Entangled

by Purpleneutrino (mackerelmademedoit)

Summary

When Keith found himself mentally linked to Lance of all people, he never thought that it would end in anything but irritation and misery on both sides. He certainly never imagined that it would be a useful asset in team Voltron's fight against the Galra Empire. Now if he can just keep his feelings in check, they might actually have a chance at defeating Zarkon.

Needless to say, when he'd wished for a 'bonding moment' with Lance, this wasn't exactly what he'd had in mind.

(Eventual romance and mature content for later chapters).

Notes

ETA 06/17: If you're a new reader, bear in mind that this fic was planned and written before S2 was released and diverges from canon before S1E11!

Beta'd by the beautiful Vicky! (chapters 1 - 4) and Doynik (chapters 5 - 12)

Cover Art
Keith tried to tell himself that it was just wishful thinking brought on by the desperation of his current predicament, but he was sure that he’d felt it. A faint presence probing the back of his mind. Barely a wisp, but it had been there. He had felt its distinct warmth soothe the pain of his distressed thoughts, keeping him calm.

He closed his eyes and concentrated hard, blocking out the rumblings of the battle around him and the eerie, lilac glow of the Galra ship in which he was being held captive. The presence grew brighter, more tangible.

It was not Red.

He threw his fist into the wall with a cry of frustration. The pain of her presence being crudely ripped away from him was still raw. His head still ached from the efforts he’d made in the past hour or so to regain his mental link with her. Something strong was blocking his reach. Something within the walls of his very cell he imagined. A new Galra tactic to weaken the Voltron team. The same technology, whatever it was, seemed to be preventing the others from contacting him as well. Not a sound had come from the helmet since his imprisonment. He nevertheless found himself glancing hopefully at it where it lay abandoned across the other side of the cell. He’d thrown it there in a fit of rage some time ago. It struck him that the Galra must have confidence in their new tech for them not to have taken the helmet from him upon his capture.

Once his anger had subsided, Keith tried again to calm his mind, and with a tentative touch, felt again for the strange but familiar presence. What was it that it could get through to him when Red could not? It didn’t seem to acknowledge him, as though it was not aware of him like he was of it. He tried to probe further. He then realised what felt so familiar. It was as though he had suddenly been transported back to the desert on Earth. Alone, isolated, but with a comforting, ever-present hum of energy enveloping him, eventually calling, coaxing, leading him further and further out towards his fate.

‘Blue?’

His heart dared to hope and a new burst of adrenaline surged through him. He licked his trembling bottom lip, tasting the sharp tang of blood from the long forgotten injuries he’d sustained during his struggle against the Galra prison guards. He let his mind reach out again.

No. It wasn’t Blue. Or at least, he felt a noticeable change in the energy that he had sensed all that time ago in the desert.

‘Maybe it’s because it’s me that’s reaching out this time?’

Even after having many months to ponder exactly how and why he alone was first drawn to the blue lion as opposed to the other paladins, he was still no closer to any sort of explanation for his connection with Blue. His first naïve theory had been that maybe he himself was meant to pilot the blue lion. He was just beaten to the punch. As soon as he had bonded with Red however, he knew that this was not the case. Red was his and he was hers. The only thing he knew for sure was that his special connection to Blue had to mean something. And maybe, maybe it was the key to getting out of his dire situation.
Keith shifted slightly on the cold floor of his prison cell and hissed at the pain that shot up through his sprained ankle, breaking his concentration and bringing the reality of his situation back into sharp focus once more. He was stuck, captured, injured and all of it was of his own doing. His only possible way out was a tenuous mental link between some unidentified energy that may or may not be Blue and there was no way to make certain of that.

‘Probing further into it may be dangerous,’ he thought, bitterly chastising himself. It was exactly this kind of reckless thinking that got him into this mess in the first place. ‘I should have listened to Shiro.’

His heart sank. Even if he did manage to make it out, there was no escaping the fact that he had endangered the entire team and risked the capture of Voltron by charging head first into battle, against the advice of the others. Now both he and Red were captured and he doubted that the team had any way to detect her whereabouts on the vast Galra ship without his bond with her to help them.

The sounds of battle raged on around him, aggravating the dull, thudding pulse of pain in his head. He sought out the comfort of the presence again.

‘Find me.’

He couldn’t explain why felt like the right thing to do, but he found himself focusing all of his efforts anyway on calling out to whoever or whatever it was that lingered in the back of his mind.

‘Please find me. Please… I’m here.’

If it was Blue, he could connect with her. And if he could connect with Blue, he could connect with —

‘Lance.’

— the rest of the team.

‘Find me.’

He repeated it like a mantra.

‘Find me… find me… ’

The world around him faded into silence as his brain strained to push the thought out towards the ever-brightening, mysterious presence. His ankle no longer hurt.

‘I’m here! Find me!’

His limbs felt weak as a burning sensation behind his eyes grew stronger with each thought that he urged outwards.

‘I’m here!’

His head was on fire.

‘Please…’

He felt a flicker. A questioning spark. His mind still burned.

‘Find me.’
Something was there. He knew it now for certain. It twisted and writhed as though repeatedly pushing against some invisible barrier. It was so bright.

‘I’m here! Come and find me!’

As he felt his mental strength beginning to wane, Keith channeled the last of his energy into pushing and pulling whatever it was that separated the two of them.

‘Come on...’

He pulled harder.

‘Please.’

And then it shattered. The presence surged through and around him. He then felt it truly for the first time: panic, concern, confusion, a need to protect —

Keith returned its touch.

‘Find me.’

As much as he loathed to admit it, Lance felt pangs of guilt for what had happened to Keith. Not because it was he who had somehow goaded him into charging headfirst into the swarm of Galra ships (the mullet head would have done it regardless of anything he’d said) but because he hadn’t followed him to back him up.

“Let him go Shiro. Keith knows what he’s doing.”

He’d said it with a deliberate and generous helping of sarcasm, but he had meant it in all seriousness too. Keith, as infuriatingly reckless as he was, always appeared (to Lance anyway) to know exactly what he needed to do and how to do it. He was annoyingly perfect that way. Well, seemed to be. Lance had been proven wrong on that account this time.

Warning growls from Blue then permeated his thoughts and they dodged a wave of Galra laser fire by the width of a hair. He sent her back a sheepish apology. They couldn’t afford to be distracted now with Voltron out of action. A warm, deep purr of reassurance surrounded him. She understood. She was worried about Red too.

‘I’m not worried about him. I’m really, really mad at him!’

She didn’t respond to that.

Lance huffed and tapped at his helmet, a new tick he had apparently developed over the past hour or so. He would have expected to have heard Shiro chiding him in his ear right now after that last shaky manoeuvre, but not a word had come from him. Nothing from the rest of the team either. The random cutting in and out of their communications system during this battle was starting to worry him. Allura and Coran didn’t seem too concerned about it when it had first happened, citing random interference as a common cause of this issue. He supposed that they did have a lot more battle experience than himself. Something still didn’t quite feel right though. This feeling undoubtedly must have come from Blue he thought. She was after all a magical, mecha space lion.
And much smarter than he was.

“What do you think, Blue? Should I say something to Coran?”

“Say what to me?”

Lance’s heart leapt at the crackle of Coran’s voice through his helmet. He hadn’t realised just how long and deafening the silence from his teammates had been.

“Coran! I’m still getting interference on our comms. Are you fixing it? This is the first time I’ve heard a voice for a while. How about the others?”

“It’s not just you. We’ve been experiencing random blackouts in communications from everyone. We’re still unsure of the cause, but we’re working on it!”

“Great!”

“Also, Shiro told me to tell you this as soon as we got back in contact with you—” Lance heard Coran clear his throat and put on his best Shiro impression. “ ‘Pay attention and stop getting distracted so easily.’ ”

“…that’s great. Thanks, Coran.”

“Anytime!” Allura’s voice then crackled through the speaker.

“Lance! Remember to focus on your connection to your lion. In the past, the strong bonds between a lion and its paladin were the cornerstone of a much stronger bond between the paladins themselves. So much so that they rarely had need for physical communications in battle. Just keep focus —”

She was abruptly cut off as the signal was once again lost. Lance cursed, hitting the sides of his helmet uselessly. ‘Stupid thing!’ He hadn’t had a chance to ask them if they’d heard anything from Keith either. Calming purrs of reassurance flooded his mind again. He sighed.

“Looks like it’s just us again, Blue.”

They did another lap around the imposing Galra fleet, weaving seamlessly between the opposing laser fire and taking out a few ships as they went. Lance looked around for any possible sign or clue as to Keith or Red’s whereabouts, but found nothing. Blue buffeted against his waves of frustration and quickly brought him back to a focus. His bond with Blue felt as strong as ever, if not stronger than it had ever been. At least that was something. He thought about Allura’s last words again. Hesitant at first, he closed his eyes and put his whole trust in Blue. He felt the cool, calming serenity of her presence overcome him. He let his mind embrace hers completely.

‘Wow.’

Lance’s eyes were still closed, but he could see. He found himself moving to dodge another round of laser fire before he’d even fully registered what was happening. ‘These must be Blue’s reflexes.’ He was seeing and feeling exactly as she was. Lance cast his new eyes over to the rest of the team, all engaged with their own fights. ‘Okay, focus.’

He concentrated on the other paladins and their lions, letting his affections for his teammates flow freely through him, his mind and Blue’s pushing together and outwards.

‘Let them hear me.’
Pidge’s resourcefulness and intelligence, Shiro’s brave, calm determination, Hunk’s unwavering loyalty and strength, and Keith —

Lance gasped as a sudden pulse of energy thrummed against the edges of his and Blue’s collective consciousness.

‘What was… ?’ Blue was confused as well. ‘You felt that right, girl?’ He pushed back with a frantic determination. The energy responded in kind. Once again his instincts knew who it was before his mind could even form the thought in his head.

‘Push back, Blue! We can break through!’ Lance didn’t even know what he was breaking, only that he needed to, he had to.

The invisible barrier strained and warped against their efforts. He felt it weaken. Lance pushed harder against the cracks beginning to form. Blue’s roars echoed through him, igniting his mind in a rush of blue flames. And then —

A deluge.

Lance felt himself gasping for air as a fierce, desperate plea engulfed him. He heard no words, but now everything was clear.

“Keith!” His voice didn’t sound like his own when Lance heard it.

He knew exactly what to do.

“… Lance… LANCE!”

It was as though he was coming up for air after prolonged submersion in a vast ocean. Lance found his head squeezing uncomfortably, the area behind his eyes burning and blood pumping loud in his ears. The roar of battle swelled suddenly around him along with the distressed, tinny cries of his teammates through his helmet, making his ears ring.

“Yes?” Lance managed to croak out. His throat felt dry and raw.

“Lance,” Shiro said, interjecting the frantic voices with a calm yet urgent tone, “are you okay? Are you hurt? Our communications have been back up for a few minutes now, but you haven’t been responding. You sounded like you were in pain —”

“You were shouting!” Hunk interrupted. Lance felt a wave of guilt at the worry laced in his best friend’s voice.

“— and saying Keith’s name,” Pidge said with a pressing tone. “Did you find him? Is he okay?”

“Did you guys not feel it?” Lance grunted, his head still throbbing.

“Feel what?” The bewilderedness in Pidge’s voice told Lance all he needed to know.

“Doesn’t matter. I know where Keith is!”

“Where?!?”

“I… can’t describe it, but I know where!”

“What do you mean?” Lance swore he could hear the growl of Green’s voice intertwined with Pidge’s words.
“No time to explain, but I can find him trust me.”

“Lance,” there was a warning note in Shiro’s voice, “don’t do anything reckless. Please.” Lance didn’t need to hear the rest of Shiro’s unspoken words to know what he wanted to say: ‘I don’t want to lose anyone else.’

“I won’t. Please just trust me on this.” And before giving them the chance to protest, he and Blue sped off in the direction of one of the largest ships in the Galra fleet. The comms cut out again. The energy he’d felt, that he was positive had to be Keith, was still there but growing fainter by the second. Lance tried to reach out to him again, but felt no response. He prayed he wasn’t too late.

Blue rushed to assure him. She was right. He could still feel him. There was still hope. And he knew where to go. He closed his eyes once more and followed the steady stream of energy guiding him. Galra soldiers were firing at him from all sides, but he and Blue were one once more. They wove expertly between shots, getting closer towards the dimming light.

Before he knew it, they were blasting a hole and plunging headfirst into the side of the ship, Blue urging him onward as he dove out of his seat and into the fray. He drew his Bayard and gunned down the soldiers who had been standing guard over the prison cell where he now knew Keith was being held. Alarms were sounding all around him, but they became faded and muted when his focus turned again to the blaze of energy he knew to be Keith just on the other side of the locked door. A kaleidoscope of emotions that weren’t his own reeled through him: surprise, hope, fear, pain, gratitude, shame, affection, apprehension —

‘Keith… ?’

Not wanting to feel any more confusing waves of feelings, Lance shook clear his mind, took aim and fired at the door’s keypad. They had no time to waste. He tore off the shriveled, fried remains of the door and hurled himself through the doorway, straight into Keith himself. Lance felt Keith’s pain and irritation before Keith had even opened his mouth to complain. He definitely didn’t feel comfortable with this new shared connection they now had.

‘ How do I turn this thing of?’

“Idiot,” Keith grimaced as Lance moved to get off him, “you landed on my injured ankle!”


“Just a sprain.” He made a move to get up from where he’d been slouched on the floor. “I should be able to walk on it. No big deal.” Lance narrowed his eyes as he felt a wave of embarrassment from Keith hit him.

‘ Liar.’

Keith was actually putting on a good show of being in perfect health and got to his feet with seemingly no difficulty. Lance would have actually fallen for it too, if not for the betrayal of Keith’s emotions given up freely by the strange connection that they now shared.

‘ Maybe this connection isn’t so bad after all?’ A sly grin crept across his face.

“Your head’s bleeding.”

“It’s stopped now.”
“It’s bleeding into your eye —”

“Just a scratch.”

“ —and your mouth.”

“It’s FINE!”

“And you’re limping.”

“Leave it!”

Keith’s anger and humiliation was radiating off of him so strongly now Lance didn’t need the emotional link to feel it. Blue was nudging him at the edge of his mind with a warning growl. ‘Alright, alright I get it. Back to the rescue mission.’ Lance sighed.

“Look, Keith relax I was just messing with you. But seriously. You’re injured and we still need to find Red and get out of here fast. So just let me help you okay?” Keith blinked at him and to Lance’s surprise gave a curt nod. A warm feeling of gratitude, though still tinged with indignity, touched his mind.

‘Huh. That’s new.’ He wasn’t used to this more agreeable side to Keith during their usual interactions. ‘I guess I must have come across as sincere?’

He heard Blue scoff at him in a way that could almost be interpreted as an eye roll.

Oh…yes. The mental link worked both ways. ‘That makes more sense.’

The unmistakable sound of approaching footsteps broke him out of his reverie. ‘Shit.’ He made a grab for Keith’s arm amidst Keith’s noises of surprise and protest, and flung it over his shoulders in an attempt to support the other.

“Sounds like reinforcements! We need to get to Red now! Where’s you Bayard?” Keith made a face.

“They took it with Red.”

“Looks like we’ll have to make do with my superior combat skills then!”

“Please God no.”

“Did you forget that I’m saving you right now? Because I could just leave you here you know.”

They bolted out the room as fast as they could with Keith’s sprained ankle, just in time before the Galra reinforcements rounded the corner of the corridor. Lance all but threw Keith into Blue’s cockpit before unceremoniously launching himself into the pilot seat. Laser fire began to rain down on them.

“Let’s go, Blue.”

Keith grunted and looked up at him from where he lay on the floor, a startled look in his eyes, any trace of complaint about his manhandling forgotten. “You know where to find her?”

“Yeah.”

“But… how?”
“I can feel her.”

Keith’s mouth opened and closed in confusion and Lance could feel his alarm and bewilderment reverberate through him.

“Look, I don’t know how okay, but I guess this… weird mental connection we have now goes deeper then we know.”

Keith abruptly shut his mouth in a tight line and Lance felt the atmosphere shift between them as an awkward silence fell. It was the first time either of them had mentioned their new found bond aloud. In fact, Lance was sure that Keith had temporarily forgotten all about it in light of their current situation. Tentatively, he reached out towards the edges of Keith’s mind. He couldn’t resist a glimpse into exactly how Keith felt about all this.

“Stop that! I know what you’re doing!” Lance recoiled hastily from the flare of anger that Keith readily sent his way, though not before he’d felt a trace of apprehension and fear. He gave a loud cough.

“Err, sorry. I just thought-never mind. We’ll talk about it later. Let’s get Red.”

He veered Blue around and began to head towards the opposite end of the ship where he could sense Red’s presence. The happiness and relief he felt from Blue confirmed the accuracy of his location. He could feel Keith’s anger also melting away to give rise to warm jubilation.

“I can feel her again,” he said with a smile. Lance stole a look at him.

“You couldn’t before?” He couldn’t tell if the grief he felt was his own or Keith’s at this point. The pain at the thought of being forcefully separated from Blue was all too real. Keith shook his head, his teeth and fists clenched. His rage flared at the edges of Lance’s mind.

“No. They took her from me. They’ve worked out a way to temporarily sever our connection. A new technology. It was built into the walls of my cell I’m sure of it and possibly other areas of the ship too. It interfered with the team’s communication system.” Lance realised for the first time that Keith did still indeed have his helmet grasped in his bloodied hands.

*The Galra didn’t take it... so this was a planned abduction?*

Without thinking, he reached out again towards Keith’s mind with a sympathetic touch. Keith frowned, but to Lance’s surprise didn’t reject him as he did before. He sent back a quiet note of thanks. Lance coughed awkwardly again.

“Right. We’ll have to inform the rest of the team about this later. The comms still aren’t working.”

He put Blue into a nosedive, dodging laser fire as it came. Keith had pulled himself up to the front of the cockpit and was staring intently ahead. When Lance turned to him, he almost felt scared of the fierceness in Keith’s eyes as they closed in on the ship. Almost.

