenly felt responsible for Lances situation.

“Lance…. I'm..”

Lance made a noise. But it wasn’t a sob like Lance had guessed, or even a tired sigh.

“PFfff hehehe Ahahahaha!” Lance's face rose and Keith saw a grin stretching clean across his face. So wide it hurt Keith's jaw just looking at it.

“Wha…”

“You… You… just.. You dumped it out.. That.. was so funny!! Did you see her face!?"

“Uh.. yeah?”

“The floral foam.. It. it's like if you just took a shit on the contract! Hahahaaahahaa!” Keith nelt down to sit beside Lance.

“ You're not mad?” Keith asked tentatively.

“OH I am pissed. At her! But you…” Lance gripped each side of Keith's face and kissed him intensely. It was not feverish, just hard, yet somehow the way Lance cradled Keith's face made it feel soft too, especially as Lance pulled away slowly. He kept his warm hands there holding Keith, thumbs stroking Keith's cheeks.

“I was… stuck. I couldn't think of a way out. Hell, I still can’t think of a way out. But you… I just needed that I think. Someone to fight for me.” Lance was still smiling, and Keith returned it.

“Anytime.” Keith leaned in, and Lance pulled him, and the two met again in a much softer kiss. Lips moving against each other in a slow dance. One that picked up in speed as Lances tongue grazed Keith's lower lip. Mouths fell open and hands roamed, Keith moving his to the back of Lance's head, his fingers mingling with the wisps of hair around the nape of Lances neck, and Lances sliding down Keith's chest, diving under the loose borrowed shirt in search of skin.

“Lance, sweety. Is she.. Oh!” Rosa had appeared from the back to see the boys tangled, and the mess on the counter.

“NO! No! No! No! You will not wreck the shop too!” She grabbed a rag from her apron and began smacking it against Lance, who held his hands up trying to defend himself.

“Mama! Stop! I get it! We’ll go back upstairs.” Lance grabbed Keith's hand, sending a wink in his direction, but Rosa caught it.

“To clean! I should send Keith home!”

“We were doing fine earlier Rosa.” Keith commented. “ I’m the one who turned over the vase. Sorry.”

Rosa looked sympathetic at Keith before turning to Lance.

“What happened with Maria?”

“She tried to buy the Blue Rose before we get foreclosed on.”
“Foreclosed?!”

“It's been a rough year mom.”

“I don’t understand! Why would you not tell your family?”

“I can handle it Mama. First let me rest a bit, and finish cleaning my apartment.”

Rosa’s face twisted into a pout that was too easy to tell that she was biting her tongue. When she did open her mouth it was rapid fire spanish, not in an abrasive tone, more like she was listing off complaints. Lance just nodded and gave verbal acknowledgements as he turned Keith around and the two head back up stairs.

When they arrived, they saw Hunk had helped clear off the couch and made a decent dent in one of the corners.

“How did it go?” He asked, pausing in his work. Lance circled the couch and unloaded himself onto it, Keith slowly sitting next to him.

“Maria tried to force me into buying the shop. I’ve missed payments so it's her or the bank will foreclose.” Hunk sat down in one of the armchares.

“So what did you do?”

“Nothing. Keith dumped an arrangement on the paperwork and called her stupid cold and ugly till she left.” Lance put an arm around Keith, pulling him into cuddle up a little. “I’m so proud.”

“I’m the one that should be proud.” Keith said, leaning into the cuddle. “After Lance stopped our fight, he straight up told her no. I don’t think she was really expecting that clear an answer.”

“Yeah… well. I don’t know what to do now.”

“How much do you owe?” Hunk asked. Lance squirmed uncomfortably until Keith nudged him.

“A hair over 14k.”

“Jesus….” Hunk whispered grimly.

“Just ‘Lance is fine.’” Lance smiled.

“Why didn't you say anything?”

“I…” Lance couldn't answer.

“What’s done is done, Lance fucked up.” Keith answered. “How do we get him out of it?”

Hunk looked thoughtful, as did Keith.

“What… wait no.” Lance protested. “This is my problem.. I-” Keith slapped his hand over Lance's mouth.

“Hey Hunk, can you gather everyone up? We can meet at my place tonight.”

“Uh.. sure. Should I tell them what’s up?”
“No!” Lance tried to shout but it was muffled.

“Just tell them it's important and for Lance.” Keith finished.

“Cool. I’ll make us some dinner. We can brainstorm how to fix this.” Keith nodded and Hunk swiftly made his exit. Keith was left with Lance on the couch, Lance's mouth still covered. Lance licked his hand.

“You were gonna lick my dick this morning, you think I'm grossed out by you licking my hand?” Keith looked amused at Lance who glared back at him. Keith removed his hand anyway, wiping it off on Lances shirt.

“Why are you asking for everyone to get involved. I thought we agreed-”

“We agreed that according to your bullshit logic, these people can’t help you anymore, and because I was new to your life I was exempt from this. I did not however condone the notion that these people are, for some reason, not allowed to help you.”

“But Keith.. I”

“No… Picture me… in tons of trouble. Every month something horrible happens. How long would it take for you to stop helping me?”

“.. I… never. But this is…”

“So you’re somehow nicer than everyone? Because everyone gets a limit to how much they can help someone out but you would never stop?”

“Keith…”

“I’ll I’m saying, is it hurts more to watch you struggle then it is to help you. Which it doesn’t hurt at all to help you. Infact, by just being yourself you are repaying me in full. As you have done for everyone else.”

“... I’m not letting them do anything for free.”

“Fine. But you’re not paying in money.” Lance let out a sigh.

“Fine.” Lance agreed, sounding more tired and strained than ever.

“Hey..” Keith said, in a warm voice. “If you’re good about letting the others help, I'll reward you.” Keith leaned over, crossing into Lance's lap, and began nibbling at Lances neck. He let out a moan.

“What kind of reward?”

“Lets just say… if you open up, so will I.” One wink and Keith could feel something hard hitting his but. Lance let out a hiss. Looking up at Keith with hooded eyes. He leaned up and Keith leaned down.

Keith gave Lance one quick peck before jumping off his lap.