Lance sent an ice-beam directly at the side of the ship followed by a final devastating laser beam, shattering the cold, brittle surface in an instant. Keith wasted no time in sprinting out of Blue and leaping into the newly made gap, sprained ankle forgotten. Lance couldn’t help but admire his dedication. He bristled indignantly as a flicker of smug amusement was sent his way. ‘Stupid emotional bond!’ This was going to take some getting used to.

A thunderous roar then shook him to his entire core and he froze as a tumultuous wave of fiery triumph permeated his mind and Red burst forth from the wreckage. She was reunited with Keith.
once more. Lance let out a victorious whoop as Keith mercilessly tore his way through the remaining Galra fleet in an act of heated revenge, blazing a trail through which Lance and Blue could pass through safely. Once out of range of the now pockmarked Galra vessel, their comms flickered to life again. Both Keith and Lance recoiled in sync at the overlapping screams and exclamations from their team, their questions ringing in their ears. Lance threw his helmet to the floor. He could feel Keith’s unease as well as his own.

‘How are we going to explain all this?’

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I have also done a couple of illustrations for this fic here on my [Entangled art tag](#) if anyone is interested in checking them out! Be warned that my illustrations will contain minor spoilers for later chapters!
One unfortunate quality of Altean clocks, Keith mused, was that the longer duration of ‘ticks’ compared to ‘seconds’ had the excruciating effect of making time appear to run slower as he watched the digital clock on the wall. It was something he wouldn’t usually notice or care about, but when sat in the Castle common room surrounded by the expectant, questioning faces of the rest of team Voltron in a suffocating silence, it didn’t help make the situation feel any less tense. The only person coping worse than him right now was Lance, who was currently sweating buckets beside him and doing a poor job of appearing calm and collected. Keith tried hard to shield his mind from the frantic, panicked emotions rolling off Lance in wave after wave, but it was useless.

‘We’ve got to learn to get this thing under control fast.’

When they had made their triumphant return to the Castle and the euphoria had worn off, Keith had immediately felt the same discomfort in Lance as he had in himself. How could they even begin to explain this situation to the rest of the team when they barely understood it themselves? Keith wasn’t sure he even wanted to understand more about it. It was embarrassing and awkward already as it was without getting the rest of the team involved as well. Still...

He glanced over at Lance who seemed for once unable to find any words to say.

... at least he wasn’t the one stuck having to explain how he knew where to find a hidden, captured teammate amongst a fleet of over a hundred Galra ships without any form of communication whatsoever between them.

“Lance, it’s simple,” Shiro said. “Just tell us what happened.” Keith flinched despite himself at the hard look Shiro was directing at Lance. He’d been on the receiving end of that look more times than he cared to admit. “It’s bad enough having one teammate lacking in discipline without you following his example.”

‘Ouch.’ That had stung. Keith flushed and sunk further into his chair.

The fact that Lance wasn’t openly mocking him right now after Shiro’s remark was a definite sign that he wasn’t himself, Keith thought. He somehow looked worse after that in fact.

‘Maybe it would be easier to just tell them?’

They had yet to exchange words about the issue, but they’d only had to look at each other after they had landed their lions to know, regardless of their mental link, that they were thinking the exact same thing.

'We can’t tell them. Not yet. Not until we’ve had a chance to talk about this alone!'
Shiro sighed and Keith, still chagrined, forced himself to look at him. Lance remained tight-lipped.

“Look, if you have a good reason for why you acted like you did, that’s okay. But from where we’re standing, you just took off, weakening the team and endangering yourself by going in your own.”

Keith fought the urge to ask Shiro if he was still talking to Lance at this point, or if his comments were intended for him. He suspected Shiro was attempting to kill two birds with one stone with this speech. Lance finally spoke up.

“H-hey, Shiro… Guys,” he glanced around at the rest of the team, visibly recoiling from the intensity of Pidge’s glare. “Believe me I do have a good explanation—”

“Well? What is it then?” Pidge wasted no time interjecting. “Because you owe us that at least for abandoning us out there!”

“Yeah,” Hunk said albeit with an obvious reluctance to gang up on his friend. “One minute you were fine, then the next you were screaming Keith’s name—”

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Keith had to fight back a snort of laughter at the unfortunate wording. He then had to fight it harder when his amusement was picked up telepathically by Lance, and Keith simultaneously both felt and saw Lance’s mortification manifest into an internal struggle with himself not to turn to Keith, start a seemingly unprovoked fight, and risk looking deranged. Keith enjoyed letting his amusement flow freely towards Lance, watching his ears turn red. He was finally starting to feel a little better about the whole bizarre situation, when he tuned back in to what Hunk was saying.

“— and then you said you felt something.”

“Ha! I did not say that! I asked if you guys felt it!” Lance then faltered, realising what he’d just admitted to. Keith could have slapped him. Idiot!

“Ah — no. I meant —!”

“Don’t backtrack! Finish what you were going to say!” Pidge was livid. “What was it you felt?”

“Lance, it’s important for the team that you tell —”

“L-look! It wasn’t anything crazy alright? It was Blue! She just, somehow knew okay?” He took a shaky breath. “I can’t explain how because she never told me.” Keith raised his eyebrows and Lance shot a look at him, the first time he’d made eye contact with him since the team had descended on them both. Keith then felt a hesitant brush against his mind and was surprised at the emotions he felt.

‘He’s… asking for my assurance?’ Lance rarely sought out his opinion on anything. Keith gave a quiet sigh. It was a terrible cover story, but he’d be lying if he said he had anything better to offer up. He sent Lance back a mental nod of agreement and then marvelled at the drastic change that came over the other boy as he began to animatedly recount tales of his courageous rescue mission.

‘Y-yeah, so Blue knew which ship Keith was on, and then all I had to do was use my expert deducting skills to pinpoint exactly where on the ship our poor damsel in distress was being held captive and blast my way through. I must have taken out at least fifty soldiers on my way in and a hundred more on my way out—’

Hunk was laughing, his eyes wide with awe and even Pidge’s look had softened to give way to a
mildly impressed look. Lance’s arms flailed with the enthusiasm of his words as he re-enacted his fights with the Galra soldiers. Any other time, Keith would be rolling his eyes and tearing down Lance’s ridiculous embellishments to his already tall tale, but he reasoned that he at least owed it to Lance to let him have his fun on this occasion. That, and it was a completely different experience watching him like this whilst having the glimmering lights of Lance’s emotions dancing around his head at the same time. The grin on his face induced a quirk of a smile on Keith’s own.

Feeling someone watching him, Keith turned to find Shiro’s eyes meeting his. Keith blanched. That stare told him that he was in no way off the hook for his own misdemeanor, no matter the grilling that Lance had taken for his. Avoiding Shiro’s gaze, if only to delay the inevitable, Keith looked instead towards Allura who had been uncharacteristically silent throughout the whole affair so far. She was staring at Lance as though not really seeing him and looked deep in thought. Keith felt a prickle of unease in his stomach.

‘She knows something.’

But before he could ponder the matter any further, Shiro’s voice interrupted Lance’s now verging-on-nonsensical spiel, which involved Lance harnessing an Ultimate Weapon (formed from the merger of his and Keith’s retrieved Bayard) and a narrow escape from emperor Zarkon himself (“Zarkon wasn’t even there!”, Pidge was yelling).

“Well, everyone. Now that this matter has been somewhat explained, we should convene in the dining hall. Coran wants us all to eat to regain our strength and then discuss with us the issue of our communication blackouts.” Keith attempted to gain Lance’s attention at this, but Lance seemed intent on ignoring him, his emotions now curiously muted. “And hopefully we can manage to get to the bottom of what the cause is.”

As they all filed out of the common room, Keith made a grab towards Lance’s arm, ‘We need to talk about this together first’, but a firm grip on his own shoulder stopped him in his tracks.

“Keith, walk with me.”

“I don’t expect you to clarify exactly what happened out there with Lance,” said Shiro in a low voice as they walked slowly along the corridor, hanging back from the others. “I’m going to leave that full explanation up to him.” Keith frowned. Of course Shiro hadn’t been convinced by Lance’s woolly tale. “I would however appreciate some form of justification for your behaviour that led to his actions in the first place.” Keeping half his mind on Shiro’s words and the other half on the ebbing glow of Lance’s consciousness disappearing down the corridor, Keith mulled over his response to Shiro. Their walking eventually slowed to a stop and Shiro spoke again before he had a chance to reply.

“Keith, what happened?” Keith’s insides wrenched with guilt when he saw the look of hurt along with anger in his eyes. “We had a plan. Why didn’t you trust us? Trust me?”

“I do trust you!” Keith spat out indignantly.

“Then why did you abandon our plan and fly in on your own?” Shiro said, his words equally as furious. Keith felt a lump forming in his throat. How had he messed up this badly?

“It wasn’t like that.”

“Then what was it?” Keith bit into his lip, feeling the now dried, flaky blood there crack
unpleasantly as he did so. The reminder of his injuries drew his attention again towards the dull ache in his sprained ankle. His reason for his disregard of the plan would sound even vaguer than Lance’s story had done.

“I…had a feeling.” Keith paused to consider his choice of words. “Red and I both had a feeling that something wasn’t right,” he felt Shiro’s eyes burning into him, “something about the way the Galra were attacking was strange. Like they were holding back.” As Keith spoke, it became clear to him in hindsight that this was exactly what the Galra had been doing. ‘Trying to lure one of us in so that they could separate one of us from the group and easily test out their new weapon. And of course I fell for it. Stupid…’ He plunged on. “So Red and I thought we should fly in a bit closer to investigate,” Shiro frowned at him.

“Why didn’t you share your concerns with the team?”

“I…” Keith didn’t have an answer for him. ‘I didn’t think.’ He looked down shame-faced.

“I think you also took advantage of the comms blackouts to ignore our warnings.” Keith was sure that he couldn’t feel any worse, but he’d been wrong. ‘He noticed that too?’

Shiro sighed at his lack of response giving him all the confirmation he needed for his accusation. “This Keith, is exactly why the Garrison did what they did. These kinds of decisions don’t help the team and put everyone in danger, including you. You’re better than this. I know you’re better than this.”

Desperate to say anything that could restore Shiro’s faith in him, Keith found himself blurting out the words before he could stop himself. “I know the reason why we were getting blackouts on our comms!” Shiro’s eyes widened.

“What?” His anger had practically evaporated. Encouraged, Keith pressed on.

“I don’t know how they did it, but it was a deliberate attack by the Galra. Whatever this new tech-thing is, they had it reinforcing some areas of their ships and whenever we got too close, it interfered with our systems.” Keith hesitated, but urged himself on. It’s not like he could further incriminate himself more than he already had he thought. “They must have planned on luring one of us away from the group so that they could capture one of us and test it out properly. The cell where I was being held blocked my communications with both you and Red.” Shiro’s eyes softened at that and he put a comforting hand on Keith’s shoulder, a far cry from the iron grip that he’d had it in before. “I kept trying to get in contact with you guys,” Keith could feel his voice breaking up, “but no-one could hear me. Not even Red. I’m sorry, Shiro. You were right. Because of me they now know for sure that their new tech works. They would have been monitoring me from outside and knew that my communications weren’t getting through.” Keith could only hope that Lance managing to find him despite this, had thrown a spanner in the works for the Galra in this regard. “They’ll be using it against us again for sure. It’s all my fault.” His eyes were burning and he rubbed at them furiously. Finding them, thankfully, to be dry, he looked up at Shiro. Enough anger remained in his expression to let Keith know that he wasn’t completely forgiven yet, but he looked decidedly less troubled as he digested the information that Keith had hastily dumped on him.

‘Please let me have done something right.’

“This is great information, Keith. I’ll let Coran and the others know.” Keith couldn’t help brightening at this reaction. It must have shown on his face because Shiro hastened to add, “This doesn’t mean that I agree with your methods however.” Shiro then gestured below towards Keith’s swollen ankle. “Go and get that checked out in the med bay and put some ice on it. I’ll send
someone to come and check on you after I’ve done explaining what you’ve just told me. He gave Keith’s shoulder a final squeeze of reassurance. “I’m sorry about what happened with you and Red. I can only imagine what that would have felt like for you. Honestly, the interference with our connections with our lions is what worries me the most about this. We need to find a way around this before the Galra can use it against us again.” Keith managed to muster up a weak smile in response. The pain in his ankle was back in full force now.

Making a point to himself to start trusting Shiro’s advice more often from now on, Keith began limping his way towards the med bay, turning as Shiro called out to him.

“I’ll get Coran to send you some leftover food as well.”

“Please don’t.”

He grinned as he heard Shiro laughs echo down the corridor behind him.

Mercifully, Shiro had listened to his request of no food from Coran. Keith didn’t think he could stomach any of the bizarre green substance right now. Certainly less so than he usually could. Altean medicine was indeed advanced, the pain from his ankle and rest of him had subsided almost in an instant when he had ingested it, but the swollenness was going to take a little longer to heal. It made him feel queasy to look at it. He swished his purpling foot around in the cool, viscous fluid that he currently had it submerged in. It seemed to be working, though slower than he’d imagined. Maybe the speed of Altean healing had made him impatient.

The door to the med bay opened and Keith glanced up to see Lance peering through the entrance.

“Shiro sent you?” He said it without thinking (old habits died hard) but he found himself pleased nonetheless that it had been Lance and not any of the others. ‘Now we can finally talk about this… thing.’ Lance scowled at him.

“Is that any way to speak to your saviour?!?” A faint spark of annoyance coupled with a reluctant amusement reached the edges of Keith’s mind. Keith narrowed his eyes as it suddenly struck him how much weaker that pulse of emotions had felt compared to before. Keith hadn’t felt him outside the door either. He let his mind reach out towards Lance’s and delve past the layer of irritation that he had caused and felt… worry, concern. Lance pushed back against him, the layer of irritation growing thicker.

“Hey! You can’t just do that after you wouldn’t let me do it to you, you hypocrite! And you’re doing that wrong by the way.” Lance pointed at his submerged foot.

“Sorry,” Keith said, though not really feeling sorry at all. Knowing Lance was actually concerned for him made him feel… something, “and no I’m not. This is what it says to do on the instructions. I think…” He trailed off as he squinted at the hastily written ‘Altean to English’ translation note that Pidge had stuck on the side of the strange contraption he was using. She had been gradually working her way through all the medical supplies, sticking notes to each one. This would have been helpful if it weren’t for the fact that her spidery handwriting was ‘illegible’ at worst and ‘might-as-well-still-be-in-Altean’ at best. Lance rolled his eyes and stomped his way towards him.

“Nope. You are wrong. Completely wrong, Keith. So let someone who actually knows what they’re doing show you how it’s done, okay?”

“Aren’t you going to go and fetch someone then?”
“I should have left you on that ship.”

Keith snorted, then yelped as his foot was yanked out of the soothing liquid into the much less soothing grip of Lance’s hands and then dropped onto the floor.

“How is injuring me further going to help!?”

“It will be healed in a minute or two if you just let me show you how to do it properly!”

“You’re worried about me.”

“Am not! Just basking in the moment of knowing how to do something better than you.”

“I felt it.”

“Not just a hypocrite, a shameless hypocrite! Why is it okay for you to go rooting around my head when you won’t let me do the same?” Keith had the grace to feel a little abashed this time.

“Sorry,” he said, and he meant it that time. “I was just… checking.” He flinched as Lance then grabbed his foot again, but this time wrapping it in a towel.

“Checking what?” Lance was fiddling with the controls of the cooling contraption. “You didn’t have the temperature on low enough.”

Oh. That made sense. Feeling foolish, Keith instead addressed Lance’s question. “Checking to see if the connection was still there.” He watched Lance rooting around the medical supply shelves. “It felt weaker than before and I couldn’t tell that you were outside the door.” Lance pulled out what looked like part of a hard, plastic enclosure. “What are you looking for?”

“The rest of the machine.”

“…oh.”

“Lie down.”

“Um…what?” Lance pointed over to the beds over on the other side of the room.

“You need to elevate it. Your ankle.”

“…right.”

Keith began to limp over towards the nearest bed. Lance appeared to get tired of his slow progress very quickly and was soon by his side to hoist him up and onto the mattress. Keith couldn’t be bothered to complain. Lance then began fussing with pillows on both ends of the bed and Keith let his mind open up again. He didn’t reach out as he had done before, just let the gentle waves of Lance’s emotions wash over him. With Lance less guarded, they seemed to come stronger. A warm, soothing blue.

“It felt weaker before, because I let it be weaker,” Lance said suddenly, turning back to the machine again as he fixed the missing part of the enclosure over the top of it. Keith stared at him in bewilderment.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I concentrated really, really hard on shutting you out.”
“Ah.” Keith couldn’t help but feel a little bit hurt by that remark, but he supposed that made sense. ‘At least he’s working on controlling it.’ Lance looked at him oddly and turned away from him.

“H-hey it’s inconvenient for both of us right?” He rubbed the back of his neck. “Thought it was for the best that I at least tried to control it you know?” Keith then realised that he must have been projecting out his emotions towards Lance without meaning to again. ‘Dammit.’

“Yeah that makes sense.” Keith tried his hardest to hold in his embarrassment, but he knew that if Lance just looked at him, he would know what he was feeling from just the flush on his face, even if his emotions weren’t projecting all over the place.

“Anyway,” Lance voice came out slightly strained, “here’s how this thing works. Lie down and prop your foot up on those pillows.” Keith, grateful for the change in subject, complied.

“Right, this is really awesome, so you’d best listen and watch closely okay?” Keith fought the urge to roll his eyes.

“I’m listening.”

“Allura showed me how to do this”, Lance said, a light blush on his cheeks. Keith tried not to imagine the scene of an injured, love-sick Lance being nursed back to health by Allura.

“You weren’t taking advantage of her kindness were you?”

“What are you talking about?!” Lance was blushing bright red now. “She was just helping me use this machine for when Pidge hurt her knee last week.” He paused thoughtfully. “Although…”

“Don’t get any ideas for injuring yourself.”

“I’m not!” Lance pressed a button on the machine, distracting Keith from his Lance-teasing. Now that the machine had its enclosure intact, the strange fluid was able to move around more freely, almost floating. Lance pressed another button and the effect increased, the transparent box looking almost like a square-shaped version of the lava lamps that they had back on Earth.

“It’s a sort of mini, anti-gravity box thingy,” said Lance. “The princess explained it a much more scientific way that I didn’t quite understand, but I’m pretty sure that was the gist of it.”