“Come on, we’ve got cleaning to do.”
Cleaning the apartment took longer than expected. In fact they didn’t really finish. Lance was sure he could save the couch, pillows and rug. So they had been dragged off to a corner with the hope of being washed the next day. The balcony, which was far worse off, had been cleared for the most part. Surprisingly not everything was damaged. The remaining few pots and plants left now left huddled in a corner, leaving Keith to witness how large and open the balcony was in the first place. It was strange, he could clearly make out his balcony a few floors up across the street, and his little cactus sitting behind the window.

So with only the fabric items left to be scrubbed, Lance and Keith called it a night. Lance leaving out some food for Blue, gathered up a coat for him and a spare for Keith to make their way back across the street.

“ It’s just across the street.”

“ Dude. the flue doesn’t care how long you’re outside.”

Keith smiled and accepted the warm bomber jacket. He was so much like his mother.

The jacket swallowed him.

“ Dammit Keith.” Lance said, watching Keith try to roll up the sleeves.

“ What?”

“ Quit being so cute.”

Keith blushed as Lance leaned forward, pecking Keith on the forehead.

“ You happy yet?” Keith asked, smiling.

“ Shut up.” Lance replied, not even attempting to hide the amusement in his voice.

They made it to Keith's apartment safe and warm, and within the following three minutes were joined by Hunk, Coran, Pidge, Allura and Shiro.

With Keith's lack of seating the group stood around in the kitchen area, standing and eating hunks jambalaya at the table.

“ Okay,” Pidge started. “ We know we’re not just here for Hunks tasty jambalaya, what’s going on?”

Lance shifted uncomfortably and looked over at Keith with pleading eyes. Keith nodded.

“ Maria showed up at the shop today,” Keith started, Shiro and Corran frowned, and Pidge and Allura looked as if they could kill someone.

“ She tried to buy Blue Rose...”

“ So. Lance rejected her right?” Pidge sounded off, full of fire. “ She’s made you tons of offers before!”

“ It’s not that simple Pidge.” Lance replied, for the first time really showing how tired he felt. Keith saw how the group seemed to notice this.

“ The thing is, Lance has been struggling for a while..”

“ I owe the bank a few rents.”
“How much do you owe?” Allura asked, sternly. Keith didn’t respond, he looked over at Lance who was shrinking under the gazes of his friends. Shame wracking his posture, making the stomach figure look meek; as though one harsh word would send him crumbling.

“Over 14,000.”

“What!?”

Pidge and Allura seemed to sound off together, looking as though they were about to tear Lance apart. Lance’s head fell and Keith stood in front of him as a buffer.

“How could it get this bad Lance!? How could you not come to us for help!” Allura stressed.

“Or even tell us!” Pidge cried out. “You complain about the weather or Justin Beever or people with an Australian accent! But you couldn’t tell us you were missing rents?! You’ve been handing us free flowers for Christ sake! We all would have payed!”

“He had his reasons.” Keith defended, not wanting to bring up what they were. That may only add fuel to the fire. Pidge turned their glare to Keith.

“Why do you know?! You’ve only been around for a few months! Why do you get the special treatment of knowing when our friend is about to get kicked out onto the street.”

“Because I love him.”

Everyone in the room seemed shocked at that exclamation, say for Pidge, who doubled their efforts.

“So what? We don’t love him!?”

“No- Pidge I..” Keith tried to reply but was cut off by Pidge smacking him across the face.

“Pidge.” Lance stepped forward, grabbing Pidge by the wrist to keep them from doing it again. Keith was shocked more than anything, sure it hurt, but it broke his heart more to look over at Lance trying to get Pidge to calm down, beating their fists on Lance’s chest, trying and failing to hold back tears.

“We all chose to sit by,” Shiro started. “We all decided Lance would tell us when he needed to. Keith is stubborn, no doubt he forced it out of him.”

Keith looked scornfully at Pidge who had stopped hitting Lance and was now crying in his arms.

“It was more like,” Lance added. “He had good luck about finding me in weak moments, I didn’t want him knowing just as much as you guys.”

“My dear boy,” Coran started. “It is truly troubling that after all these years you fail to trust us. We would have come to your Aid without question.”

“That’s what I’m saying.” Lance stranded. “You guys have given me so much over the years. How could I ask for more? We all have our limits.”

“But you,” Allura started. “Do not get to decide what they are.”

“Okay.” Hunk interjected. “We are all bothered by Lance not telling us what’s up. But we know now. So…” Hunk turned to Lance. “How can we help.”

“I... I don’t know.”
“I have an idea.”

Everyone turned to Shiro, who was smiling. Pidge sniffling quieted.

“In the long run, I think it can benefit the whole street.”

“What are you thinking?” Lance asked.

“I’m thinking… we turn your apartment into a bar spot.”

“What?” Was either sounded off or shown on expressions around the room.

“Hear me out.” He turned to Allura. “That place we went to dinner last Thursday. Remember it?”

“Oh yes, Beer Kitchen, very good stuff.”

“Hunk, you’ve been lacking in an evening crowd right?”

“Well, we sell alcohol, but we don’t have room for a full on bar, so happy hour is a bit empty. Our nights tend to slow down faster too.”

“Pidge, you’ve got a good supply of odd history books right, for alcohol and America’s history and maybe some biology books?”

“Sure. Too many in fact, you can hardly walk in those sections.”

“Allura, you were telling me how you want to try internal design.”

“Yes! I’ve been dying to test my style aesthetic.”

“And Coran makes a mean cocktail.”

“In fact I do! Used to mix drinks for the owners of this street when we had our poker nights, I was just a boy.”

“Lance… You need extra business. Free advertisement. You’re talented and charismatic. Your regulars know how good the Blue Rose is, but there are too few off them. I say Hunk sets up your apartment like a bar, for a month, put your arrangements on display, hang out, meet some people. It will bring in new customers. And for letting Hunk use the space to increase his own traffic flow you get part of the Bars revenue.”

The room was quiet, all eyes on Shiro. Than Hunk spoke.

“There is that old fire escape connecting our buildings in back. We could run food across it if they wanted bar snacks things. Once dinner service was up if they wanted a drink we could send them up.”

“Oh!” Allura exclaimed. “We can put a small fire pit on your balcony and some other heat lamps, I can decorate the apartment stairwell to look more inviting!”

Pidge spoke up next.

“I’ve got tons of old tables in the back that are being eaten alive by towers of books, dust them off, get some chairs and we can fill the apartment with seating.”