“I see.” Keith watched the liquid slowly rising and falling around the edges the box. “So, a magic healing box?”

“A magic healing box.”

“Got it.” Lance turned off the magic healing box and took off the lid.

“So,” he pressed a button on the apparent touchscreen on the side of the lid, making Keith feel like even more of an idiot for missing such a crucial part of this ridiculous machine, “this creates an opening that seals around your leg see?” Lance unwrapped the towel from Keith’s foot and lifted it up, his touch much more gentle than before. He placed Keith’s foot back in the bottom half of the enclosure, balancing it carefully on top of the pillow pile at the foot of the bed. The soothing liquid wrapping around Keith’s ankle in a welcome relief. Lance then put the lid back on, the edge nearest the top of his leg morphed to fit perfectly around it, enclosing his swollen foot completely in the box. He then pressed the button again. Keith gaped as the liquid swirled fast around his foot, much colder than it had been before. Just as Lance had described, the machine was done in about a minute. When he removed it, his ankle looked back to normal. Keith moved to get up, but Lance
shoved him back down.

“What was that for?!”

“I’m not done yet!”

“What?”

“It’s a magic healing box, but you’ve still got to massage your ankle a bit like you would back on Earth, yeah?”

“Yeah…”

The next thing Keith knew, Lance’s hands were on his ankle and the situation became distinctly more awkward. Even Lance had gone quiet now as he diligently worked his hands over his foot. Lance’s mind had gone suspiciously silent once again. Keith tried his best to repay the favour. He was sure his efforts were failing however.

“How do you know how to do all this?” Keith asked, saying anything he could to break the uncomfortable silence.

“From being human and knowing how to take care of myself?” Keith scowled at him, but felt himself relax a little more. Their usual bickering made the situation feel more normal. Lance had a smug grin on his face and Keith felt his mind becoming more open again, Lance’s internal glee swam around him.

“I played outside all the time as a kid,” Lance continued, still smiling, “so I hurt myself a lot. Climbing trees, riding bikes and stuff you know? Sprained my ankle more times than I can count.” He began to massage Keith’s heel. “You just learn what to do.”

“I did all that kind of stuff too as a kid.”

“Then how do you not know any of this basic stuff?” Keith shrugged.

“Guess I’m just not as clumsy as you are.” He cried out as Lance painfully squeezed his little toe. Lance said nothing, just carried on massaging, though with a slightly less gentle touch. Keith huffed before speaking again.

“When I injure myself, I usually just walk it off. I don’t bother with this kind of stuff.” He had the sneaking suspicion that Lance was fighting the impulse to pinch him again.

“You’re an idiot. How are you still alive?! Never mind that, how did you become the best pilot in our class and then manage to survive all by yourself in a desert when being this much of an idiot?”

“You think I’m the best pilot?”

“You think I’m the best pilot?”

“Of course you would focus on that part.”

Silence fell again, but a more comfortable one this time. Keith leant his head back into his pillow and closed his eyes. He concentrated on Lance’s energy again, relaxing his foot into his touch. Lance seemed content, peaceful. It was hard to tell with his own emotions swirling into the mix however. Keith tried harder to distinguish them from each other.

“You’re doing it again.” Lance’s voice was lacking in its previous sharpness though Keith noted.

“Sorry.”
“Are you even making an effort to shut it off?”

“Not really.” Lance paused halfway through massaging the sole of Keith’s foot. Keith had to hold back a noise of disapproval.

“You’re not even trying?!”

“I don’t want to.” Keith’s heart was thudding. What was he saying? Lance was not going to like this idea at all. Lance’s hands were still on his foot, unmoving.

“But why?” Lance looked appalled. Keith stared up at the ceiling. How could he best phrase his plan in the most appealing way possible?

“Because,” he said slowly, “I think it could be useful.”

“In what possible way could knowing each other’s random feelings be useful? Apart from blackmail.” Keith gave him a withering look.

“I meant useful for the team.” Shiro’s words were still bouncing around his mind. “I think we could use this bond to help the team.” Lance stopped looking vaguely disgusted and instead looked intrigued.

“You mean… like a weapon?”

“Exactly.”

“An Ultimate Weapon?”

“Please don’t start that again.”

“I’m serious! Against the Galra?”

“We would use it to fight against them, yes.” Lance looked like he was starting to catch on. His fingers gripped Keith’s ankle tighter.

“Our connection wasn’t affected by their new interference technology —”

“Yeah.”

“So you’re thinking —?”

“I’m thinking that instead of trying to shut it off, we work out how to make it stronger.” Keith tilted his head back up again to look at Lance, feeling both his excitement and apprehension. He was grinning at him wild-eyed.

“We’d be an unstoppable, telepathic duo!”

“I think you’re making this more dramatic than it is,” Keith said, but couldn’t deny his own child-like enthusiasm.

“We’d be like superheroes!”

“Piloting a giant, robot lion in space doesn’t make you feel superhero enough?”

“Being a pilot is one thing, having superpowers is another.” Keith had to admit that he had a point there. “So, what do we do?”
“We train.” Lance groaned.

“Not more of those stupid team bonding exercises!”

“And we’d have to do research.”

“Studying?!”

“How else are we going to find out how to control this thing?”

“Um, by concentrating really, really hard like I did before.”

“That wasn’t controlling or making it more powerful. More like holding your breath for as long as you can.”

“You’re just jealous that you can’t do the same!” Keith exhaled impatiently.

“Look, are you in or not?” Lance groaned again, leaning his face into the pillow pile at Keith’s feet.

“Fine. I’m in. But only because you tempted me with the prospect of superpowers.”

“And we keep this a secret.”

“Why would I want to tell anyone this?”

“Good. So I guess we should try and practice every night.”

“Every night?”

“When everyone is sleeping.”

“Every night?”

“We don’t know when the Galra will next attack! We need to be ready.” Keith hadn’t meant for his anger to flare up and out towards Lance’s open mind, but it had. He felt Lance’s surprise in response.

“You’ve got to get that under control,” Lance muttered, almost to himself. Keith grimaced, but had to grudgingly admit that Lance was right. “Alright, every night then”.

“Alright.” They sat in silence for a while, letting the decision that they had just made sink in. Keith was then pulled out of his thoughts by the soft, absent-minded tapping of Lance’s fingertips against his ankle.

“Um, Lance?”

“What?”

“You can let go of my foot now.”

“Oh! Yeah, right.”

A few minutes after Lance had left the med bay and Keith was about to be on his way out himself,
the door opened again and Hunk stepped through the threshold.

“Hey Keith! How are you holding up? Shiro sent me to check up on you. You feeling any better?” Keith blinked at him in confusion for a few moments, then smiled as realisation dawned on him.

“Yeah. Much better now thanks, Hunk,” he said.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Tumblr link to my artwork for this chapter [here](http://example.com)

Thank you all for the positive response so far!!
“What are they doing?”

“This may sound hard to believe, but I think they’re reading.”

“Reading?”

“Textbooks to be exact.”

“But Lance hates studying.”

“And I don’t remember Keith even turning up to classes when he was at the Garrison, never mind doing the assigned reading.”

“Look Pidge! They’re even taking notes!”

“They’ve got to be up to something. This just isn’t normal. Scoot over so I can get a better look.”

“Lance.”

“Hm?”

“They’re watching us.” Lance looked across the table at Keith who was determinedly avoiding the curious faces of Pidge and Hunk squashed up against the window of the door.

“I told you it was a bad idea to come to the library during the day,” Lance said, groaning and laying his head down on the pile of electronic books in front of him. Keith glowered at him.

“This was your idea, Lance.”

“Ahh nope. I don’t remember that.”

“You said that you’d ‘rather shave off Coran’s moustache in his sleep and face his wrath than sit in a huge, creepy old room full of dead trees after dark’ —”

“Doesn’t sound familiar...”

“— which makes no sense anyway because we’re in space! It’s always dark out! And the books
are all electronic.”

“Hey the Castle does get darker when Coran puts it into low-power mode! Are you also forgetting that the last time we were wandering around the Castle on our own in the dark, you were almost skewered by a robot gladiator and I nearly got ejected into space! That does things to you psychologically.”

“Whatever, it’s too late now anyway. They’ve seen us.” Keith sighed and stood up. “I’ll go and let them in.”

“What?! Why? You’re giving up already? What happened to keeping this thing a secret?”

“I have an idea okay? Just trust me.” Irritated, Lance watched him go.

‘You could at least tell me your grand plan first idiot.’

Feeling petty, Lance pushed and prodded against the weak defences of Keith’s mind. ‘Tell me your plan!’

Unsurprisingly, all he got in response was a mental shove and simmering displeasure. Although he heard no words, Lance somehow knew the thought that had been sent his way: ‘Get out my head and be patient!’ He chuckled as he felt Keith struggle to keep his anger under control with little success.

‘Why does he find it so much harder to control than I do?’

Lance wished he could say that he enjoyed one-upping Keith in something for once, but with the payoff being Keith’s, frankly, exhausting torrent of feelings bombarding him every few minutes, it was definitely something that he would have enjoyed more in theory. His only hope was that the other boy would learn how to better control his projections soon.

‘…and I should probably stop provoking him too…maybe.’ Sometimes the urge to take advantage of their shared link was too great.

Keith returned with Hunk and Pidge at his heels who were demanding answers.

“There’s something you guys aren’t telling us!”

“Yeah, you’ve been acting differently ever since we got back from the battle yesterday. What happened? What are you keeping secret?” Hunk said, sounding hurt. Lance’s stomach twisted with guilt. He’d never kept anything this big from Hunk before. Forcing himself to keep quiet and not blurt out everything to Hunk right then and there, Lance waited for Keith to speak up. ‘You’d best have something believable to say.’

“It’s not a secret,” he said, “just pretty boring.” Lance was impressed at Keith’s ability to appear nonchalant when Lance could clearly feel his anxiousness. “Allura and Coran want to investigate more into how the Galra managed to disable both our comms systems and connections with our lions and see if we can maybe find a way around it. Shiro volunteered us for the job as a way for us to make up for our, err, actions during battle last time.” Even though what he was saying wasn’t true in the slightest, the swirling cocktail of emotions that spun around Keith’s head as he spoke would’ve made Lance think otherwise: shame, regret, a fierce determination —

‘Huh. He really does feel bad about what he did.’ Keith’s insistence on wanting to use their bond to help the team was starting to make a lot more sense. ‘So he wants to make it up to us.’
He wasn’t sure exactly what compelled him to do it, but before he had even consciously made the decision, he let his mind seek out the vivid glow of Keith’s energy and embraced it in what he hoped was a reassuring way. ‘The team doesn’t blame you.’ If Pidge and Hunk had noticed Keith’s sudden jolt in his seat and straightening in his posture, they didn’t mention it.

“Oh…right. Well that explains it I guess,” Hunk said, looking disappointed. Lance had to laugh. Of course Hunk had been hoping for some dramatic reveal.

“Sorry, Hunk. Nothing mysterious or exciting going on here, right Keith?” Keith gave no response, merely stared down at the table, face slightly flushed. ‘What’s with him?’

“Speak for yourself!” said Pidge. She was practically vibrating with excitement. “I’ve been wanting to research into this myself ever since Shiro told us what happened. Interfering with our comms is probably child’s play to the Galra, but the bonds between us and our lions? That’s on a whole other level! They have to know something we don’t about the bond if they can exploit it like that. Which is terrifying, but also fascinating. And if we can find out how they do it —”

“Pidge, Hunk, are you guys saying that you want to help us study?” Keith finally spoke again, eyes still boring a hole into the table.

“Ye—“

“No!” Hunk interrupted with a shout, grabbing Pidge’s arm and backing up towards the exit. “Pidge and I have some very important work to do already —”

“We do… ?”

“Important engineering things. I would explain more, but —” Hunk dragged Pidge out the door before he could even finish his own sentence. Lance snorted.

“Good thing we can always count on Hunk to hate studying as much as us.”

“What was that all about?!”

Lance balked as Keith rounded on him, looking flustered.

“Err, what?”

“When you… reached out. What you sent me I… it was…” He looked mad. Lance retreated back into his mind and shut the figurative doors. He didn’t dare try to take a glimpse at the fury that he was sure was now running rampant through Keith’s head.

“It was weird, okay I get it. Sorry I won’t do it again. Just calm down, alright?” He watched nervously as Keith took a deep breath and exhaled, his face still very red.

“Look,” Lance continued, “you don’t have to feel this bad you know? Stop blaming yourself so much for what happened with the Galra. You did what you thought you had to do.” Keith appeared to have collected himself now. Lance cautiously let his mind open up again.

“But it was wrong and I left the team vulnerable to attack.”

“You did it to try and protect us though right?” Keith met his eyes with a ferocious honesty.

“Everything I do, I do for team Voltron,” he said, and Lance was nearly overwhelmed with the intensity of Keith’s words coupled with the unbridled feelings of affection and loyalty that he
projected towards him. “But I still made the wrong call.”

“From what Shiro told us about how you got captured, it wasn’t your fault. It was their plan all along to lure you in.”

“And I fell for it!”

“Yeah that was dumb, but that’s expected of you by now.” Lance couldn’t resist the light-hearted jibe. Keith gave him a disdainful look, but Lance felt his mood brighten. “And any one of us could have fallen for it too if we’d noticed what you had.” Keith opened his mouth and closed it again, falling silent. Even his mind seemed to have stilled for once.

“Well,” Lance said, changing the subject before the silence started to feel awkward, “that was actually a pretty good cover story!”

“Thanks.”

“So what’s the plan if Hunk and Pidge question Shiro, Coran, or Allura about it?”

“I didn’t get that far.” Lance brought a hand to his face in exasperation.

“Urgh, I guess we’ll worry about that later.” Lance made a show of yawning and stretching. “Anyway, I’ve had my fill of studying for today —” Keith raised an eyebrow at him.

“We’ve been here for twenty minutes.”

“— so we should try out some training exercises instead. Do you have any ideas?”

“I have a few.”

“Alright, meet me at my room later tonight then and we’ll try them out.”

“After dark?” Lance scowled at the mocking tone in Keith’s voice.

“It’s fine when I’m in my own room! Anyway, meet tonight, yes or no?”

“Yeah sure.”

“Awesome! Catch you later then. I think all that studying deserves a two hour nap at least.”

“See you later, Lance.”

Despite the display of weariness in his voice, Lance heard Keith laughing quietly behind him as he left the room. When he was outside the door, he took a chance and let his mind reach out and lightly brush the edges of Keith’s, soft enough that he hoped the other boy wouldn’t feel it. It was warm, happy and full of light.

Keith clutched his tablet so tightly, it felt as though the screen would crack under his fingertips. He forced himself to relax his grip. ‘He’s not going to like any of these training ideas at all.’ He re-read his library notes again for what must have been the tenth time since he had started his slow walk towards Lance’s room. They sounded worse on every re-read. He resisted the temptation to launch the tablet down the corridor.
No matter how slowly he walked, he eventually found himself outside of Lance’s room. He took a deep breath and braced himself for Lance’s sure to be less-than-favourable reaction towards his training plans. On instinct, he opened his mind and began to seek out the familiar energy belonging to Lance. Keith had received random bursts of emotions from him as he had started to get within range of his room. Bizarre flurries of completely unconnected emotions followed by long periods of quiet, sometimes with a muffled, background thrum of energy, glowing steadily with no distinct emotion present. It was nothing like he’d ever felt from Lance before. Now that he was outside his door, the same quiet background energy was there again. *What is he —?*

A loud snore from behind Lance’s door then broke his concentration. Oh. That explained a few things. Keith tapped his fingers on the door impatiently. It was locked electronically from the inside.

*‘How am I meant to get in when you’re asleep, idiot?’*

He knocked quietly. No response. Keith frowned. He couldn’t risk knocking any louder at the risk of waking Pidge, notoriously nocturnal on most nights and a light sleeper whenever she actually did sleep, whose room was only a few doors down. Keith doubted they could get away with anymore close calls like the library incident again. He grimaced. *‘I guess I have no choice.’* He opened his mind up to its fullest extent and concentrated on mustering all of his frustration into a single, very loud thought. Lance was going to kill him for this. He found the edges of Lance’s mind again and unleashed a torrent against it, shouting the thought in his mind as loudly as he could.

*‘WAKE UP LANCE!’*

Almost instantly, he heard a yell from the other side of the door and a loud thump that sounded suspiciously like Lance had fallen out of bed. Muffled groans and cursing followed before the electronic beep of the door’s keypad sounded. The door opened to reveal a dishevelled Lance, eye mask askew and muttering darkly. Keith gave him a smug grin.

*“Having sweet dreams?”* Lance glared at him, an effect somewhat ruined by his fluffy, blue lion slippers.

*“Screaming your emotions into someone else’s dream is just plain rude!”* Lance said in a stage whisper.

*“Keep your voice down.”*

*“I’m whispering!”*

*“Loudly!”*

*“So are you!”*

*“Just let me in, Lance!”* Lance sighed dramatically, but stepped aside to let him past and proceeded to flop back down onto his bed.

*“So,”* he said between yawns, *“let’s hear your ideas then.”* Keith stood in the middle of the room, awkwardly holding his tablet to his chest.

*“Did you not get any ideas yourself from the books we read?”* Keith knew it was no use stalling, but anything that would give him more time to get a grip on himself was something he was willing to do.

*“Well, I sort of had an idea. Half an idea. Then I got bored and drew this instead.”* He held up his
own tablet to show Keith an admittedly good drawing of Blue shooting down a horde of Galra drones with her lasers. He wanted to shove the offending art into Lance’s infuriating, grinning face.

“Lance, are you even taking this seriously?”

“I am! It’s just hard for me to focus on something so boring as reading dry, old books translated into bad English okay? And I did have an idea! I just didn’t have time to write it down before Pidge and Hunk found us.”

“Then why did you leave?” Keith could feel his temper rising faster by the second. He fought hard to quash it. Staying calm was vital for what he had to say next. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter. We’ll make do with mine.” He felt Lance’s mind hum in curiosity, “From what I’ve read so far, it seems like this kind of bond gets stronger the closer we are.”

“Well that’s obvious. It gets weaker when we’re further apart.”

“I’m pretty sure the book meant closer emotionally.”