“I can make chairs.” Keith spoke up.
Soon the room was filled with chatter, different ideas, and changes. Things that had to be done.

“ I've got a friend that can get the apartment approved as a restaurant really quick. If Pidge and I buckle down with Keith and make the necessary changes to it.”

“ We could probably get it up and running in a week.” Pidge, now excited, exclaimed. “ Normally bars around here can pull in about 2-3 grand a night on profit. We could make back what Lance needs in a week if we all work as staff and refuse pay.”

“ That's Illegal!” Lance finally put his foot down. “ You’re forgetting how much it will cost to make all those changes too!”

“ I don’t think so.” Shiro said. “ In Japan I’ve seen homes used as restaurants before. It's not uncommon. Your place holds a good aesthetic already.”

But Lance still looked unconvinced.

“ Lance…. Will pay at the end of the month, whatever is left over.” Keith said. Lance looked betrayed.

“ I still haven’t agreed to this. Where am I gonna live while my home is gutted into a night bar?”

“ With me.” Keith answered instantly. That shut up Lance slightly. “ Pidge can sell their books, displaying them for more loaner types, We can wear Alluras outfits as uniform. We can give shout outs to Corans barbershop and it will basically be an extension to Hunks restaurant, so he can for sure turn a profit.”

Lance sighed… “ Everyone is okay with this?”

Everyone agreed.

“Okay then. What are we gonna call it?”

Keith's hand shot in the air.

“ Uhh… Keith, it’s not like we’re in school, you can just say what you want.”

“ I’ll pay for any of the cost to change the apartment, if I get to name it.”

“ Keith.. No-” Lance protested, but everyone else agreed.

“ I want to call it… Sky Garden.”

A beat of silence.

“ Huh… not bad.” Hunk said.

“ Very nice indeed, Keith.” Said Allura. “ We can use your houseplants to decorate, right Lance?”

“ Ah, sure. What's left of them anyway.” Lance sucked in a breath as he finished. Keith wasn’t sure if it was that Lance wanted to hide the fact all together or just didn’t want to bring it up so bluntly.

“ What do you mean?” Shiro asked concerned.

“ Lance rage-fested and smashed nearly everything leafy and green.” Hunk said, looking angry again.
No one said anything. Keith could see everyone shift into a new concern for the boy that started to shrink into his previously guilty stance.

“What’s done is done, Lance got the rage out and he’s fine now.” Keith said, once again standing between him and everyone. “Let’s meet up tomorrow and start sharing Ideas. Lance and I will get the apartment ready.

Everyone nodded in agreement, helping Lance and Keith clear up the plates from dinner before leaving for the night. Once gone, Lance collapsed onto the couch.

“Tired?” Keith asked, drying off his hands from finishing up with the dishes.

“Dead. But I’ll manage. You?”

“I’m not the one with my life on the line here.”

“But you are putting your money on the line.”

“More like…” Keith rounded the couch, sitting next to Lance. “I’m putting my money where my mouth is.”

Lance quirked up an eyebrow in response.

“Really? Well, maybe you should put something else there.”

“Like what?” Keith said smiling as Lance was leaning in close to him.

“My mouth.” Lance smiled.

“Ugh.. that was so bad. You’re the worst.” Lance laughed.

“Sorry.” He closed the distance and a fire ignited between them. Keith's body molding itself to Lance’s side. Lance pushing against Keith so the two were falling back to lay on the couch. When Keith broke the kiss, Lance pouted.

“That’s all you’re getting from that dumb ass statement.”

“Hmm… what if… if I said something even worse, yet yielded something awesome. Would you let me say it?”

“You can say it, but it may not yield in anything awesome. Besides, we shouldn't push ourselves. We’ve got work tomorrow.” Lance deflated slightly. His face hid in the crook of Keith's neck.

“I’m not happy about you paying.” He mumbled.

“We talked about this, you can pay in favors. You can’t afford to pay us or give us flowers.” Lance groaned.

“Your mom can hold down the shop for a bit, I think she’ll be happy about that.”

“She will be, she retired too early, she just knew I wanted to manage on my own.”

“You can model for Allura again?”

“Ugh.. It was more fun when I was trying to woo her.”

Keith ignored that.
“You will be helping Pidge and Hunk with their businesses.”

“What are you getting out of this?” Lance pulled back to look at Keith. His look fiery and serious and a little worried.

“You.”

Keith wish he had keys to Lance’s mind so he could see what he was thinking, most of the time he was an open book. But when it mattered he was a mystery.

And maybe that was best. Because as soon as Lance broke out into a wicked grin, Keith felt a hot stone hit his stomach.

“Well okay then.” Lance spoke in a soft sultry tone. His lips close to Keith's, lightly grazing them before trailing down his face, neck, skipping past his shirt and working his way to the pants Keith had on.

In three smooth motions, the belt was off and the pants open. Lance shimmied them down far enough to access Keith's boxers.

Lance pressed his nose against the bulge inhaling deeply. Keiths head flew backwards letting out an unconscious moan. He felt Lance’s hot moist tongue through his boxers, panting hard as Lance open mouth kissed hard dick through the light fabric. Lance's mouth slid along the sides, defining the shape, leaving Keith in teased twisting pleads. Lance's fingers began circling around the hem, slowly shifting them down.

“Wait.” Keith said suddenly, put his hands onto Lance's shoulders. “I… don’t want… not just because… It’s… ugh.” He wasn’t sure how to voice his concerns without using some shitty words. But he didn’t want Lance to whore himself just because Keith was helping out. He heard Lance giggle.

“Keith… This isn’t tit for tat. I was gonna suck you off this morning, nothing has changed.”

“But..”

“Shut up and let me be affectionate towards you.” Lance scolded, then without warning, pulled down Keith's boxers and set free a rather eager part of Keith. Keith’s hands gripped lances shoulders tighter, only one letting go so he could hide his face in the crook of his own elbow.

Keith was panting heavy at each teese and suck of Lance's mouth, turning Keith's world into a hot blur. Keith his hips shaking as Lance continued his assault. The pants turned to moans and he peaked down see Lance, looking sultry back up at him.

It was Keith's undoing. With one last hards suck, Keith's body shook with pleasure, his muscles tensed. He could feel his dull nails biting into the fabric of Lances shirt. The pleasure carried him, his spine bending upwards, one last jolt and he collapsed. He could feel Lance sleeping, as it sent more pleasure shooting through him, but his mind was dull to it; no longer caring how pathetic the whimpers he made were.