“… are you sure that wasn’t just a bad translation?” He shot Lance a contemptuous look.

“It makes sense that we would have to form a strong bond as teammates for it to work, Lance.”

“Urgh, I guess.” Lance sat up on his bed. “I just don’t want it to mean that we have to become ‘super best friends’ or something overnight. No offence.” Lance was stubbornly avoiding his gaze and trying to appear casual, but Keith could feel his embarrassment growing.

“None taken.” He watched Lance with amusement as he struggled to get his next words out.

“But… it’s not like I actually hate you or anything you know?”

“I know.”

“What do you mean ‘you know’?”

“Well, Voltron wouldn’t exactly work if any of us really hated each other right?”

“… right.”

“I mean, we’re teammates. Maybe we’re not all best friends or whatever, but —”

“I consider you a friend,” Lance said suddenly, looking horrified at his own outburst. Keith laughed as he felt Lance’s mind dart around wildly, unable to decide on feeling ‘alarmed’ or ‘mortified’ before settling on ‘defensive’.

“Don’t get me wrong! I still think you’re the most annoying teammate that I’ve ever had the displeasure of being in a team with. And stop laughing!”

“Don’t worry the feeling’s mutual,” Keith said, deciding to put him out his misery. Lance looked at him with surprise. A faint flicker of what felt like hope passed so swiftly from Lance’s mind to his Keith almost missed it.

“The annoying bit or the friend bit?”

“Both.”

“Ah. Okay. Cool.”
It should have been awkward, Keith thought as he sat down on the floor and leant back against the foot of Lance’s bed, but instead both of them seemed to feel content to let their minds unfurl around them, mingling with each other, letting them feel. Trepidation lingered amongst the warm blue of Lance’s energy Keith noticed, but it barely registered against the happiness he felt there that matched his own.

“Is this part of our training exercise?” Lance said quietly.

“It could be,” Keith closed his eyes and reached out further towards him. Maybe if they could just —

“Keith!”

‘Ah.’ He’d pushed it too far again.

“Get out of my head!” Keith opened his eyes and turned sharply to look at him.

“We’ve got to get used to being more open with each other.”

“That still doesn’t mean that I want you barging into my damn head all the time!”

“We were just sharing a moment!”

“Yeah, exactly! *Sharing.* Not just pushing our way into each other’s heads without permission!”

“I’m fine with that.”

“Oh huh. Sure. Just like you were today in the library you mean?”

“That was different!” Keith felt his face burning, “Pidge and Hunk were there too and it was… ”

“It was *what*?”

Lance was glaring at him. Keith glared back. Why did Lance have to bring that up again? Keith had been trying his best to forget about it. He turned away from him, willing the heat to die down in his face.

“Forget it.” Keith picked up his tablet that he’d abandoned on the ground beside him. He doubted that going back to his ‘bonding ideas’ list was going to help the now tense situation at all, but it was better than letting this moment get any more sour than it already had. “Even though the basis of our link is emotional, other aspects can affect the strength of our bond too.” He held his breath as he felt Lance’s anger begin to ebb away slightly.

“Such as?” Lance said, his response terse, but that was better than nothing Keith reasoned.

“Physical touching.” There was no point beating about the bush anymore.

“What?!”

“Bringing our energies into close proximity and focusing hard on our bond can help strengthen it over time,” Keith said, rushing to get the words out. “Both temporarily and permanently.”

“What exactly are you suggesting?!!”

“Touching foreheads, holding hands when meditating —”
“Okay, we’ve gone from ‘I don’t actually hate you’ to ‘hold hands with me’ in the space of a minute and that’s way too fast even for me. It’s giving me whiplash!”

“Let’s just try it.”

“Keith!”

“It’s not a big deal!” Ignoring everything about Lance’s posture and mind that was screaming ‘No, no, no!’ , Keith turned in his direction and thrust his hand towards him.

“Take it.”

“I am not holding your hand!”

“Just take my damn hand Lance! It’s not like you haven’t before!”

“That was an extreme situation when we both almost got killed by Sendak!”

“So now you admit that bonding moment happened?”

“I never said that!”

“Just… hold my hand.”

No answer. Keith sighed wearily and turned back around, slouching against the side of the bed and letting his hand fall limp beside him.

“… fine.”

Keith jumped as his hand was suddenly pulled up and clasped firmly in Lance’s own. He whipped around to see Lance staring at him, red in the face, but mouth set in a determined scowl.

“So what now?” Lance said, his voice stiff.

“We focus completely on our bond and each other.” Keith swallowed and tried to ignore the pulse of Lance’s heartbeat that he could feel through his wrist and the nervousness rippling off both of their minds in intense waves. “Similar to how we feel when we form Voltron.”

“Right…”

They fell silent. Keith tried to concentrate on his breathing. He felt Lance’s palm grow clammy around him own. Letting his mind open, he felt for Lance’s energy. Hesitant at first, Lance returned his touch. Keith inhaled sharply and clutched Lance’s hand tighter as a powerful surge of energy sparked between them. Something felt different this time. As though they were crackling with a static charge of electricity. Maybe this was —

Keith’s eyes snapped open as Lance dropped his hand like he’d been burned and stood up off the bed.

“Well that didn’t work! Shall we try something else?”

“What are you talking about?!” Keith scrambled to his feet. “That was completely different to anything that’s happened before!”

“Didn’t feel much different to me.” He was turned away from Keith, arms crossed and mind firmly closed. It was infuriating.
“Stop lying!”

“I’m not!” Lance was red-faced once more, but from anger or embarrassment Keith couldn’t tell. “It didn’t work, Keith. Your idea was bad okay? Face it.”

“Where are your great ideas then genius?” Keith spat at him. He couldn’t help but feel hurt even amidst the rage that currently boiled away inside him. Why did he think this was ever going to work? Something in Lance’s expression faltered, but he said nothing.

“Thought so,” Keith said, unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice. “It was a waste of time coming here.” He turned to leave. “Let’s just forget about all this. See you tomorrow I guess.” But before he could take a step closer towards the door, Lance’s hand shot out and grabbed his arm.

“I do have half an idea remember?” Lance said softly, not looking at him. The rest of his mind was still a fortress, but Keith felt a quiet note of apology from Lance reach the edges of his own. Keith sighed, his mouth twitching into a small smile despite himself.

“What is it then?” He had a feeling he was going to regret asking.

“Bear in mind that it’s only half an idea —”

“Lance —”

“So before you judge —”

“Just tell me what it is.” Keith narrowed his eyes at Lance as he looked down to where his hand was still gripping Keith’s arm.

“Give me your jacket,” he said. Keith stared at him.

“… what?”

“Take off your jacket and give it to me.” Blushing furiously, Keith wrenched his arm out of Lance’s grasp.

“No! Why should I?! You have your own!”

“That’s not why I want it idiot! Just let me show you.”

“Whatever this idea is —”

“Half idea!”

“— it’s obviously stupid.”

“Hey I did your stupid idea! It’s only fair you try out mine.” Then before Keith had a chance to react, Lance had tackled him to the floor and wrestled the jacket off him.

“Get off me!” It was no use. Lance stood up with a grin, thrusting Keith’s jacket into the air with a triumphant flourish.

“Ha! I win!”

“Congratulations,” Keith said sarcastically. “Now can I have it back so I can go back to my room before this gets any more —”
Lance put on Keith’s jacket.

“— ridiculous.” Lance smirked down at him.

“Well? What do you think?”

“What are you *doing*?”

“Wearing your jacket.”

“I can see that moron! But why?! What does this accomplish apart from making you look stupid?”

“Hey!” Lance said indignantly, jumping back as Keith got up from the floor and advanced towards him.

“Give it back!”

“No!”

“Give. It. Back.”

“Just hear me out first!” Keith stilled with his hands clasped around the collar of his stolen jacket. His rage smouldered against the hopeful pleas that he could feel emanating from Lance’s mind.

“Fine,” he said after a few moments of consideration. He relaxed his hold on Lance but didn’t let go completely. “Let’s hear it.” Lance bit his lip.

“I figured,” Lance said eyeing Keith warily, “as the books all said that we’d ‘need the ability to see things from the other person’s point of view in order for a strong bond to form’, that we could try, you know, becoming more in sync by acting and dressing like each other.” Keith gave him a deadpan stare as he watched a blush slowly creep up Lance’s face.

“So… playing dress up?”

“I told you that it was only half an idea okay?!” Lance squawked. As he babbled on, Keith weighed up his options before coming to a decision. It was a ludicrous idea, but what did he have to lose?

“Okay,” he said, feeling smug at the complete disbelief he subsequently induced in Lance’s already reeling mind.

“Wait, what?” Lance blinked at him in shock.

Keith let go of the collar and roughly pushed Lance away as he continued to gawk at him. He walked over to the chest of clothes in Lance’s room and began to rummage around inside.

“What are you doing? Stop that!”

“Finding your jacket.”

“You have no boundaries!” Keith scoffed at the blatant hypocrisy.

“I think you’ve missed the point of these training exercises.”

Keith shrugged on Lance’s jacket, ignoring Lance’s continued protests. It was a bit big on the shoulders and the sleeves slightly too long, but it was comfortable. He could see why Lance wore it
all the time. Lance stopped talking abruptly, an odd expression on his face. Keith looked back at him, reaching out to Lance in question. Lance’s mind was closed off again, so he spoke aloud instead.

“What?”

“You look... ” Lance spoke with apparent difficulty. “That doesn’t fit you. You look ridiculous.” Keith rolled his eyes.

“And you don’t? My jacket doesn’t fit you either and you’re wearing it with your pajamas!”

“I was dressed appropriately for the time of day unlike some people!”

“This was a terrible idea.”

“Says the guy who wanted to hold hands!”

“That would have worked if you’d actually held it for more than a second!”

“Whatever! Why do you want to hold my hand so much, Keith?”

“Shut up!”

“What are you guys shouting about?”

Both boys froze and whirled around at the sound of Pidge’s voice coming from the now open door. She looked between them both, bleary-eyed. Keith fumed. Lance hadn’t locked the door! He broadcasted his fury in piercing daggers towards Lance, feeling a grim satisfaction when he saw him quail in response.

“Why are you… ?” Pidge was taking in their attire with confusion. Keith started to panic.

“We were just —”

“Keith stole my jacket so I stole his!” Lance blurted out before Keith could finish. He felt his face grow hot as Pidge looked at him, raising her eyebrows. He turned towards Lance with a venomous expression.

“I what?” he said heatedly.

“Err... ”

“That’s not true!”

“Whatever, weirdos.” Seemingly bored already at their antics, Pidge left the room. Lance tore off Keith’s jacket and flung it to the ground, eyeing it like it was poisonous snake. Keith stood seething next to him.

“So... ” Lance said after a few ticks of deafening silence, his voice shaky. “I think we managed to throw her off, yeah?” Keith looked at him stony-faced. “Okay fine. Next time we’ll stick with your ideas.”

“Smartest thing you’ve said today.” Suddenly exhausted, Keith sat back down on the floor. Lance joined him.

“Although...”
“Yeah?”

“Maybe, we could also try sitting in each other’s lions.”

“What?”

“You know? Trying to get inside each other’s heads? Seeing things from each other’s perspective?”

“I don’t think we’d be able to pilot each other’s lions.”

“Not pilot them, just sitting. In the cockpit.”

“… your ideas are all terrible, Lance.”

Keith could only hope that Lance was too distracted in his outrage to notice the fond smile he now had on his face. He played idly with the sleeves of Lance’s jacket as Lance ranted at him in the background. He’d forgotten that he still had it on. Keith pulled the jacket closer around himself.

Maybe he’d keep it on just a little longer.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Thank you for all the support and lovely comments so far! <3

Tumblr link to my artwork for this chapter here

ETA: Check out this adorable fanart that tumblr user maraluzy did for this chapter!!
Lance’s idea of sitting and meditating in each other’s lions was actually starting to look like a smart and appealing idea to Keith at this point. Anything to escape the incessant chatter from the boy in question beside him.

“Keith. Hey, Keith —”

In the past couple of days, they had almost exhausted Keith’s (admittedly sparse) ‘bonding ideas’ list, and frustrations were running high. Keith’s in particular —

“Keith! Keith, listen —”

Though physical contact was obviously the key to unlocking their bond’s potential, Lance had refused to try out that particular idea again despite Keith’s insistence. Hand holding was apparently “never happening again” and touching foreheads was “way too weird”. The most Keith had managed to convince Lance to do since the failed hand holding incident, was have their shoulders touching slightly as they attempted to meditate and focus on their bond. But that hadn’t even lasted a few minutes before Lance had grown agitated and moved away —

“Keith.”

So now they were back to square one. Studying. And though they had now taken to bringing their study materials into Lance’s room instead of the library (to avoid the watchful eyes of Pidge and Hunk) Keith was finding it much harder to concentrate on reading than before —

“Keith.”

“What?!?” he finally snapped at Lance.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Keith gritted his teeth. Lance was grinning at him unperturbed, hand hidden behind his back and mind dancing with glee.

“We are not doing this.”

“Nope! Wrong answer.”

“Shut up, Lance.”

“Wrong again! Wow you’re terrible at this.”

“Four! You’re holding up four damn fingers behind your back. Happy now?”

“… you’re not even trying to use our mind-melding superpower are you?”
“It’s not a superpower if we’ve barely made any progress in strengthening it since we got it. And why would I try something that clearly didn’t work the first thousand times we tried it in the past hour?”

“Because you weren’t trying hard enough those other times.”

“I was trying up until the point it was obvious that it wasn’t working.” Keith wished he’d never added ‘mind-melding/telepathic bond/whatever guessing games’ to his ideas list. “It was the worst idea I had, which is why it was at the bottom of the list.”

“This idea is by far your best idea.”

“Definitely my worst one then.”

“Better than all your touchy-feely ideas.”

“How would you know that when you were too scared to try them?”

“I am not scared!”

“Then prove it,” Keith sniped back at him, hoping every prickly wave of irritation he was sending Lance’s way was hitting its target. Satisfied at Lance’s lack of verbal response and his mind recoiling like a receding tide from the edges of Keith’s own, Keith turned back to his reading.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Keith slammed his book down on the floor.

“How many times are we going to do this before you get tired of it?!”

“As many times as it takes for you to start actually trying!”

“Lance –”

“If you try this again, I’ll try another one of your touchy-feelies.”

“Don’t call them that.”

“Deal?” Keith narrowed his eyes at him, but Lance’s face remained serious and his mind was projecting the unguarded sincerity that Keith, not for the first time, felt unable to say no to.

“Fine, deal,” he said, turning away stubbornly from the bright smile that broke across Lance’s face in response. There was no turning away from Lance’s freely flowing emotions however as he was engulfed by a blue energy so warm it was almost suffocating. ‘Why is he so happy?’

Lance’s emotions had been confusing him much more than usual lately. He appeared to have almost perfect control now over what exactly could pass to and from his own mind (a skill Keith was becoming rapidly envious of) and only seemed to struggle when he was tired or under stress. He had no trouble keeping Keith out when he wanted to. Only when Keith had a particularly powerful burst of emotion (usually anger or upset much to Keith’s dismay) did the iron gates of Lance’s mind waver. So Keith had to wonder what had changed for Lance to become so open now about the emotions, of which previously, he would rather have died than share with Keith of all people.

‘Maybe he did take me seriously about the whole “getting closer emotionally” thing?’

A strange feeling of happiness tinged with internalised disappointment overcame him. ‘I’m letting us down. He’s right. I do need to try harder.’ The disappointment set in stronger, marring the
attempts of their mutual happiness to mingle. He tried to push it down.

“Awesome!” Lance said. His expression then faltered slightly as Keith looked up at him, his eyebrows furrowed in what looked like concern. He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again as though thinking better of it. His mind gave nothing away. Keith tried not to think about how Lance would’ve almost certainly sensed what he’d just felt.

“Go on then,” Keith said, voice stiff. “Ask me.” He inhaled slowly, ‘Breathe in, breathe out…’ counting each breath as he did so and reeling back in his writhing, untamed thoughts one by one.

“R-right.”

Lance cleared his throat and hid a hand behind his back. The smile had returned to his face, though not as bright as before. “So, how many fingers am I holding up?” He brought the index and middle fingers of his other hand to his temple and squinted at Keith. “Okay, concentrate… I am beaming the thought to you… now!” Keith gave a loud snort of laughter, writhing emotions of negativity forgotten.

“You’re ridiculous,” he managed to force out between laughs. But he couldn’t help it. Lance was grinning broadly again. Keith found himself mirroring the ridiculous pose back at him. Lance’s joy was infectious, infusing his mind so strongly it made him giddy.

“Are you concentrating?”

“Yes,” Keith’s face was starting to hurt from smiling. He closed his eyes and let his mind drift. It bumped up against the edges of Lance’s before being drawn in with a gentle tug.

“What number am I thinking of?” Lance’s voice echoed strangely around him, muffled but somehow feeling closer than it did before, as though he was speaking soft and low in his ear. Keith took a deep breath and sunk further in. He was bathed in a comforting blue light again.

“What number?” The energy thrummed around him. He wasn’t sure if it was his imagination or not, but he could sense the energy changing — a minute shift in intensity and colour. A glimmer of gold.

“Three,” Keith said, his mouth moving before the word had even solidified in his head.

“Wait, say that again?” Lance’s voice had lost its dream-like quality. Keith resurfaced with a start.

“Three?” he responded, unsure. Had he even spoken? Keith couldn’t remember.

“Hey! You got it!”

“I guess?” Lance’s eyes were shining. ‘But I don’t know how I got it.’

“So, was it a coincidence, or did you actually sense it.”

“I sensed it… I think?”

“You think?”

“It’s hard to explain,” Keith began. Even if he could explain it, the memory of what he had seen was a gossamer thread slipping through his fingers. “Your energy changed. It felt, no… looked different. Really bright. Sort of yellow.” It sounded stupid when he said it out loud, "and it felt
familiar. The same feeling I got when you thought of that number last time we tried this.” He steeled himself up for a mocking from Lance that never came. Instead, Lance looked thoughtful.

“Well that makes sense.” If Keith hadn’t already been sitting on the floor, he was sure he would’ve fallen over in surprise. “Because the number three is yellow.” Keith blinked at him.

“Um… what?”

“You know?” Lance spoke in a deliberate, slow manner as though what he was saying was the most obvious thing in the world. “Numbers have colours right? Four is green, two is blue…”

“No?” Lance frowned.

“Numbers don’t have colours for you?”

“Why would they?” Keith’s question was born out of genuine confusion as opposed to scorn, but Lance was on the defence regardless.

“I don’t know! They just do for me okay?! I thought that was normal.” He was very red in the face now. Keith bit his lip as amusement began to set in. And the look on Lance’s face was actually making him feel sorry for him. ‘I guess ‘not mocking’ counts as being closer emotionally?’ The silence had stretched on far too long and was approaching ‘uncomfortable’ territories. ‘I should say something, but not make fun of him. Okay…’

“So, what number is red then?” Keith said, coughing loudly to cover up the slight shakiness in his voice from his suppressed laughter. Lance was eyeing him with suspicion.

“One,” he answered finally, still flushed, but face defiant.

“One?”

Lance nodded.

“One is red?” Keith repeated, unable to keep the disbelief out of his voice. ‘Is he serious?’

“Yeah.”

“And two is blue?” It was no use. Keith could feel his resolve cracking. ‘Don’t mock, don’t mock, don’t-’

“Yes.”

“Hmm… so because you’re the blue paladin —”

“What are you…?”

“— and I’m the red paladin —” Realisation began to dawn on Lance’s face.

“Don’t say it!”

“— does that mean you’re number two and I’m number one?” Lance groaned, hands clutching the roots of his hair in frustration.

“No! That’s not what it means!” Keith could feel Lance trying and failing to put up the barriers of his mind and revelled in the fact that it wasn’t him struggling to keep a lock on his emotions for once. His embarrassment was palpable, even without the bond and Keith for some reason found
that he enjoyed the rapid blush spreading across Lance’s face far too much to hold back a final, taunting remark.

“Am I your number one, Lance?”

“Shut up!” Lance buried his face in his hands. The laughter that he’d been suppressing caught sharply in Keith’s throat as he was hit with an unexpected surge of mixed emotions: dismay, humiliation, fear —

“H-hey, Lance, come on,” Keith said, this distinctly un-Lance-like reaction was freaking him out. “It’s fine if you think—if numbers have colours for you. It’s weird, and probably not normal, but it’s fine. I didn’t—”

‘Didn’t realise you’d get this upset about it.’

Lance froze and peered at him through his fingers with something akin to incredulity in his eyes.

“Err…”

Keith had a feeling he’d missed something. Lance’s mind was withdrawing again fast. When he reached out to grasp it, Keith only caught the tail end of a feeling: confusion with a hint of relief. No trace of embarrassment left to be found.

“What?” Lance said at last, voice quiet.

“Colours are… fine?” Keith said, unsure now as to what they were even talking about anymore. Lance dropped his hands slowly from his face.

“Right.”

“Yeah, so nothing to be upset about.”

“I wasn’t upset about— I wasn’t upset!”

“Alright.”

“Good.”

“Because I was just messing around you know? Like we usually do?”

“I got that.”

“So…”

“So.”

“… you were right.”

“What now?”

“This idea. It did work. You were right,” Keith gave him a small smile. “It wasn’t a bad idea after all.” Lance smiled back and much to Keith’s relief, looked like his usual self again.

“Yeah! See? I told you!”

“Shall we try it again then?” Lance brought his fingers back up to his temple and Keith couldn’t
“Keep a straight face.
“Let’s do this!”

“Keith.”
“What?”
“This is creepy. Like you’re reading my mind. Are you reading my mind?”
“No, Lance…”
“Do you think you could? If you tried hard enough?”
“I don’t think I want to.”
“Haha, seriously though. Could we, you know, eventually hear each other’s actual thoughts? Like, word-for-word?”
“I don’t know… Maybe?”
“I don’t think I’d like that.”
“Me neither.”
“…”
“…”
“What am I thinking?”
“What do you mean? Another number?”
“No, I’m thinking of a person.”
“Okay…”
“…”
“…”
“Did you get it?”
“… Hunk?”
“Yeah that’s right.”
“So Hunk is yellow?”
“Is that weird?”
“No. That one actually makes sense.”
“Alright, smart guy. Who am I thinking of now?”
“…”
“…”

“… Someone who likes neon green a lot.”

“Ha! Knew you wouldn’t get that one.”

“Who was it then?”

“Coran.”

“…”

“…”

“He should be orange.”

“No way! That’s Pidge.”

“Pidge is green like her lion.”

“Pidge is an orange-green.”

“You can’t change it!”

“It’s my brain I can do what I want!”

“What colour am I?”

“…”

“…”

“What?”

“What colour am I to you?”

“…”

“Lance?”

“Stop staring at me like that!”

“Like what?”

“Like that!”

“I’m not doing anything!”

“…”

“Hey, Lance?”

“…”

“Lance.”
“…”

“Can you stop shutting your mind off like that?”

“Why should I?”

“…”

“…”

“Think of me.”

“What?!”

“I want to see what colour I am.”

“You can’t just say weird things like that!”

“You’re the one with the weird colour-thing!”

“What happened to it being ‘fine’?”

“It’s still weird and that’s fine. Doesn’t stop it being weird.”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“Where are you going?”

“Leaving. It’s probably time for dinner. So stop lying around on my bedroom floor.”

“But we only just had lunch.”

“Get up or I will step on your mullet!”

“I will get up when you tell me what colour I am.”

“Fine. Stay there. I’ll lock you in my room.”

“Fine by me. I’ll just take a nap in your bed.”

“What?!”

“Looks comfy.”

“Get off my bed!”

Lance looked up at the knock on his door. He placed his tablet down quietly and tip-toed towards the door, unlocking it with a light touch on the keypad.

“Shiro?”
“Hey La—”

“Shh!” Shiro looked at him in confusion. Lance jerked his head over towards his bed. Shiro’s eyes widened.

“Why is Keith sleeping in your bed?” He said, lowering his voice. Lance felt himself flush.

“On not in! There’s a difference.” Shiro raised his eyebrows at him.

“If you say so.”

“We were studying!” Lance waved his hands frantically towards the pile of electronic books scattered all over the floor. “See? Then he got tired and refused to get off my bed okay? Nothing weird!”

“I see. Why didn’t you wake him?”

“I didn’t want to.” Shiro was looking at him funny again. “Dude sleeps with a knife under his pillow, Shiro! I’m not messing with that.” Shiro chuckled.

“Fair enough.”

It was half true, Lance thought. The knife under the pillow was terrifying. But in truth Keith looked so peaceful when he was asleep that he didn’t have the heart to rouse him. After giving up on wrestling Keith off his bed some time ago, Lance had just decided to leave him there, stubborn in his refusal to leave Lance’s room. He’d then fallen asleep less than a minute later. Lance’s first thought of course had been to kick him the hell off the bed and throw him out the door, but then he had felt the pleasant warmth of Keith’s dormant mind brush up against his own. It hummed and glowed – soft orange, pinks and reds. Lance had let it wash over and surround him like a melodic background tune as he read the previously abandoned textbooks on his bedroom floor. Keith’s sleeping mind was so calm – such a contrast to his wild, waking mind. He let his mind reach out towards it again, feeling their energies intertwine.

“What were your studying?” Shiro spoke again, sounding curious but with an unmistakable note of doubt in his voice. Lance reluctantly relinquished his hold on Keith’s energy.

“Just…stuff,” he glanced back at Keith. ‘Why did you have to fall asleep now you idiot?!’ How was he meant to come up with a plausible story by himself? “Why are you here anyway?” he directed at Shiro. Stalling was more his forte. Shiro frowned at him. Okay, stalling was more his forte with people other than Shiro.

“I was coming to tell you that Coran has dinner prepared now and also that I wanted to talk with you after we were all done eating.”

“Talk?”

“About what happened the day Keith got captured.”

‘Oh, quiznak!’ Lance thought he’d gotten away with that. Of course Shiro had only been biding his time.

“Err, sure. No problem. Though I already told everyone what happened before, so I don’t know what more I can really tell you haha.” he could almost hear Keith’s voice in his head mocking him as though he was awake: ‘Smooth, Lance. Real smooth.’
“I don’t think you told us the whole story.” Lance could feel sweat beading on his brow. Shiro didn’t pull his punches. “I want you to know that whatever it is that you felt uncomfortable discussing in front of the whole team, you can talk to me about it first okay?”

“Okay,” Lance croaked. What the heck was he going to say to him? He looked towards Keith again. ‘Now would be the perfect time for you to wake the hell up and work out how to beam ideas directly into my brain stat!’

“Good.” Shiro gave him a kind smile and once again Lance was overcome with the urge to spill everything. “Now, what ‘stuff’ exactly are you two studying?” Lance held back a groan. Shiro had him completely cornered.

‘Keith, can’t we just tell him? And the others? Maybe they can help?’

He sent the thought uselessly towards Keith’s sleeping form. Keith merely shifted a bit in his sleep, his ridiculous mullet falling into his face and concealing it from view. Lance sighed in defeat. ‘Lying it is.’

“We’re researching into strategies that might help us counteract the Galra’s way of interfering with our comms systems,” he said. “It was Keith’s idea.” It was only a white lie, but he felt unable to look Shiro in the eyes nonetheless.

“Oh,” Shiro looked pleasantly surprised and glanced fondly over at Keith. “I see.”

“Y-yeah,” Lance wasn’t sure why, but he had the sudden compulsion to shut the door in Shiro’s face. “I think he feels bad about what happened.” Lance mentally slapped himself. Keith probably wouldn’t have wanted him to tell Shiro that. ‘Stupid!’

“Right.” Shiro turned his warm expression towards him this time and Lance immediately felt bad about his previous compulsive thought. “So, are you guys coming?”

“Yeah, I’ll go rouse the mullet and meet you there.” Shiro nodded and turned to leave. “But if I end up with a knife sticking out of my chest I’m blaming you.”

———

Keith squinted down at the hastily scrawled note that he’d found stuck precariously onto his forehead, which he could only assume had been put there by Lance. He winced and rubbed at the sore spot near his scalp where a few hairs had also been pulled free on removal of the sticky note. He’d get Lance back for that later. He began to read:

‘Gone to dinner with the others. You owe me for letting you sleep in on my bed. I also did some reading when you were getting your beauty sleep (no amount of sleep will help that mullet by the way) and got a few more ideas for us. See you later.

p.s. You’re locked in’

“What?!”

Keith bolted upright and ran to the door then glared at the second sticky note he found there.

‘Just kidding idiot.’

He growled and tore up the offending note as he let himself out.
Not feeling remotely hungry, Keith made his way to the Castle common room instead. Lance’s weird colour-thing had given him loads to think about. ‘It could really help us find out more about how this bond works.’ He opened the door to the common room to find Allura, a serene smile on her face and looking worlds away. She didn’t notice him at first, content with observing the antics of her mice playing and scampering around on the floor. Not wanted to disturb her train of thought, Keith quietly took a seat on her far right. The mice had taken note of his arrival however and were at his feet before he’d even turned on his tablet. Allura turned to look at him, laughing as the smallest mouse made for Keith’s hair and nestled in happily, a new habit it had taken to lately. Keith sighed.

“Hey Allura.” She smiled at him.

“Hi Keith. Why aren’t you at dinner with the others?”

“Not hungry.” He petted the mouse on his shoulder and tried to disentangle it from his hair. “How about you? Sorry if I disturbed you.”

“Allura,” Keith thought. He looked at Allura with amusement as he struggled with the mouse, before taking pity on him and coming over to help. “I was just about to leave anyway.” Her fingers moved with a gentle touch through his hair, taking care not to snag at the ends as she pulled the tiny creature away. Keith wondered offhandedly how Lance would react if he told him Allura had run her hands through his hair. Murder him in his sleep probably. He chuckled softly to himself and Allura looked at him with interest. He gave an awkward cough.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” he said as he pushed thoughts of Lance aside, “what were you thinking about?”

“Allura,” Keith thought. “I was thinking about you actually.” Keith choked.

“Um, what?” Lance was definitely going to murder him. She giggled at the expression of dread that must have crossed his face.

“Not just you. You and your fellow paladins.”

“Oh.” Keith felt a little better.

“But Lance in particular.”

“… oh.” Keith wasn’t sure how he felt about that at all. “What about him?”

“I spoke to him briefly during our last battle, whilst you were still captured,” she said, looking thoughtful again. “About the importance of his bond with his lion and how it was the key to something much greater.” Keith’s heart leapt in his chest as he remembered then the look that she’d had on her face that night after the battle. ‘I was right. She does know something. But how much?’ His mind raced to find a solution to a problem that he wasn’t even sure existed yet.

“So what exactly—”

A thundering boom then reverberated through them, shaking the words right out of his mouth. Allura was on her feet in an instant, her wistful look replaced with a familiar, battle-hardened determination.

“Keith! Get to your lion!”
Keith could feel the intensity of Lance’s terror before he’d even rounded the corridor to Lance’s room. He shuddered as a burst of energy that felt like a desperate plea flooded through him. He heard no words, but somehow knew Lance was calling out to him. On impulse, he sent back a wave of reassurance. ‘Don’t panic. We’ve got this.’ He then saw Lance hurtle out of his room from the opposite end of the corridor and scramble towards him, pulling on his armour as he ran.

“Lance!”

“What are we going to do?!” Lance grabbed at Keith’s arms in panic, his helmet dropping to the floor. “We had no warning! Coran said the Castle didn’t detect this Galra fleet’s presence at all on their scanners. Not until they were right on top of us!”

“We’ll be fine. We can form Voltron and take them out!”

“That’s not true and you know it!” Keith was thankful for the protection his armour gave against the tightening grip of Lance’s hands. “You said it yourself. They’ll be using their new weapon again. Hell, that’s probably how they snuck past the scanners! And we’re not ready, Keith! Our bond isn’t strong enough yet to be of any use. We’ll all be lost out there! What are we going to do?”

“Lance!” Keith tried desperately to ease the dizzying speeds at which Lance’s mind was whirling around him, but it was no good.

“What, Keith?! The others are already out there risking their lives and you’re just… just standing there—” He let go of Keith’s arms and wafted his hands both physically and mentally, pushing Keith away. “— trying to calm my mind?! How will that help once we’re out there defenseless?!”

“Lance, please just listen!”

“We need to go!” Lance made to push past him, but Keith threw out his arms to stop him. His helmet fell to floor beside Lance’s with a clatter. Lance’s eye’s widened. “What are you…?”

“Just listen to me for once and come here!” he yelled. It was as though someone else had control of his limbs as he began advancing towards Lance, his mind blazing. Lance’s mind was swimming with a whole different fear now as he stood unmoving in front of him, mouth slightly open in surprise

“What are you—” Lance repeated, his voice softer than before and quivering as Keith raised his hands towards him. Keith felt a sense of déjà vu as the noises of battle became muted and the only thing he could see or feel was the energy of the other boy directly in front of him, glowing brightly. He watched his own hands move, as though in slow motion and clasp the sides of Lance’s face. Lance’s eyes fluttered shut as Keith’s fingertips made contact with his skin and although Keith couldn’t feel the softness through his gloves, Lance’s skin hummed with energy beneath his touch. Lance’s mind was more open than he’d ever felt it. He took a deep breath and dove in.

As his mind connected with Lance’s, he could feel everything: his fear, his anger at himself, anger at Keith, frustration, affection and worry for his team, his helplessness. Keith felt the way his touch was affecting Lance, how his own fingertips felt against Lance’s skin and buried themselves into the soft curls of hair at the nape of his neck. Lance was trembling beneath him.

“Focus,” he breathed, talking both to himself as well as Lance. He saw Lance flinch when his breath touched his face. Keith felt his own affection for his teammate surge through him and
smiled. ‘Sorry, Lance. But we did have a deal.’ He pulled Lance closer, bringing their foreheads into contact and closed his eyes.

All at once, the world faded around them. Then the same powerful rush of energy he’d felt before when they’d held hands, ignited and crackled between them again. He felt the pulsing blue of Lance’s mind matching his own and held his head tighter towards him. His heart felt ready to burst out his chest. The energy grew and grew in intensity between them. It was so bright his head felt as though it was on fire —

Then something gave way. He gasped as they were abruptly thrust into starlight, the energy roaring in his ears. Keith clutched Lance tighter as his legs almost collapsed underneath him. A constellation of colours erupted around them and he quaked as he felt the twin roars of both Red and Blue resonate in his chest. He fell away from Lance, breathing heavily, eyes wide as he took in the dazzling new world around him. A hand reached out to steady him and he looked up into Lance’s terrified eyes.

“What the hell was that?!!”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Tumblr link to my animation/artwork for this chapter here

First time animating anything orz...that was a lot of work!

ETA: Lance's experiences with synesthesia are (loosely) based on my own

ETA2: Tumblr user chipofmintchocolate did this really cool fanart for his chapter omg ;A; check it out here!
“Keith? Dude, seriously what was that? And are you okay? You don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine.”

Keith was shaking. Everything around him looked like it was on fire. Lance’s steadying hold on him loosened as he sunk to the floor and tried to make it look as though he was only crouching to pick up their fallen helmets. When he tried to stand back up again with as little amount of pathetic trembling as possible, a feeling of concern from Lance popped into his mind. That wasn’t all it was however. Ideas that couldn’t possibly be his own, began to unfurl in his head.

‘This isn’t what usually happens.’

As Keith tried to focus on them, his brain began working on translating the sudden onslaught of confusing new images and colourful emotions that were far more powerful than usual. He let out a strangled choke as the images that Lance was apparently projecting became clearer, ‘He wants to —?!’

“You are not carrying me!” Keith blurted out without thinking. His throat then contracted when he absorbed the reality of what had happened and what he’d just said. A flurry of images that showed Lance carrying Keith in a variety of different ways flickered through his mind like a movie reel at high speed. A garbled noise left his mouth as an image of Lance holding him in a bridal carry was projected into his head before being whisked away again. ‘What is this?!’ Lance looked at him, confused.

“How did you—? Never mind, we need to get to our lions. If you can stand, let’s go!”

“I told you I’m fine,” Keith growled at him, getting to his feet with difficulty and thrusting Lance’s helmet so forcefully at him, that Lance almost dropped it again, “and stop thinking so loudly!” He felt too hot. Everything felt too hot.