Lance's lips rose off him with a pop, and Keith looked down just in time to see Lance swallow.

“Fuuck..”

“That good huh?” Lance smiled, pulling himself up to look at Keith, who was now staring at the ceiling. Keiths hand rose, open, to the ceiling.
“I saw god.” He said, in a quite awe, face straight. Lance laughed.

“You are ridiculous.” Lance giggled, nuzzling his face into Keith’s chest. Keith lowered his hand letting it rest on Lance’s broad back, fingers fidgeting with the hairs at the nape of Lance’s neck.

“Should I return fire?” Keith asked, nudging Lance who seemed to be quickly falling asleep.

“No need. I was jerking it my pants, I came when you came.”

“So your pants are full of cum right now.”

“More or less.” Lance sighed happily. Keith however, nudged him harder, forcing Lance awake again.

“Ow. What the heck.”

“Don’t fall asleep while your pants are soiled. Go change.”

“Into what?”

“You can take these.” Keith pointed at his pants, still unbuttoned with his dick hanging out. “They are yours after all.”

Keith nudged Lance up enough to stand, heading over towards his room to fetch himself and Lance underwear. When he returned, Lance was passed out on the sofa, just a shirt and his leg.

“Lance, take your leg off.”

Lance mumbled, sitting up. He looked like a child trying to tie his shoes the way he fumbled around, but eventually the leg came off, at least with Keith’s help.

“Don’t you want to sleep in the bed?”

“Don’t wanna move. You go..”

Despite Keith’s wanting to stay, even if it was on the couch, he left to his own bedroom. Skipping his usual routine to flop down onto the bed. He wouldn’t push Lance. He felt for sure Lance felt the same way, at least on some level, but pushing him to say those words would only cause Keith to doubt it. It was hard, but he knew he wasn’t rejected yet. Lance had other things on his plate, and Keith would be there when that shit was taken care of.

Building only took three days. Three long days, but the team was not about to waste time. It helped that apparently Alluras team of lackeys from her clothings store had a fantastic work ethic when it came to any of Alluras Ideas. The apartment now was warm, the window breakfast bar now turned into a craft beer station, along the walls were some booths and tables, all deep warm wood; complementing the blue shades of color. Lances T-V had been moved into Keith’s apartment, along with some of the other stuff that Lance worried about. Keiths apartment slowly morphed into patchwork of his and Lances belongings. Even though Lance slept at his apartment still. He was often too strained from work to even make it back to Keith’s, and they had kept his bed in the apartment with the idea of just locking the door off.

Hunk wired in new lights while Pidge rigged up a sound system along with a few great “mood” CD playlists. Allura added a canopy to the back area along with outdoor seating.
“You know.. It would be really cool if this whole area either went down or raised up, so we could put in a few inches of soil covering the place and lay down some grass. Or you could grow stuff directly?” Pidge suggested one day as they were putting away glasses in the kitchen. It was opening night, and they were waiting for Allra to show up with their uniforms.

“A few inches wouldn't do it.” Lance commented. “You’d need about a foot? That would mess with the doorway going out.”

“Not if you went down.”

“If I go down I hit shop. The whole point is to save it remember.”

“What if…” Keith suggested. “You strip away the whole apartment. Raise the whole area up to make room for the soil, and then put in the grass.”

Pidge and Lance looked at Keith dumbfounded.

“Where would I sleep.” Lance asked, as though it was obvious, which it was, but Keith didn’t really want to share his solution for that.

“Besides, how long are we gonna run this place?”

“I don’t know,” Pidge was now sliding wine glasses into their holder now hanging from the kitchen window. “If it makes a lot of money why stop.”

“Because I live here.”

Pidge looked over at Keith who blushed. Pidge was probably thinking the same thing, or at least knew what was going through Keith’s mind. The look she offered him however was something like ‘don't worry. I got you.’

“I’m just saying, if this works maybe you shou-”

“We haven't even had our first night Pidge. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.” Lance’s tone was harsh, cutting deep causing Pidge and Keith to wince. Lance left to go wipe down tables, Keith followed.

“Come with me.” Keith said, pulling Lance away from his furious scrubbing.

“What.. Keith we open soon I need to-”

Keith pulled Lance into the bathroom, she shower now blocked off by a temporary plaster wall it was half its size and a little cramped.

“Will you cool it?” Keith said, as Lance fidgeted in the tiny space.

“I'm cool! I'm perfectly cool!”

“You’re nervous. Which is fine, but don't let it affect you tonight. The place looks great, as do the flowers. This is our best shot, but it won't happen if you doubt it from the start.”

Lance, for a moment, looked as though he was about to argue back, but he sighed. Deflated, and defeated.

“Yeah.. you’re right.”
“Yes, I am.”

“Sorry.”

“You should be.”

Lance smiled up at Keith who smiled back. Keith cupped Lance's face and brought him in for a kiss. It was fiery, full of its usual gut wrenching passion. Keith slammed Lance against the door, and Lance's arms snaked around to grab Keith’s ass.

“How long do you think we have till someone comes to get us?” Lance asked.

“Let's find out.” Keith said, moving to attack Lance's neck.

However the answer was imminent as the door swung open and the two fell over.

“Jesus! Guys! Can you keep it in your pants for two minutes? Please?!” Pidge shouted, covering their eyes.

“Sorry.” Keith said.

“Just a good luck kiss.” Lance added.

“I was planning more than that.” Keith said in earnest, looking down at Lance confused.

“Woah! T.M.I.” Pidge said, walking off.

“I knew that, Pidge didn’t have too.” Lance said, trying hard to hide his amusement.

“Oh.”

Allura came soon after with the uniforms. Each was a different colored shirt paired with black pants and a black embroidered apron. The white embroidery spelled out the bar's name along with lots of spiraling blossoms.

“Sorry I couldn’t do more, I spent most of my time designing the inside.”

“That's more than fine Allura.” Keith said, tightening his own apron over his red shirt. Lance fighting with his own blue one.

“Do I really gotta wear this.” Lance said turning around to show, FLOWER POWER. In big white text on the back.

“It’s better than mine.” Pidge said showing the back of the green shirt, PAGE MASTER showing in big white text.