“What…”

“What?!” Keith took a step back as Lance stepped towards him. The heat radiating off him was excruciating.

“Is it just me, or is everything, like extra bright?” His eyes were following him with a fascinated gaze. “You’re… glowing.”

“I’m glowing? You’re the one that’s now a furnace! And don’t touch me!” he said, as an image of Lance reaching his hand out towards him and touching his face formed in his mind.
“I wasn’t going to!” Lance’s hand was already halfway to his face however. “Really though, your face is all shiny. It’s messed up.” He frowned. “And what do you mean, ‘furnace’?”

“Your hands, your… everything is too hot!” It was hard for Keith to form a coherent sentence with Lance standing this close and burning in front of him. “Just stand back!” Lance winced and tried to cover his ears without letting go of his helmet.

“What the quiznak is wrong with your voice?!”

“What are you talking a—”

Keith faltered, their bickering cut short as waves of panic and fear rippled through him and to his horror realised that it hadn’t originated from either him or Lance. He met Lance’s eyes and saw that they were reflecting his dismay right back at him.

“You felt that too right?” Keith said with a shaky breath. Lance nodded.

“The team.” He put on his helmet. “They’re in trouble. Whatever your freaky forehead touch did, we’ll talk about it later.”

“We can’t talk about it later!” Keith yelled as they ran together down the corridor, “It’s happening now!” His legs, still wobbly, gave out underneath him and Lance’s hand shot out to grab him. Keith yelped at the searing touch.

“Watch it!” Lance said. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing!”

“Can you get to your lion by yourself?”

“Once I get to Red I’ll be fine. Just take your hand off me it hurts!” Lance let go of him and stared down at his own hand in confusion.

“But I didn’t do anythi—”

“Look,” Keith said as they began to run again, “we’ve obviously triggered something in our bond —”

“You triggered it.”

“—and I can’t explain how, but we must be somehow tapping into the other lions’ consciousness.”

“Through Blue and Red?”

“Yeah. Which means—”

“We can sense the others.”

“Exactly.”

“And it’s given us ‘Super Lion Vision’ senses too?”

“What?”

“Well I assume that’s why everything looks super bright and colourful now and why your voice sounds about ten times as loud and annoying as usual.” Keith scowled at him, pulling on his
helmet with more force than was necessary.

“Let’s just get to the hangars.” The helmet didn’t do much to shield him against the heat, but that was the least of his worries. Everything was still burning, the confusing cocktail of their teammates’ emotions engulfed him and now an overwhelming scent was filling his lungs. He inhaled it deeply and felt lightheaded.

They reached the control room, clambered over the threshold and were met with the furious glare of Allura. Keith felt sick.

“Where have you two been ?!” Keith saw Lance wince and reach to cover his ears again despite his helmet. “Your fellow paladins need you!” He sensed Lance’s mind burn with shame and frustration at her words and felt a pang of sympathy at the mortified look on his face.

“Allura, we’re sorr–”

“We’ve already lost contact with the others,” Allura snapped before Keith could finish, “and the Castle has taken a lot of heavy fire. We need you both out there now.”

“We’re on it.” Keith took a sharp intake of breath as the hot intensity of Lance’s words hit him along with a very real, burst of heat that emanated from his form. The scent burned stronger in his nose and his throat. Lance turned towards the door of his hangar and looked back at him, mind unfocused but bright and a look on his face that Keith couldn’t decipher at all.

“See you on the other side,” he said with a wry smile. Keith gave him a hard nod and looked towards his own door.

“Keep your mind open,” he responded, speaking low enough that Allura and Coran wouldn’t hear, but loud enough that he knew Lance’s new hearing abilities would be able to pick it up. Lance didn’t reply, but he felt a gentle nudge of acknowledgment brush up against his mind along with a deep, rumbling purr from Blue. He heard Red respond in kind.

As the door to Lance’s hangar shut behind him, Keith let his mind follow him down and down into the Castle’s interior. He could still feel him long after his heat had faded from view. When he finally reached Red, Lance’s presence was still there, lingering. It was the greatest distance that he had ever sensed him at. His heart thudded. Did this mean that they were stronger? He tried hard not to think about how the mysterious scent had all but evaporated now and what that had to mean. Could they actually do this? He gripped Red’s dual joysticks and shut his eyes, letting his newfound rush of adrenaline flush out any latent fear that remained within him. Red’s consciousness encircled and consumed him as they rode out the hangar. They reached out together with their combined energy towards Lance and Blue. Keith grasped hold with a tentative question.

‘Can you feel me?’

“Yeah I can feel you.”

Keith held back a gasp as Lance’s voice rang in his ears. He opened his eyes to see Lance’s face flicker into view and look back at him from Red’s display monitor. Lance smiled.

“Keep my mind open right?”

“Y-yeah.”

“I can’t believe it works at this range! We couldn’t manage more than a length of a corridor before.”
“Still think my forehead touch was ‘freaky’?”

“Of course,” Keith rolled his eyes, “but…” Lance paused and Keith was sure that he must have forgotten how open and strong their mental link was currently, for he was projecting a vulnerability that was very unlike him. Keith kept quiet, “It did work. You weren’t wrong.” Lance avoided his eyes. “Just, you know, warn me next time. I totally thought you were going to…” Keith frowned as Lance trailed off.

“Going to what?”

“Doesn’t matter. The others need our help. Let’s go kick some Galra ass!”

“Right!”

Keith and Red circled around to meet Blue and they flew in sync towards the front of the Castle that had now become the site of the battlefield. Keith’s stomach lurched and he felt Lance’s matching distress as they took in the sight below them. A fleet, maybe twice as large as the one they had fought last time, had the others surrounded and they were barely holding them off as the Castle’s shields were taking more and more laser fire. Without being able to communicate with Coran, Allura or each other, their fellow paladins’ attacks were uncoordinated and easily countered by the opposing Galra fighters. Red’s angry growls surged through him. Keith opened his mouth to speak, but Lance got there first.

“Red says that the other lions can’t communicate with Shiro, Pidge and Hunk!”

“Red’s talking to you?”

“She is now. You can hear Blue too right?” Keith smiled. Blue’s warm, calming purrs surrounded him, her familiar energy filling him with an affection and nostalgia for Earth so deep his heart ached.

“Yeah I can hear her.”

With their minds as open as they were, it wasn’t a surprise to feel Lance’s acknowledgment of his feelings and his responding affection, but Keith felt a shyness about it all the same.

“I guess our bond goes four ways now,” Lance said with a small smile. “Okay,” his expression hardened with a serious determination, “we need a plan and fast.” Keith nodded, his face grim.

“Forming Voltron is the only way that we can take on this fleet now with the Castle shields being as damaged as they are. It will take too long with just the lions alone. But the only way we can do that is by taking out whatever it is that’s blocking our communications.”

“Right.”

“But as soon as we get in range for their new tech to affect us, we won’t be able to talk like this anymore. So…”

“Our bond is the key.”

“—and we’ve got to time it right.”

“Got it. So how about we—”

Just as it had happened back in the castle, the ideas in Lance’s head arose and began to bleed into
Keith’s, swirling around like smoke before reforming into a clear image in his mind. For the second time that day, he found himself responding to Lance before he’d even finished speaking.

“Good plan, Lance.”

“Uhh what? I haven’t finished explain — wait a minute,” his eyes narrowed at him, “did you just hear my thoughts? How long have you had this power without telling me?!”

“I didn’t! Well, I didn’t hear them. More like… saw? Felt them? It’s hard to describe.”

“So what did you see?”

“We go in together, guns blazing and create an opening in their formation, serving both as a temporary distraction away from the castle and as an escape route for the others to get out of firing range.”

“Y-yeah that’s right,” Lance’s mind was split between feeling both impressed and horrified. “I projected all that to you?”

“It probably works both ways,” Keith said, chewing his lip and thinking. “How about this?” He concentrated hard on the images Lance had sent him, breaking them down, morphing, and reforming. Lance’s eyes widened.

“You think…” he said, speaking slowly, “…that we should bluff? Make them think we’re going in guns blazing. It’s what they’d expect. But instead we split up. Take advantage of them not knowing about our bond.” Keith grinned at him.

“Exactly. We split up last second. Just before the comms cut out. You head towards the others and the castle and I’ll draw them out. Break the formation down completely.” Lance’s eyes were shining.

—and we communicate the rest of our plans like this using our mental link!”

“Yep.”

“Got it! Are you ready? We’ve not got much time,” Keith’s blood ran hot and fast through his veins, a violent heat fueled by adrenaline searing behind his eyes.

“Let’s do this!” he growled and he felt Red’s penetrating roar resonate in his chest and his words.

“Alright!”

They charged, nosediving Red and Blue towards the imposing lilac glow of the Galra fleet. Lance whooped and hollered as they went, his mind a blazing trail of light. It was invigorating.

“How are we going to detect the source of interference?” Lance said as they advanced closer and closer. “How will we know what it will look like?”

“I have an idea,” Keith said, pushing any misgivings he had about disclosing his new abilities aside. There were more important things at stake now. “I sort of have this… heat vision.” Lance’s eyes lit up in excitement.

“Woahhh awesome! So you can shoot lasers out your eyes?!”

“Not that kind of heat vision!”
“Oh. What can you do then?”

“I can see and detect heat signatures from all objects around me.” ‘Especially yours for some reason.’

“Not nearly as cool then.”

“But it can be useful.”

“Wait, is this why you were freaking out when I touched your arm before?”

“I wasn’t freaking out! And no. I think it also makes me, err, more sensitive to heat too. But there’s no time to talk about that! My point was that I think I have a way to detect the source of interference.”

“How?”

“It’s got to be drawing a lot of power to be able to sever the strong bonds we have with our lions, so it must be giving out a lot of heat. I’ll be able to see it. It will stand out.”

“That sounds like something Pidge would say, so I believe you.” Lance’s expression became firm again. “Okay this is it. Here we go!”

They dove in, raining fire and ice down on the unsuspecting Galra forces. Keith’s heart raced as they got closer and closer. Lance’s yells over the comms were becoming faded, distorted and broken. A spark of fear flickered within him. What if this didn’t work? Lance’s voice got fainter. What if their bond wasn’t strong enough? Keith’s breathing became shallow and he felt sweat beginning to form on his brow as he remembered being trapped in his cell… the agonising silence… the torment of losing Red… What if he was plunged into darkness again?

“Keith!”

Lance’s voice and glowing presence broke through the black storm cloud his mind had created. He took a shuddering breath.

“Lance.”

“We’ve got this okay? We can do this! I trust y—”

Silence.

“Lance!” He panicked, reaching out his mind desperately, clawing at the edges. A soft touch soothed him. ‘I’m here’ it seemed to say, and relief washed over him. Blue’s roars then echoed all around, giving him the strength to move again. Lance and Blue took off to his right, gunning down several ships as they went. Keith took out the ships that attempted to follow them.

‘I’m the one you’ve got to worry about assholes!’

He and Red tore through the back end of the fleet with ease, drawing them away from the main formation and reducing them to charcoal. His mind chased Lance’s presence across the battlefield, tracing out the path he had taken with Blue towards the castle. A smoky image from Lance emerged in his mind: a vision of what he and Blue could see before them — a hundred or more warships were between them and the rest of the trapped team. He felt fear tinge the edges of Lance’s mind.
‘Shit.’ Keith’s mind raced, letting Red guide him through countless laser fire around him as he tried to focus. There was no way, even with Lance’s skills, that he could take on that many forces alone without help. ‘What can I do?’

As he was thinking, the smoky image morphed in his mind: the black lion.

‘Shiro.’

Keith urged his idea towards Lance’s increasingly fearful mind. Even without the means of communication between them, Keith knew that Shiro and his lion would know what to do. ‘Draw some away from Lance, Shiro, and get out of there with the others!’ If they could just split up the formation a bit more, then maybe Lance would have a chance. ‘Don’t worry, we’ve got your back. I’ve got your back.’ He held on tightly to the fearful light of Lance’s energy until he felt it ease and spark again with a newfound confidence. The resounding roars of both Blue and Red gave him hope that the black lion had also received his plea for help. He watched from a painful distance as Lance and Blue shattered a hole in the frontline Galra fleet. ‘Please let this work.’

With a roar so deafening that Keith could feel it inside him as though it were Red’s, the black lion careered out of the ominous, violet depths with Green and Yellow in tow. Keith watched in awe as it took out at least twenty ships at a time with its jaw blade. Shiro’s elegant, yet powerful fighting style was evident even in the form of a giant, mechanical beast. As Black led the charge away from the castle’s front, a wave of Galra ships trailed behind them. The fleet became thinner. Keith beamed and wished that he could speak his gratitude and admiration out loud to Shiro, but with the comms still dead, it would have to wait.

‘I’ve got to find this source and take it out fast!’

As he worked to draw as many ships as possible away from the castle and Lance, he felt Lance’s mind encircle his own and more images float up the surface of his mind again.

‘He wants me to… ?’

Red purred approvingly as they watched Lance’s plan unfold around them. Lance was right. If he was too busy concentrating on fighting the waves of Galra ships, he couldn’t focus his energy on identifying and destroying the tech disabling their comms. In his current state, the heat signatures were too weak for him to distinguish. He would have to—

‘Trust us. Me, Red and Blue. Put your trust in me. I’ll keep you safe.’ The message from Lance was clear and all-encompassing despite the lack of words.

Keith had never felt calmer as he closed his eyes and relinquished control over Red’s joysticks. He let his mind merge fully with hers, feeling her guide them through the hailstorm of laser fire with a speed and agility he couldn’t ever hope to achieve alone. His mind then saw what Lance saw: beyond the broken remains of the Galra fleet back at the castle, Keith could see himself and Red in the distance, the stark contrast of his energy blazing red-hot against the blackness of space. Lance’s new ‘Super Lion Vision’ as he called it, appeared to allow him to see far beyond what any human would usually be capable of and with colours so vivid that it almost hurt for Keith to look at. He then saw in his mind a vision of what Lance had planned: Keith and Red luring ships into Lance’s line of fire. A complete surprise attack, for who would suspect even the best sniper in the known Universe to hit anything at that sort of range? It was so brilliant he felt his respect for Lance increase tenfold right then and there.

“Okay, Red. Let’s do this.” His mind was stinging with the effort, but he didn’t care. The heat signatures were now raging fires in his mind’s eye, but sure enough, only two of them stood out as
the brightest of all: Lance and a gigantic cube-like object positioned right in the centre of one of the largest ships in the fleet. ‘Got you.’

He and Red raced towards it, drawing ship after ship into Lance’s firing range as they went. Keith grinned wildly as he felt Lance’s raucous joy surge through his mind with each ship he gunned down. As he and Red advanced on the source, he sent a pulse of energy to Lance and an image of where they needed to go. The remaining Galra forces were still large in number and reforming fast. Shiro and the others wouldn’t be able to hold them off for much longer.

‘It’s now or never.’

Keith let the rage and indignation he still had leftover from his last failure in battle fuel him as he charged forward with Red. Lance and Blue soon joined them at their side as they began to close in. He felt Lance’s mind brush against his own as they flew together as one. With fire on one side and ice on the other, they laid down a final, devastating twin laser beam towards the source. It exploded with a force so great and blinding that Keith had to shield his eyes. The effect was immediate.

“Yeah!! You take that laser right up the quiznak !”

Keith’s heart soared at the sound of Lance’s voice over the comms, then laughed out loud as his words sunk in.

“Now you’re definitely not using that word correctly.”

“Keith! Buddy! We did it!”

“Great job guys, but it’s not over yet.”

“Shiro!” Keith couldn’t keep the happiness out his voice. “You guys are okay!”

“Yeah we’re okay thanks to you two. Whatever you did and however you did it, it worked. But there’s no time to chat. Let’s form Voltron and get out of here.”

“Yes, Sir!”

“On it!”

“Seriously though guys,” Hunk’s voice sounded almost weary from bewilderment, “that was insane. How did you–?”

“Hunk! Watch your back!” yelled Pidge, shielding him from a wave of laser fire. “Less talking, more giant robot forming.”

“Right, sorry guys.”

Taking out the remains of the Galra fleet had been a cinch after forming Voltron. He and Lance were so in sync with each other and the rest of the team, it hadn’t felt so much like fighting but dancing. A choreography so graceful it was like they’d rehearsed it. Now that he had left Red and had started to make the trip back to the control room however, the last of the adrenaline that had been keeping him upright until now was starting to dwindle. The side-effects of their forehead touch had faded and he felt Lance’s presence again only when he was right outside the door
between his hangar and the control room. Keith stumbled through, ready to give in to the lead weight of his legs and collapse right there where he stood, but Lance got to him first.

“Keith! We did it! And it was awesome, so I don’t care what you’re going to say, come here!”

“Lance, wha—?”

‘Oh.’

Lance was hugging him. It was like being wrapped up in his jacket again. He put his arms tentatively around the other boy. The warmth of Lance’s mind combined with the physical warmth of his embrace was nearly more than Keith could bear. Something stirred in his chest.

‘…oh.’

Keith held Lance tighter.

He’d worry about that another time.

Lance readjusted his hold on Keith’s waist and hoisted the idiot’s dead weight of an arm further across his shoulders so that it hung more securely around his neck. When he’d tried to let go of Keith after his celebratory hug, his teammate had only clung onto him harder as his legs suddenly ceased to function. He’d barely registered the elated praise and congratulations from Allura and Coran behind them as he’d hurried to steady him, feeling the alarm flashing through Keith’s mind.

“Keith,” he’d said, “what’s happened to you?”

“Just… get me to the common room before everyone else arrives. Please.” Lance couldn’t help but feel a little bit smug at his rival’s loss of pride, but stopped himself from making a teasing remark. They had just pulled off the most badass, telepathic, battle manoeuvre together after all. Also, the light flush on Keith’s face and the embarrassed way that he was avoiding his eyes was something he didn’t quite feel like sharing with anyone else right now. So here he was, dragging the great, useless lump down the corridor to the common room, trying to ignore the way Keith’s breath was tickling the side of his neck and making his hair stand on end.

“You were like this before the fight too,” he said, glancing down at the dark head of hair lolling on his shoulder. “Are you sick or something?”

“No”, Keith grunted and Lance could feel his mind twinge in apprehension. “I think… ” He pressed his mouth into a very thin line before mumbling, “… I might have pushed this bond thing a bit too far.” Lance raised an eyebrow at him.

“What do you—?”

“I mean that I pushed my mind too hard okay?! It’s why I fell asleep earlier too after our training. I’ve also been trying all day to get better at shutting my mind off… Like you.” Lance watched, speechless as Keith’s face became redder at his confession.

“You’re an idiot,” he said finally. Keith sighed.

“You don’t need to tell me that,” he muttered.
“Well I’m telling you anyway, so suck it up.”

They reached the common room and Lance gently lowered Keith into the nearest seat before collapsing down next to him. He sunk into his seat, feeling about as exhausted as Keith looked. Lance observed the steady rise and fall of Keith’s chest as they sat in silence. His ‘Super Lion Vision’ power was ebbing now, but Keith was still luminescent. The urge to reach out and touch his oddly glowing skin was rising within him again. Keith’s eyes were closed.

Lance’s hand was about an inch away from the side of Keith’s face when the door to the common room slid open and he recoiled so fast he nearly overbalanced in his seat.

“Guys!” Lance really did topple over in his seat this time as Hunk barrelled into him, drawing him into a back-breaking hug. He laughed and squeezed him back. Hunk looked like he was torn between crying and punching him in the face, but settled instead on shaking him by the shoulders and laughing deliriously, eyes glassy. They fell down together on the seat laughing until Lance felt breathless. He looked up to see Keith’s eyes on him, a strained sort of smile on his face. Lance opened his mouth to question him, but was cut off in an instant by Pidge launching herself at him, angry tears in her eyes as she half-heartedly hit him in the chest shouting.

“You idiot! I hate you! Why did you do that?! Why?!”

“Why am I the only one getting beaten up?!” he shrieked, trying to catch her fists in his hands. “What about Keith? It was his plan too!” He looked back up again, but Keith was no longer looking his way. Shiro was beside him, hand on his shoulder and speaking softly to him. Lance strained to hear Shiro’s words over the laughs and shouts from Pidge and Hunk on top of him.

“You did a great job,” he was saying. “I’m proud of you. Both of you.” Lance felt Keith’s mind flush with pride as he beamed up at Shiro.

“We couldn’t have done it without you either,” Keith said. “But thanks.” A strange feeling settled in Lance’s stomach at the look on his face. Keith then frowned and turned to look in his direction again. Lance felt his mind reaching out to him, confused and questioning.

Acting fast, Lance grabbed Keith’s arm and pulled him into the group couch pile-on, shutting off his mind quickly before Keith had a chance to probe any further.

A couple of days later, after they had worm-holed into a less Galra-filled corner of space and Keith had slept for over ten hours in a cryo pod (which was 24,000 ticks Lance had calculated, well, asked Pidge to calculate) Keith was in Lance’s room again, back to his usual self. This unfortunately involved waking Lance up in the middle of the night for more ‘mind-training’ sessions when Lance would much rather be getting more ticks of sleep himself. Just as he was about to nod off again for what felt like the hundredth time, Keith spoke up. Loudly. Lance groaned. ‘How does he always know when I’m about to fall asleep?!” He hoped this wasn’t a new ‘Super Lion’ power he had developed without telling him.

“So I’ve been reading this book—”

Lance shifted on top of his bed and looked down at Keith. He was lying down on Lance’s bedroom floor again, an annoying habit that he seemed to have developed in recent days, and holding up the electronic textbook that Lance recognised as the book he himself had been reading.
back on their first day in the library. Funny how long ago that seemed now with the progress they’d made.

“—and even though your original idea about swapping clothes was stupid—”

“Hey!”

“—you actually might have been onto something.”

“Really?”

“Try not to sound too surprised.”

“I’m not!”

“Right.” Keith was smirking. Lance scowled at him.

“Stop making fun of me and just tell me why I was right all along.” Keith laughed, but sat up from the floor and turned to him, pointing down at the book passage that Lance had bookmarked and then promptly forgotten about.

“It says here that in ancient Altea, these kinds of bonds were traditionally strengthened in what they called ‘bonding ceremonies’, ” Keith said, his brow furrowed as he scanned the passage. “A lot of the descriptions that go over the details of the rituals in these ceremonies don’t seem to translate well to English, but this section that you highlighted about the ‘ability to see things from the other person’s point of view’ is directly referring to a ritual that involves the practice of exchanging belongings—”

“See! I told you!”

“Not necessarily clothes.”

“Oh.”

“It’s also a little more complicated than just swapping something like jackets for a while.” Lance noticed then that Keith had forgone wearing his jacket tonight. He wondered if that had been on purpose.

“So… what do we do then?”

“I have to give you something that’s important to me,” Keith said, chewing his lip. Lance could feel his mind spinning. “And you give me something in return that’s as equally important to you.”

“How are we supposed to measure something like that?”

“I don’t know… ” Keith wasn’t looking at him. He then stood up abruptly and made towards the door. “Stay there. I’ll be right back.” Lance frowned after him, unable to pin down the confusing mix of emotions that were swirling around Keith’s mind as he ran out the door. He let his mind follow him until Keith had moved out of range. Lance sighed and picked up the book to stare down at the passage himself.

‘Something important to me.’

What could he give him? He stared around his room, all of a sudden feeling very forlorn. All his possessions were back on Earth. The only things that he’d had on him when they’d started out on this crazy adventure were the clothes on his back. Nothing that had any sort of sentimental value.
Any Earth trinkets that he’d manage to scavenge since their time on the Castle had all come from Pidge. Somehow he didn’t think Pidge’s headphones, assorted pens and sticky notes would cut it. He looked down at the passage again.

‘Usually small — ’ he read to himself, ‘— precious to the owner and wilfully given. Something that the receiver of the gift will be able to carry with them always.’

“Something to carry…”

Just as an idea began to form in his mind, Keith burst back through his door, panting. Lance jumped. He’d been so absorbed in his own head that he hadn’t even felt Keith’s presence approaching.

“Here,” Keith said breathlessly, holding his hand out to Lance, something dark red clutched within it. Lance recognised it immediately.

“Your scarf?” Keith nodded.

“It’s small, it’s mine and it’s precious to me.” His eyes were hard and determined. “I want you to have it.” Lance could feel that he was trying intently to keep a lock down on his emotions. His breathing was still faster than usual. Lance gaped at him.

“Are… are you sure?”

“Yes. Come here.”

Keith grabbed Lance’s arm, pulling him down to sit cross-legged on the floor with him. He took Lance’s hand.

“Keith, wait what are you—?”

“Just… let me.”

Lance’s face felt hot. Keith’s hold on his hand was unexpectedly gentle. He watched cautiously as Keith pushed back the sleeve of his jacket to expose his wrist.

“This way you can carry it with you,” Keith mumbled as he began to wrap the scarf around Lance’s wrist, taking care not to bind it too tight. Securing it with a small knot, he looked up at Lance, ears slightly pink. “It belonged to my parents. Take care of it for me.”

“O-of course.” Lance looked down at the newly tied scarf on his wrist that Keith was still cradling in both hands. “Your parents, huh?”

“Yeah.” Keith’s voice was as guarded as his mind. Lance didn’t press him any further.

“That’s cool,” Lance said, trying to keep the tremor out of his voice. When Keith finally let go of his hand he felt like he could breathe again. “Thanks.” He ran his hands over the red fabric.

“It’s the wrong colour,” Lance said without thinking. Keith looked offended.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“Ah, nothing sorry! I didn’t mean — I meant that it wasn’t the colour that I see, you know, when I — ah just forget it. It’s nice I like it.” Lance got up and turned away from Keith’s suspicious look, blushing furiously. “Anyway, I have something for you too.” He felt Keith’s mind open again in curiosity as he began to rummage around his room. Eventually he found what he was looking for: a
piece of string and a peculiar dark blue pebble. A hole had been worn right through it by the ocean
that they’d left behind. The only bit of Earth that he had left.

“So, err, this is it,” Lance said, starting to feel self-conscious under Keith’s watchful gaze. “I know
it doesn’t look like much, but it is special to me. You could tie it on this string or something…”
He trailed off, waiting for Keith to start getting annoyed at him for not having a suitable enough
gift. To his surprise however, Keith actually looked intrigued.

“Can I see it?” he said, holding out his hand before Lance had even answered.

“Yeah sure.” Lance wasn’t sure if it was his weird ‘Lion Vision’ again or not, but Keith’s eyes
almost looked as though they were sparkling. When he reached out towards his mind he could
feel… excitement. *What’s up with him?* Lance placed the pebble into Keith’s gloved hand.

“I found it at Varadero beach,” Lance said as he watched Keith turning the rock over in his hands.
“I, err, liked to collect stuff like that back on Earth. Cool rocks and things,” Keith was so going to
tease him for this. “This one was one of my favourites, so I used to just carry it in my pocket a lot
of the time. It’s the only thing of mine that I had on me when we left Earth.”

“You collect these?” Keith looked serious and not at all mocking.

“Err… yeah?”

“Me too.”

“Wait, what ?!”

“Since I was a kid.”

“Seriously?! Dude, me too!” Keith grinned at him, his eyes shining with a child-like glee.

“Yeah! I have a whole collection back at home,” his smile faltered. “Well, had a collection.” Lance
sighed and sank back down onto the floor next to him, leaning against the bed.

“Ah man. Sorry for bumming you out.”

“It’s fine. It will still be there when we get back right?” Keith gave him a small smile and Lance
felt his mind grow warm and bright around his own. He smiled back.

“Yeah.”

They sat in a companionable silence for a while, Keith still turning the pebble over in his hands
absent-mindedly.

“I’ve sort of started a new collection since we arrived here,” Keith spoke again hesitantly. “Just a
few things that I’ve picked up from the planets that we’ve visited so far,” his gaze was fixed on the
pebble in his hands. “You could…come and see it sometime if you like?” Lance grinned.

“I’d like that.”

Keith didn’t respond, but Lance could see him smiling. Lance gave an awkward cough.

“Um, anyway, should I—?” he gestured towards the pebble in Keith’s hand. Keith handed it back
to him, watching as Lance threaded the string through the hole. It actually looked kind of… nice,
Lance thought. Hands shaking, he thrust the pebble pendant towards Keith, unable to meet his
eyes.
“Here you go. Take it. It’s yours. You can tie it wherever or just keep it in your pocket or something.” Lance was babbling and he knew it, but he couldn’t stop himself. ‘What is wrong with me?!’ Keith shook his head.

“No, you’ve got to give it to me properly.”

“What?”

“Like I did with my scarf.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s to do with some symbolism or whatever. Like it says in the book.”

“Oh. Right.” Lance’s hands were clammy.

“Here,” Keith shuffled around where he sat on the floor, turning his back to him. “Tie it around my neck.”

“Err, alright.”

Lance stared at the back of Keith’s head in alarm. He swallowed and fumbled with the pendant in his hands as he leant forward on his knees and draped it carefully over Keith’s bowed head. Lance was faced with another obstacle however.

The mullet.

“Um—” he began, wondering what in the Universe he could say that wouldn’t make the whole situation even more awkward. He stared down at the mullet again. Keith would surely kill him if he got the string tangled up in his precious hair. ‘Should I just —?’ He held the ends of the string in one hand as he reached out towards Keith’s hair with the other, ‘—move it out the way?’ To his horror, he felt a note of surprise from Keith’s mind, the kind of surprise Lance usually felt when he had projected something that he didn’t mean to. ‘Stupid bond! Why am I even trying to strengthen you?!’

“It’s in the way right?” Keith said, sounding indifferent much to Lance’s relief. “I, err, saw that image you projected.” Lance wished Zarkon would appear and smite him down right then and there.

“Y-yeah, sorry. Should I—?”

“I’ve got it.” Keith reached a hand around the back of his head and brushed his hair out the way, exposing his neck. The loose strands tickled Lance’s knuckles as Keith moved them. His neck was so pale against the darkness of his hair and shirt.

“Thanks.” Lance’s hands were still shaking as he attempted to tie the string.

“Do you need any help?” Keith said. Lance could feel his amusement dancing around in his mind.

“I’ve got it!”

“Are you sure?”

“I know how to tie a knot, Keith!” Keith snorted with laughter and the tension gave way. Lance gave the string a final tug and sat back on his heels.
“Done.” Smiling, Keith turned back around to look at him. Clutching the pebble in his hand and tracing his fingertips over the imperfections.

“Thanks. I like it.”

“No problem.”

Keith was glowing again. Lance wished he could get a grip on this new ‘Lion Vision’ thing. It was hard not to stare when Keith’s whole being appeared to be reflecting the starlight. He forced himself to look away, taking a leaf out of Keith’s book and laying down on his bedroom floor to stare up at the ceiling. Not long after, Keith joined him. They let their minds swirl around each other, as they often did now during their late night, mind training sessions. Despite his original intentions, Lance found himself glancing over at Keith again. Maybe it was the way Keith’s mind swam with affection, or the way he was casually turning the pebble over and over again in his hands, or maybe it was just the time of night, but whatever it was, Lance felt compelled to speak.

“Keith”

“What?” Keith met his eyes. Lance looked away to speak to the ceiling instead.

I’ve got to tell you something”

“… okay.”

“Even though I never outright hated you, alright, maybe I did for a short while at the Garrison, but after that. After we rescued Shiro, found Blue, and I — you know — got us stuck on the other side of a wormhole? After all that… even though I didn’t hate you anymore, you still pissed me off.”

“Are you going somewhere with this.”

“Let me finish! I thought you were a smug idiot who didn’t care about anyone else but yourself and Shiro, which yeah I figured out pretty quickly wasn’t true, but I never actually told you that.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m sorry for thinking that way about you.”

“Oh. Um, thanks.”

“Because you’re not like that at all. You’re actually… well… ” Lance held his breath and closed his eyes. Feeling for the edges of Keith’s mind with his own, he pulled him forward gently, coaxing him closer and letting him pass through to the areas of his mind that he usually kept under lock and key.

‘You’re actually a pretty cool guy,’ he thought, ‘and a damn good pilot.’ He shyly withdrew his mind from Keith’s again, hoping that at least his feelings would reach him where his words could not. Lance opened his eyes again and turned to see Keith looking back at him, eyes wide in surprise. A smile then broke across his face so full of light, it made Lance think that his ‘Lion Vision’ had been triggered again.

“You too,” Keith said, his mind ablaze.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Illustration now added! Tumblr link here

ETA: Bonus art of Lance giving his gift here!
Arrow of Time

Chapter by mackerelmademedoit

Chapter Notes

Credit to my bf for being my beta!

ETA: Had a couple of messages asking this, so just thought I’d clarify here too. Fanart is very, very welcome yes!! I draw my own illustrations, but would have absolutely have no objections to other people drawing art for this fic at all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything about this bond was inconvenient really, Keith thought. Sure it had helped them defeat an enormous Galra fleet, become better teammates and closer friends, but the drawbacks really were hard to ignore. Especially now with the bond between them getting stronger by the day and neither of them having complete control yet over their new ‘Lion Senses’. The senses that seemed to trigger at the most inopportune moments.

Like now.

Keith inhaled slowly. The scent settled deep in his lungs, burning and spreading out within him, seeping through his very pores. It was as intoxicating as its source was annoying. Of all the heightened senses that this bond had given him, this one was perhaps the most distracting. The heat vision he had some semblance of control over, his skin’s sensitivity to heat, though a pain to deal with, was easily avoided by meditating in a cold shower until the effects had calmed down. This increased sense of smell however, was a different matter entirely. It was particularly hard to deal with when being surrounded by the entire rest of team Voltron and trying to have an important mission debriefing about the day of the Galra’s attack on the Castle. Lance had taken it upon himself to explain his and Keith’s involvement (sans mentioning the bond) which Keith was immeasurably grateful for in his current state, even if it was Lance’s fault that he was in the state that he was.

Pinching the skin of his left hand hard with his right under the dining room table, Keith tried to focus on the words coming out of Lance’s mouth instead of the overpowering scent that he was emitting. Even in his own head he could only refer to it as ‘the scent’. Acknowledging that it was Lance’s scent was not something he was ready confront. Not yet.

He inhaled again, trying to pick out any other amplified scents in the room that he could concentrate on instead. Without Lance there, he’d amused himself by trying to pick out the individual scents of the rest of the team (always a risky endeavour if any one of them had just come from the training deck) but as soon as Lance had arrived, that exercise had become futile, his scent hot, heavy and burning in Keith’s nostrils.

And then there was the hand holding.

Well, it was more just touching really. Light brushes across Keith’s wrist, lingering touches, fingertips grazing his knuckles, but whatever it was, Lance just couldn’t seem to help himself. Though, if Keith was being entirely honest, the urge to do the exact same thing plagued his own
mind. He could only assume that it had to be a side-effect of the bond – the compulsion to recreate the intensity of the connection that they had shared in heat of battle. Though the effect was not as powerful as their forehead touch, sometimes when their hands made contact, an exhilarating spark of their former connection surged between them, igniting their ‘Lion Senses’ and making their minds pulse with energy. It was addicting.

Just as his increased sense of smell had begun to, blessedly, subside, he felt Lance’s hand again on his own. Keith’s breath hitched at the touch. He looked over at the other boy, but Lance appeared not to have noticed what he’d done. He was still talking, his mind very quiet (as it had been throughout the whole meeting so far) and ignoring him completely. Keith frowned, but took advantage of the fact that his mind was no longer saturated with the scent to catch up on what the others were talking about.

“So when did you guys decide to do all this?” Shiro was saying. “You can’t have had much time to communicate your plans before the comms cut out.”

“Well, Keith and I,” Lance began and Keith immediately lost focus again because, although the finer points of the earlier conversation had been lost on him, his scent-addled brain hadn’t failed to pick up on the fact that Lance had said the phrase “Keith and I” several times now, and Keith found that he liked the sound of that phrase far too much when it came from Lance’s mouth. He slowly tried to move his hand out from underneath Lance’s to no avail. The edges of Keith’s scarf were poking out of Lance’s jacket sleeve, tickling Keith’s wrist. Keith flushed, his free hand moving, as though on its own accord, to clutch his pendant through the thin fabric of his shirt.