“Well here’s Hunks for when he joins us.” Allura showed. Hunks read GASSY GENIUS. Allura's read THE BITCH and each of her workers who had offered to help had BITCH'S CREW on the back of their own pastel shirts. Coran's read THE MUSTACHE. And Shiro's was LEFTY LEGEND.

“I think if we’re talking horrible shirts, mine wins.” Keith said spinning around showing a bold BANGING FLOWER POWER.

“I don’t know,” Lance mused. “I think that’s my favorite.”
“Well it's inaccurate,” Keith whispered to himself. He went over to a box in the corner, opening it to reveal the bottom was filled with his little cactuses, taken from his garden and each given their own pot. As he set them on the tables, he noticed how much the orange of the blossom shined behind the shades of dark blue, causing it to almost look red.

“Woah, are these from your place?” Lance asked.

“Figured they would make good centerpieces.” Keith set the last one, admiring his work.

“Sharp eye, the add a nice pop of color.”

“You can keep them.”

“You’re not gonna try to replant them when this is over?”

“Not sure what the point of that would be, I don’t plan on returning to my shack too often.”

Keith studied Lance's face. He seemed lost, trying to connect the dots of two seemingly unrelated points.

“I think they will like it here better.” He said before turning away to go help Pidge.

They opened just after four, the first hour was slow, but that was to be expected. As soon as happy hour picked up there was a rush upstairs. Hunks staff had been promoting the small bar all week, and everyone had done their best to spread the word. Keith noticed people coming up with take out bags from Hunks, some people wearing Allura’s fashion, some of the scientist and workers from S.N.I.F. Most of them seemed somewhat bitter towards him. There was an odd group of boys that seemed to enjoy being waited on by Pidge exclusively, Lance decided to call them pigeons, and there was a large collection of men with ridiculously groomed mustaches calling themselves, the Miraculous Mustache Men. A club which Corran was apparently a part of.

Keith had gotten used to being summoned by the name “Banging Flower Power” Most of which were the more drunk customers, but Lance and Pidge tended to abuse the name as well. There were also many men and women trying to flirt with him, each claiming to be flower power. The joke got old fast. It wasn’t till a tall tan dark haired brute tried to offer Keith a lily that he stole from an arrangement, did Lance come angrily to his rescue, carting Keith away, making sure the offer saw the words printed on Lances back.

Despite Lances earlier objections, Keith thought Lance was having a lot of fun. He would brag about Hunks cooking, Alluras uniforms, Pidges crazy book collection on flowers, Corans mustache… He loved talking about his family, and the history of the shop downstairs. What people loved most was his “sob story” which Lance told with enough are that no one felt bad for him, they more or less took his side, calling Maria a slue of words, blaming the government for the war; all sorts of different reactions. It wasn’t until Lance and Keith were serving one table that the night truly seemed to turn around.

“So what are we celebrating tonight?” Lance asked the group while Keith set out some water.

“Our friend,” One dark haired edgy girl started, “A complete hopeless when it comes to love, finally got engaged!” The table of men and women whooped and cheered while the girl in the center of it all blushed. Keith noticed the simple silver ban on her finger.

“Actually,” The girl said, “I was wondering if this place does wedding events. I’ve seen the outside when it used to be that garden, I’ve always thought that looked so lovely.”
“You wanna get married here?”

The girl nodded.

“And the downstairs shop does weddings right?” Her friend asked. “Morgan here is just gaga over flowers. It’s the only part she cares about, well, that and her other half.”

Keith looked over at Lance who seemed to be contemplating something, blank faced, a little shocked.

“Why don’t you come over sometime this week while the shops open, and we can talk about it.” Keith answered, worried Lances lack of answer might scare her off before pulling him away.

Keith pulled the two towards the fire escape, where food was still being run back and forth.

“What’s wrong.” Keith asked, putting his hand on Keith shoulder. Lance didn’t answer. Lances phone dinged and he slowly took it out to check it.

“We made our nights goal.” He said quietly.

“What? Really? That’s awesome! It’s only Monday and we’re open for another four hours!”

Keith was ecstatic, this much positive feedback meant great things. If they could keep it up, Lance would have enough to pay off twice the amount he owes.

Keith’s phone vibrated, and he saw a text from Shiro.

“Can people rent the space out for parties?”

“Hey Lance, someone wants to know if you do parties-”

Lance cut him off, not with his usual kiss, but a hug. He could feel hot tears hit his shoulder as Lance shook. Keith tentatively wrapped his arms around Lance who pulled back and moved in for a kiss.

Happy. That’s what it felt like, that purest feeling of joy, the warmth of love. Keith responded, or tried to but Lance soon broke away.

“Let’s sneak off.”

“What? Lance, we got the bar to run.”

“The teams got it.”

“They need you, people are asking questions.”

“We’ll tell them just to come by the shop later.”

“Lance-” Lance cut him off with a quick kiss, and Keith gave him a deadpan look from Lances predictability.

“If I don’t pull you away, I will fuck you right here.”

Keith gaped, he couldn’t come up with a return argument, and in his silence Lance gripped his hips and grinned into him, revealing Lance’s urgency.

“Why? Why now?”
“Because I can’t stop thinking about what you have done for me, my life, my mind. I can’t fight it…” Lance began a savage attack on Keith's neck that made him forget how they were standing outside in December, in only a t-shirt pants and apron.

“Lance.. We ca-”

“I love you.”

Keith felt something move through him, like diving into water, that rush of being engulfed so quickly, yet you are aware of everything, and then weightlessness.

“I love you, and I don't deserve you and you make me want to fight again, fight against whatever is holding me back. I love your shitty attitude, or how understanding you are, or how you just swept into my shop one day and stole my heart. I love your stupid hair and how good it looks on you. I can’t even list all the things because it's a feeling, it's just….”

Keith kissed him, he felt compelled to shut him up, for the sake of him and Keith's own heart. A cold wind swept through causing them both to shiver and move in closer for warmth.

“Uh… sir?” Keith broke away and saw a mousy looking girl in pink hair, with a tray of food.

Keith pulled Lancer closer to move him out of the way of the door. The girl looked to be blushing as she scurried in.

Keith looked at Lance, who looked destroyed in the best way possible. Eyes red and crinkled, cheeks and nose flush, breathing heavy.

“Let’s go.”

Neither one led, they more or less walked out in tandem. Lance shouting out a lame excuse to Shiro at the bar that he was tired and was gonna cut out early. The reason this excuse was so Lame is the way he first walked out with Keith, looking as if he was holding back the urge to run. Keith looked back for Shiro's reaction and was met with the man looking tired but amused, before turning back to the customers.

Across the street once again Lance and Keith could hardly wait till they got upstairs. Lance having even managed to unbuckle Keith's pants in the elevator. Leaving Keith to run holding them up when the doors opened.

This time though Keith was insistent, the second they got into the apartment and shut the door, Keith pulled Lance into the bedroom.

“I can’t believe you got a bed just for sex.” Lance chuckled looking at the luxurious bedding.

“Shut up and fuck me.” Keith whipped off his shirt and apron, discarding them on the floor, before pushing Lance onto the bed.

“Woah.. who’s fucking who here?”

Keith pulled off his pants, leaving him in his own boxers, in front of Lance who was gawking.

There was a beat before Lance began scrambling for his own pants to pull them off, Keith crawled onto the bed and helped. Once off, Keith dove in, peeling back the boxers and attaching his mouth to
Lance's member.

It was warm, unbelievably so, and smooth like velvet. His tongue raised up each vane to the crook of the head, teasing it. He felt excitement bubble as his spare and reached down into his own boxers, around his hard-on and to his puckering hole.

He was sweaty, and used what little moisture he had to enter himself roughly, moaning around Lance. He teased himself while he tested Lance, causing a sluie of moans and grunts to fill the silence along side slurps and soft rustling of covers. Lance thrust deep, causing Keith to gag and in the excitement, add another finger.

“Keith..” Lance moaned, his hands gripping the back of Keith's head. Not guiding, or pushing or pulling, just holding on for dear life.

“Keith.” Lance gripped a little, gaining his attention. Keith pulled off, but with a long suck that sent Lance head rocking back and his good leg shaking.

“Yeah?”

“How do you feel about… switching?”

Keith paused in thought.

“You mean… I fuck you instead?”

“Well yes but… like.. I don’t know about you but… I have a feeling I'll want a few rounds. So we… ya know.. Switch between theem!” Lance voice cracked, mostly because Keith's hands had started a new assault on Lances member while Keith looked down at Lance.

“That sounds perfect.” Keith smiled, sitting up on his knees. “But I’m gonna ride you first.. I'm already prepped.”

“Holy shit…. Hold up.”

Lance leaned up to detach his leg. Keith helped. Each part came off leaving nothing but the stump of scarred flesh and tissue behind. It felt smooth. Keith found himself leaning down to kiss it. Lance was removing the shoe off the artificial, pulling out a packet of condoms under it.

“Seriously.”

“It never hurts to be prepared.”

“I've got plenty of stuff.” Keith leaned over to the bedside dresser, pulling out lube, lotion, and condoms.”

“Guess that means more rounds.” Lance smirked.

“If you think you can hold out, cowboy.”

“I think..” Lance said pulling Keith onto his lap. “You're the cowboy right now.”

Boxers off and condoms on Keith found himself sliding into the heat, bouncing and grinding as Lance mirrored him with each step.

Keith could feel his thighs start to ache, could feel sweat rolling down his back. Lance sat up, wrapping his warm arms around Keith, engulfing him in heat. He could feel Lance lift Keith up slightly before Lance began to pick up Pace, Leaving Keith, hitched up, shaking, taking it.
Neither of them lasted long. Keith leaving splatter all over Lance's chest. Keith pulled out, Lance tied off the condom, Keith leaned forward starting to kiss Lance again, fingering him, Lance's hands wrapping around Keith. The pause didn't last long before the were switched, and Lance was gripping the headboard as Keith plowed into him.

The longer it went on the more blurred it got. No more questions were asked, just commanding movements and ever changing positions.

Finished, the two laid side by side, facing each other. Keith felt an overwhelming desire to move the both of them to the shower, but at the moment he was fairly sure that both their legs would need a break. Lance had taken to holding Keith's hand, lazily kissing every inch of skin.

"If I was a flower, what would I be?" Keith asked, voice raw and so soft compared to his cries from before."

"Hmmmm..." Lance hummed and Keith could feel it on his skin mixed with warm breaths.

"Rose. Maybe."

"Isn't that a little boring." Keith said dejected, he was hoping to hear some crazy plant name."

"While roses themselves are everywhere, Rose people are far more rare. They are coveted, beautiful, elegant without trying, and very picky about who gets close to them."

"Would that make you hydrangea then? Because I gotta beat the shit out of you so you can drink properly."

Lance laughed. "Think so?"

Keith paused for a moment. "Maybe not."

"Oh.. Then what flower am I?"

Lance returned to kissing Keith, now moving up his wrist.

"A cactus blossom."

"Huh... why that?"

"Cause... somehow in a lifeless world, against all odds, you're beautiful and full of life."

"Holy shit... dude." Lance stared at Keith wide eyed. "Does that make me your cactus."

"Only if I'm your Rose."

They kissed. Pulling away slowly, reluctantly.

"That was really cheesy." Lance chuckled.

"I'm in a cheesy mood." Keith smiled, nuzzling into Lance.

"Speaking of cheese, did you get to eat anything at the bar?"

"Nope."

"How does a pizza sound right now?"
Whooo... kinda crazy and a little rushed. I had a lot to fit into this chapter. Its not over yet.. but this is it for the main story. Hope you enjoyed this at least.

Also Sorry about the Spanish. Ive been trying not to use google translate but instead going to find Phrase websites.. but that's not always a problem solver.

As always feel free to let me know about any glaring issues. Don't be shy, I can take it.

Enjoy the translations

LANCE! ¿Qué es ... qué ha sucedido?!- LANCE! What is ... what has happened?!

LANCE! ¡NINGÚN SEXO HASTA QUE USTED LIMPIE! Tu chico problemático!- LANCE! NO SEX UNTIL YOU CLEAN! You problem boy!

Ma, No íbamos a tener sexo-Ma, we were not going to have sex

¡NO besar tampoco!-DO NOT kiss either!

Es tu culo caliente tan dulce como parece?-Is your hot ass as sweet as it looks?

- I love you.

( Everything else there should be translations with the text)
Two years later.

Lance wheeled himself out into the living room, balancing on the two primary back wheels, tilting and rocking his way gracefully over to Keith's side, humming a Christmas tunes all the while.

“Can you use that thing normally?” Keith strained, setting out plates on the large oak table.

“Noooope.” Lance sing songed, trying to hop up on one wheel. Instead he spun round knocking into the christmas tree.

“You are the worst at that.” Keith said, trying not to Laugh as Lance gracefully grabbed hold of the tree to keep it from falling.

“Probs cause it doesn’t have wings and a jet engine.” Lance stood from the chair. Folding it up and leaning it against the wall just behind the other gifts.

That damn thing had been the first gift he had given Lance, and Lance had been happier than a middle class kid with an Xbox.

After a month of running Lance's apartment as a bar, it being such a massive success, Maria returned to the shop, bringing along the Bank asshole, a contractor, and an interior designer, grinning like god herself. Only to find out Lance had just payed out the owed money in full, including the following rent. Lance always took great pride in embellishing how Maria strutted in, Keith sitting on the counter that Lance was leaning against, Keith's limbs dramatically draped over him, kissing Lance
While he informed Maria that the day she owned this place was the day the air force started using pigs as pilots. Or some other smooth one liner that changed with each retelling of the story.

Which sure Keith was sitting on the table, he liked having the best view while Lance worked. But really Lance had jumped from his work the second Maria walked in, shoving the payment statement from the bank and loudly telling her to ‘suck it’.

They had celebrated Christmas late that year. Working through the actual day and treating the day after he told Maria to suck it as the ‘New Christmas.’ It was also the day that Lance felt the need to ask Keith to be his boyfriend, after a screaming Maria stormed out, which Keith thought was unnecessary seeing how they had been living with each other that past month. Lance might have said “Okay you’re my boyfriend now.” and left the question out all together.

There was even money left over, which Lance divided up amongst the team and staff. For most it was a nice bonus, and the bar itself, closed for a month. Lance said it was for him to think about if he wanted to continue it. Really it was because he was looking for staff to run it full time. Sky garden reopened February of that year, in time for Valentine's day.

It was rather popular for weddings, when spring came around, so much that Lance had to limit it to no more than 8 weddings, not wanting to scare away their regular customers. The extra cash flow was great. Infact everyone on the block had managed to make improvements on their businesses.

Hunk was getting a greater dinner rush at his own restaurant, that would usually travel up to the bar after dinner, he also made a percentage profit off the bar because he more or less ran it book wise.

Pidge, along with sales from the bookstore, designed a robot to run their family store. Fully automated, and really fun to watch, people bought books just to see the robot move around the store and pick them off the shelf.

Allura went online with her business, promoting as well, Coran’s line of hair and men's mustache and beard products. It would later bring in a slue of young hipsters and cause his shop to be buzzing once again.

Lance was often over booked. But now he had a team to help. They often took over the bar on days when they needed the room, leaving the room smelling awesome for that night's happy hour. Lance had hired a team who had really two things in common. They were good, and they all hated or were fired from Dozens of Dozens. With the spare cash flow, they shut down Sky Garden temporarily to open it up and make the back garden even more awesome. It was now almost completely outdoors. During the summer it looked like a spot of eden in a skyline.
Lance helped Keith with setting the table, before getting too distracted with trying to distract Keith. His long tan arms, as they often did, found themselves winding around Keith's waist and stomach. Pulling him backwards into a warm chest.

"Don't you have a roast to look over?" Keith said smiling as Lance peppered his neck with kisses from behind.

"The only roast I wanna look over is yours…"

"What?" Keith snorted.

"Yeah I was hoping that would sound better, like if you said.. "Rump roast" or something." Lance giggled, sliding one hand down to pinch Keith's butt. He didn’t jump or flinch. He just turned around to give Lance a cold ‘ish’ glare.

"Go check on it before you burn this apartment down." Keith said sternly.

Lance let go, saluting him and walking over to the kitchen.

"Can you hold Red! I'm about to open the oven." Lance shouted.

"Hold up.” Keith walked over to his computer, picking up the munchkin ginger cat from off the Keys. While Lance had knitted him a maroon sweater and pair of goldenrod socks their first Christmas together, the second one where they had been living with each other brought with it a cat. Shiro still takes claim that the idea was his. Surprisingly, despite Red being fussy sometimes, he was a good cat. Got along with blue really well. He just had this addiction to warm things and did not understand the oven was death and pain.

"Got him."

Lance opened the oven and in a few moments Keith could feel the excess warmth and catch the delicious smells. Red wiggled in his arms.
When the oven was shut again, Keith let red go, who darted over to the kitchen and began pawing at the oven.

“Dude, you’re cat is weird.”

“You picked him out.”

“Cause his face is grumpy like yours.”

“Cabrón.” keith shot off.

“.” Lance retorted.

A knock sounded at the door.

“Its open!” Lance called out.

The door cracked open and Hunk and Pidge appeared.

“We bring Christmas goods on this actual factual Christmas!” Hunk sung walking through the door, Keith helping them with their coats.

“It feels weird doing this on actual Christmas, like it’s too soon.” Pidge commented. Everyone flowed into the kitchen were Lance was working on a stew and rice.

“Well Keith and I want New Christmas to be our anniversary.” Lance said, giving Pidge an odd gloating full smirk.

“Why though, it's not like it was your first date.”

“Lance keeps saying it was the day he asked me officially, but I think he just likes that fantasy in his
head of winning back the store and winning my heart in the process.” Keith said smiling, leaning over the counter. Lance started pouting.

“You make it sound like I didn’t sweep you off your feet.”

“You did, just not on that day. But yeah sorry Pidge, new Christmas is ours.”

“Unless you wanna watch us make out for a day.” Lance rounded on Keith, embracing him, dipping him, kissing him.

“Ugh.. the cheesey staging makes me sick.”

“There is nothing fake about our love!” Lance boystered.

“Lance… keep cooking.” Keith spoke as dry as he could, but it was hard to hide the warmth in his tone.

Lance pulled Keith back up and returned to the stove.

“I’ll say on that much,” Hunk added, looking over Lance's shoulder. “I can’t imagine a life where I had to listen to Lance pinning and confused feelings. It felt like high school.”

“Well at least now they are grossly attached to each other.” Pidge said as the two laughed, watching their friends, the two obviously more focused on each other.

“What?” Lance and Keith said at the same time, finally noticing the attention they were getting.

“Will you guys ever stop mooning?” Pidge asked laughing.

“Never.” Lance spoke bluntly, walking over to cuddle Keith again, only to get shunned back to cooking.
Shiro and Allura showed up a little while later with their Large doberman, Black. The thing was huge compared to the cats, hell compared to other dogs, but the gentle giant never seemed to frighten other cats. Instead Red and Blue would often curl up on Black and fall asleep.

“Oh man, it's a pet party! I would have brought my fish Yellow.”

“Or my parrot green, then we’d have a freaking rainbow of bad pet names.”

“Well we got Black a gift this year and wanted to see his reaction.” Lance said with excitement. Running over to the tree and taking out a giant cartoonishly sized bone. Black made no move to get it, not wanting to disturb Red and Blue who were nuzzling into his back, but Lance set the bone down in front of Black and he slowly took it into his mouth and walked carefully over to the living room before laying down.

Once Corran showed up, along with Lances family, and Pidges family, they dug in. Filling their stomachs with food and hearts with cheer. Hours flew by as drinks were drained and before Keith even realised, he was clearing up Plates and saying goodbye.

Blue and red, missing there friend, curled up together under the christmas tree, enjoying the warmth of the L.E.D.s

Lance and Keith curled up on the couch, enjoying the warmth of each other's company.

Keith couldn’t help but feel content. Repetition was nothing he was afraid of, but the idea of settling into a rhythm of life with someone just seemed like such an incomprehensible notion over two years ago. While had a rhythm to life, he wasn't bound to it, and sharing that rhyme with someone felt as though they would dance the same dance all their lives. Lance was different. If ever there was someone to take routine and chuck it out the window, it was Lance. His willingness to grow and change made him so easy to be with. Keith could imagine a life time with him.

Cuddled up on the sofa, with hot chocolate cooling on the table, looking fierce. Matching sweaters only outshined by the matching house slippers. Lance's arm was wrapped tight around Keith's shoulder, and Keith could feel Lance drifting further and further off to sleep. Keith looked towards the tree the had decorated with bells and minoras and flags of different countries and Japanese anime figurines, and felt a thought escape him.

“Should we get married?”
It was a thought that he had not meant to say out loud. It wasn’t even a new thought. Maybe the thought of Lance bullying off had Keith’s guard down, that Lance wouldn’t hear him.

But Lance tensed.

And it caused Keith’s face to burst into flame, while his body froze completely.

“What…” Lance said, his voice was strained, holding back rage. Which caused fear to shoot through Keith. Sure he wasn’t expecting Lance to kiss him wildly while expressing how much he would very much like that, but something no negative caught Keith off guard. Keith stayed silent, trying and failing to feign sleep.

“What did you just say?” His words came out slow, and cold.

“Nothing.”

“Of all the-” Lance shot up out of his seat, cutting himself off before leaving the room. Keith felt as though his heart had been split open. Keith had always figured he understood Lance fairly well, but now ever doubt was pouring in faster and faster, threatening to overflow. He could hear Lance clattering around in the bedroom. Their bedroom. Would it become just his again? Thoughts of life without Lance swarmed in, he felt something hot slip down his cheek.

Lance appeared, red in the face, one look at Keith though and he turned pale and wide eyed.

“Keith..” He spoke softly, and Keith found himself trying to put his heart back together. 

“I… we don’t have to. I just.. Cause we live together I thought…”

Lance rushed to his side taking his hand.

“Keith! I’m not mad.. Miffed, cheesed? Maybe. But … that’s only because.. You can just say these things with no planning or fear and me…”
Lance held up a silver ring.

“... I'm stuck freaking out about this for months.”

The ring twinkled in the fairy lights of the tree, Lance now down on one knee.

“If I had known we didn’t have to make a fuss with the ring-”

Keith cut him off in a kiss, the ring in fact falling between them. Of course it meant something, it meant even more that Lance had been thinking about this for so long, that they had been on the same page; as always.

Lance broke away first. Reclaiming the ring and slipping it onto Keith's ringer.

“Can we just pretend this happened on new Christmas though, that’s when I was planning to ask. I was gonna do the whole Champaigne thing but with flowers, and you the whole one knee thing, and you would be so flustered you would clutch at your pearls...”

“What am I.. an 80 year old woman in this?”

“And I would ask you to be that one person in my life I can lean on without guilt, and I would be your one person, and tell you no one else has ever made me more happy, or brave, or turned me on as much.”

Keith lightly punched his arm, but he did it while hiding behind his other hand, to embarrassed to look Lance in the face. Knowing those blue, sparkling, love filled eyes would be his undoing.

“That I want to grow old and have cats or adoptive kids with you. Whatever you want. I can promise you flowers whenever you want, and jokes even when you don't want them.”

“You were going to say all of this.” Keith mumbled, well more squeaked out, it was a poor attempt to appear in control. Thankfully, Lance didn’t draw attention to this.
“More or Less. It’s maybe not as composed as it was supposed to be. I did have a spe-”

Keith kissed him. Like the first few times they kissed, it was full of passion and fire and life. Keith kept pushing in, till they both felt Lance leaning back and by then it was too late. They fell onto the floor in a heap. Laughing. Keith fixed his gaze on the eyes he was more than ready to commit to looking into for the rest of time.

“Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Two years later.

Thankyou everyone for reading. This fic started back in July and has come along way. We have had two awesome editors along this journey, sadly none at the end but we can only hope I learned something. This fic isn't the longest I've written but it's the longest in a while and it was a lot of fun to write my take on this, and has hopefully improved my abilities as a writer.

All the comments helping me out with different things like grammar, plot and spanish have helped me out and while this might not be my last Klance fic, it's probably gonna remain the longest within this pair. They are just too much fun.

This was supposed to come out on Christmas but I was traveling so Happy New Years!

End Notes

Not only the first fic in a long time, but my first posting here. Most of my other work are on fanfiction.net and they are all horrible in my humble opinion. Not saying this will be anything great either; I just love writing AU’s.
I'm not the best at writing or grammar but really what better way to practice then some heavy writing, am I right? If you see something wrong let me know.

Open to crits.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!