“–so really, we were just winging it,” Lance finished as Keith tuned back in to his voice. It took all of Keith’s resolve not to drop his head down onto the table in exasperation at his words. Shiro looked unimpressed.

“… winging it?”

“Winging. It.”

“Right.”

Keith had to admire Lance’s tenacity in response to Shiro’s unwavering disbelief and stony-faced expression that undoubtable told them that he was not buying this explanation one bit. And Shiro wasn’t done.

“So what about the tech that was disabling our comms? How did you find it?”

“Lucky guess.”

“Lance—”

“I’m serious!”

There was no way they would be able to keep this up for long, Keith thought. Something would have to give. The tension was thick, but neither paladin was backing down—

—and Lance was still touching his damn hand. Worse, Hunk had now noticed. He was staring down at Lance’s hand, half-covering Keith’s, from where he sat on Lance’s other side. Keith wasted no time in violently wrenching his hand free, willing the furious heat to die down in his face. For the first time since the meeting had begun, Keith felt Lace’s mind open up in surprise as he turned his steadfast gaze away from Shiro to first look at Keith, then Hunk and then down at Keith’s knee where his hand still lay next to Keith’s clenched fist. The look on Lance’s face would
have been comical to Keith if the situation wasn’t also completely humiliating. Keith thanked his lucky stars that Hunk was the kind of guy that he was and didn’t draw attention to the uncomfortable situation, but merely gave Lance and Keith a concerned, questioning look before turning away. Though if the frown on Hunk’s face was any indication, Lance was definitely going to be subjected to his probing questions later on. Keith felt Lance’s mind reeling in panic around his own as he swiftly removed his hand from Keith’s knee. Shiro made use of Lance’s temporary distraction to speak up again. Keith blanched as Shiro turned this time to meet his eyes instead.

“What about you, Keith? Do you have anything else to add to what Lance said?” Keith swallowed and stole a quick look at Lance, who now appeared to be having an existential crisis beside him, before meeting Shiro’s hard gaze again. He wracked his brains for any sort of coherent idea or sentence that might take the help take the heat off him and Lance.

“Ah, no I think that about covers it.” It was possibly the worst thing he could have said. ‘I’m more of an idiot than Lance.’

“Keith—”

“Anyway,” Pidge mercifully interrupted, looking irritated. “Can Hunk and I talk now about our analysis of the Galra tech remains we managed to scavenge from the wreckage? Because it’s pretty important.” Shiro looked abashed.

“R-right. Sorry Pidge, Hunk. You two go ahead.” Pidge huffed as she opened up her laptop and Hunk cleared his throat.

“So, from the parts that Pidge and I managed to recover from the site — seriously though guys —” He looked at Keith and Lance with a weary expression, “— you couldn’t have left it a little more intact for us? Anyway, I put them back together as best I could and we started running some tests.”

“And while it’s pretty obviously a jammer,” Pidge said, “finding out exactly how the Galra knew which frequencies to jam when we’re talking about a ‘mystical bond that cannot be explained by science alone’ is tricky. A telepathic bond between us and our lions can’t exactly be operating in the same way that any normal wireless communications system would be.”

“Precisely!” Coran interjected. “The bonds forged between a lion and its paladin, or indeed any kind of telepathic bond, is a very deep level of magic, something that Altean scientists have struggled over many decades to understand.” Pidge nodded.

“The Galra have had 10,000 years now to research into this. It’s not unfeasible that they have discovered something about the bond that Alteans didn’t know about, allowing them to develop this kind of tech.” Keith’s heart beat faster, his throat dry as he watched Pidge’s brow furrow in a tiny frown. All this talk of telepathic bonds was setting him on edge. ‘We can’t let them know yet. We’re not ready. I’m not ready.’ He felt for Lance’s mind again and found his matching unease. Feeling brave, Keith tentatively relaxed his balled fist and reached out with his pinky finger towards Lance’s hand, touching it with a gentle brush of his fingertip. Lance sucked in a breath, but otherwise did not visibly react, except to return the light touch with his own finger.

Mind considerably calmer, Keith listened as Pidge carried on talking.

“I have however come up with a few ideas for how we can perhaps bypass how the jammer affects our comms system.” She grinned. “From what I can tell, it’s most likely some form of barrage jammer. One that can jam multiple frequencies at once. Which would indicate that the Galra don’t know exactly what frequency we’re broadcasting on which is something. But this also means that we can’t just change the frequency—”
“Yes we already tried that,” Coran said. “Their jammer must be covering a wide range.”

“Which means our only other options are increasing our signal power, or my favourite option,” her eyes had a manic glint in them, “develop something that can detect and directly track the signals it’s transmitting, enabling us to destroy it before it has a chance to affect us.”

“That’s kind of what you were doing right?” Lance whispered to Keith, his mouth suddenly right next to his face, his hot breath tickling his ear. Keith repressed a shiver.

“Sort of I guess,” he whispered back, trying not to sound as breathless as he felt. ‘This is ridiculous.’ How had being around Lance suddenly become so difficult?

“So basically,” Hunk said with a sigh, “we have some temporary fixes, but we’re still no closer to stopping the Galra from interfering with our bonds with our lions. We need to run more vigorous tests on this jammer, but with the state that the Castle is in, we just don’t have nearly enough power to do that.” Keith felt a pang of guilt at Hunk’s words. If only Lance and Keith’s bond was stronger, more stable. ‘Then we could help.’ Right now it was a hindrance. A runaway thermonuclear reaction that neither of them could control, let alone utilise. Mentioning it would surely only complicate matters. ‘We still need more time.’

“The Castle does indeed need more maintenance,” Coran said. “That last wormhole really took a lot out of her and we’re running low on the resources we need in order to get her back in proper working order.”

“Yes,” said Allura, standing up and surveying the team. “It is imperative that we get the Castle fixed as soon as possible. We don’t know when the Galra will make their next move and we don’t have the power to travel through another wormhole this time.” Shiro looked at her in alarm.

“We don’t?”

“Unfortunately not,” she said, expression pained. “Which is why I have set us on a course towards a planet which I believe might be able to help us. We should arrive there sometime later before dinner.”

“Help in what way? People?”

“No. This planet, as far as we can tell, is uninhabited. It does however contain an abundance of natural resources, some of which may be useful to us for fixing the Castle. We’ll know more when we arrive.” Shiro nodded.

“Understood. Okay everyone. Rest up for a while and prepare to move out later.” He turned to Allura. “I assume we’ll be travelling on foot and gathering supplies by hand?” She nodded.

“The terrain will most likely be unsuited for your speeders.” Lance groaned.

“Don’t you guys have, like, robot probes or something for this kind of thing?”

“No, Lance.”

Meeting over, Keith made his way back to his room, intending to collect his Bayard and hit the
training deck. He opened his door and jumped, hand automatically reaching for the knife at his belt, before he recognised who it was that was lying on his bed with a smug grin on his face.

“So let me get this straight,” Lance said from Keith’s bed. “I get super vision and super hearing and you get”—he snorted with laughter, “—the power to detect hot things, sensitive skin and super smell. Tough break, dude.” Keith flushed angrily. Of course confiding in Lance about the full nature of his powers had been a mistake.

“So let me get this straight,” Lance from Keith’s bed. “I get super vision and super hearing and you get—” he snorted with laughter, “—the power to detect hot things, sensitive skin and super smell. Tough break, dude.” Keith flushed angrily. Of course confiding in Lance about the full nature of his powers had been a mistake.

“Shut up.”

“I’m sorry, but that’s hilarious.”

“Is it hilarious how much you stink? Because you do. I have super smell remember?” Lance looked at him, horrified.

“You take that back!”

“Nope.”

“Keith!”

“Not doing it.” Lance pouted and turned away from him towards the wall.

“I don’t stink,” he muttered. “I smell great thank you very much.” Keith rolled his eyes, but couldn’t bring himself to disagree. The scent wasn’t bad, just really, really… intense.

“What are you doing here anyway?” Keith said, coughing loudly in an attempt to distract from the colour on his cheeks.

“Taking you up on your offer to see your cool rock collection.”

“Avoiding Hunk and Shiro then?” Lance sat up with a jolt, blushing.

“N-no! What gave you that idea?”

“The way that you ran away as soon as the meeting was over and hid in my room so that they wouldn’t know where to look for you?”

“I told you I wanted to see your collection, right?” Keith sighed.

“Whatever. Can you get off my bed now?”

“No way, buddy. You owe me remember? I let you sleep on mine for at least two hours.”

“It wasn’t that long.”

“Uh huh. Sure, Keith. Whatever you say.” He paused and Keith felt a shy touch at the back of his mind, akin to a warm hand on his shoulder.

“I’m not lying though,” Lance continued. “I do, um, want to see your collection.” Keith turned away from him, trying to hide his smile behind his hand. Lance’s mind was too bright sometimes.

“Sure,” Keith said, reaching to grasp for his pendant again on instinct. He pulled it out from beneath his shirt, letting it hang freely as he searched for his box of planetary relics. Heat began to prick his all over every inch of his skin and he shuddered. Breathing was suddenly much harder and the air he did manage to get felt humid. ‘Shit. Why is this happening now!’ Lance’s concern
washed over him, feeling blissfully cool against the now hot flush of his mind.

“Keith? What’s up?” Keith’s back was still turned to him, but he could tell that Lance had got off the bed and was walking towards him. The heat that was now radiating off him was stifling.

“I’m—” Keith stopped himself from saying ‘fine’ on impulse. There wasn’t exactly much point being prideful now when Lance had all but carried him in his arms through the Castle after their last battle. “It’s just this stupid heat sensitivity thing. I’ve triggered it again somehow.” He turned around to see Lance regarding him with a look in his eyes so soft and warm it had to have been the heat messing with Keith’s brain. Sure enough, Keith blinked and the look was gone, but Lance’s mind still brushed against his own with a soothing comfort. Keith swayed slightly and then recoiled as Lance made to steady him. Lance froze with his hand halfway towards him.

“Ah, sorry. I forgot. Touching hurts you right? Too hot?”

“I-it’s fine,” Keith was feeling warm for a whole different reason now. “It’s not nearly as bad as other times have been.”

“How do you know?”

“I would have thrown you out my room by now.” Lance laughed and Keith felt his heart squeeze painfully in his chest. ‘This is bad.’

“It gets that bad, huh?”

“Yeah. Unbearable.”

“Wow. You really did get the shit end of the ‘Lion Senses’ stick didn’t you?”

“Shut up,” Keith said again, but he couldn’t keep the laughter out of his voice when he spoke. He sat down on his bed, closing his eyes and counting his breaths. “It should die down in a few minutes.” The bed then dipped and he felt Lance’s heat settle beside him.

“Is this okay? Or am I too close?”

“No. It’s fine.” ‘Just about.’ If Lance got any closer—

Keith hissed and his eyes shot open as the searing heat of Lance’s hand grazed his own. He pulled his hand away violently.

“Lance! What the f—?!”

“Sorry, sorry! I didn’t mean to.” Even through the haze of heat, Keith could feel Lance’s mind spiraling in full blown panic mode. “It just happened I — you’re kind of um… glowing again. I think my ‘Lion Vision’ has, you know—”

“It’s okay,” Keith said, voice thick as he tried to steady his breathing. Sweat from his forehead clung to his eyelashes as he struggled to gain control over his over-stimulated senses. ‘I just need to concentrate.’ His blood was pumping loudly in his ears. “Touch my hand again.”

Lance’s mind stilled. It was hard to tell if he had closed it off again or if he was just simply in shock. Keith’s heart was pounding so fast it hurt.

“… okay,” Lance said finally. “Why?”

“I want to try and control this stupid thing. Help me out.”
Lance’s hand cautiously brushed his own again. It still burned, but Keith forced himself to endure it. ‘I just need to adjust.’ He took Lance’s hand fully into his own, gripping it tightly. Lance inhaled sharply through his nose. Neither of them spoke for a long time, their minds both silent. Lance’s hand gave a slight tremor. The heat was beginning to ebb. Keith found himself thinking back to the first time he’d asked Lance to hold his hand. He chuckled and energy thrummed between them. Lance’s mind stirred in curiosity.

“You’re, err, much more into this idea than last time,” Keith said, answering Lance’s nonverbal question. Lance made a strained noise.

“I-idiot! I’m not! I’m just trying to help!” He didn’t let go of Keith’s hand however. “Is… is it helping?” Keith turned to look at him, but Lance was staring straight ahead, avoiding his gaze.

“Yeah,” Keith said, smiling at him. He could feel the edges of his scarf around Lance’s wrist again, tickling his thumb. Keith pinched and rolled the soft fabric around between his fingertips. “How about your ‘Lion Vision’?”

“I’ve still got it.” Lance was watching him stroke the fabric with an unreadable expression on his face. “I think it might be dying down a bit now though.”

“Is that why you kept touching my hand before?” Keith said without thinking, feeling his face starting to heat up again.

“What?!” Lance squeaked and tried to jerk his hand away, but Keith clung on tighter.

“Earlier at the meeting.” The words were tumbling out of his mouth before he could stop himself. “Was it because of your ‘Lion Vision’?” ‘Why am I even bringing this up?’ Lance was staring at him now, red-faced. His hand had gone slack in Keith’s.

“Oh. Um no… it wasn’t that.” Keith hated the look on Lance’s face. Couldn’t stand it. He let go of Lance’s hand and let him pull away. “I just… can we not talk about this? It’s this bond man. It’s—”

“Yeah. I get it.” Keith’s throat ached as Lance went silent, no longer looking at him.

“You need to feel close to me right?’ Keith thought desperately. ‘That’s what you’re feeling. Because of the bond. Because it’s stronger now. We’re naturally drawn to each other. We can’t help it.’

Keith tried to reach out to Lance’s mind, but it was firmly shut.

‘Tell me you’re feeling the same things as me.’

If Lance felt the same, then it was just a side-effect of the bond. It will probably go away soon once they had better control over it. Not our fault. Nothing to worry about.

‘Tell me it’s not just me.’

Nothing to worry about.

“What are you going to tell him?” Keith said, hating the way his voice came out sounding so wrong, even to his own ears. Lance finally looked back at him. “To Hunk. What are you going to say?” Lance shrugged, tugging at the scarf around his wrist.
“I’ll figure something out.” Then all at once his face became very serious. “What about Shiro? We need to tell him something sooner or later, Keith.”

“I know.” This topic of conversation was perhaps even worse.

“Why can’t we tell him? Or the others? What are you afraid of?” Lance’s words were painful. Keith almost wished that Lance would just force his way into his mind and find the answers for himself. He wasn’t sure he even knew what the answers to Lance’s questions were, even if he could bring himself to voice them aloud.

“I’m not afraid.” That was a lie. “I just… want to be able to understand this thing first.” Telling Shiro would be selfish. ‘I can’t tell him, Lance. He’s got enough to worry about.’ Lance looked unconvinced, but to Keith’s relief, just nodded at him, falling silent once more. He frowned as he watched Lance tug at the scarf again.

“Did I tie it too tight?” He thought about reaching out to loosen the knot, but Lance pulled his hand further away before Keith had even moved. He realised with a hot flash of embarrassment that he’d probably projected an image of that thought.

“Ah, no it’s fine.” Lance was blushing.

“Are you sure?”

“Hey, you know how I came up with some more ‘bond training’ ideas? We haven’t had a chance to try any of them yet since the Galra attack.” Keith rolled his eyes at Lance’s shameless attempt at a subject change, but didn’t say anything. “Do you want to try them out?” Keith sighed.

“Alright. It doesn’t involve stealing my jacket though, right?”

“Will you let that go?! And no, they’re kind of, ah, more like yours…”

“What do you mean?”

“Well you were kind of right about the whole ‘physically touching’ thing.” Lance rubbed the back of his neck. “So they’re sort of more like those kinds of ideas.” Keith smirked at him.

“After all that making fun of me for the ‘freaky forehead touches’ and ‘touchy-feelies’.” Lance opened his mouth to retort, but then Allura’s voice rang out over the Castle loudspeakers.

“Paladins! We have arrived ahead of schedule. Convene now in the control room for a mission briefing before we prepare to depart for the surface.”

Keith tossed his helmet back and forth in his hands and kicked the door to Lance’s room impatiently. “We’re going to be late. Get a move on!” He yelled towards the door.

“I am!”

“Why do I have to wait outside?”

“Because I’m changing!”
“No, I mean why do you want me to wait? Why can’t I just go on ahead? And you were in my room when I got changed.”

“I averted my eyes!”

“You’re taking too long. I’m leaving.” Keith tucked his helmet under his arm and started walking away. This was ridiculous.

“Keith, wait!” Lance burst out of his room and Keith gave a start as Lance’s hand came down on his shoulder. “Um, we’re probably splitting into teams for the mission, yeah?” He let go of Keith’s shoulder, clasping his helmet tight in his hands. “Do you want to partner up?” Keith stared at him, his shoulder somehow tingling from the contact despite the armour between them.

“This isn’t high school, Lance.”

“Shut up, I know that!”

“And you’re not just trying to avoid Hunk?”

“No! I want to team up. With you.” Lance’s mind was so open and earnest Keith couldn’t bear to look at him. He thought about their last battle; how they’d connected, fought so in sync, their triumph, Lance’s hug —

“Okay, sure.” Still unable to look at Lance, he began walking briskly down the corridor. Lance jogged to catch up.

“Awesome! Oh wait hang on.”

“What now?”

“Your pendant string is sticking out.”

“Wha—?”

Lance’s hands were on the side of his neck, gloved fingertips sweeping across his skin to grasp the loose string, tucking it gently into the collar of his suit. Keith held his breath. Lance was too close.

“There you go. Now it won’t snag on anything or… yeah…” Lance trailed off awkwardly as he looked up, meeting Keith’s eyes. A horrified look of realisation dawned on his face as it grew steadily redder, matching the heat that Keith felt adorning his own.

“T-thanks,” Keith managed to choke out. Lance stepped back, turned and walked stiffly away from him.

“Let’s get to the control room.”

“Right.”

By the time they’d arrived, they’d missed the briefing and everyone else was heading towards their respective hangar doors, including—

“Allura?” Keith said in surprise, watching as she followed Hunk to his hangar door, pulling on her helmet. “You’re coming with us?” She nodded.

“I know best what we’re looking for down there, so I thought it wise. We don’t have time to fill you both in now, but Shiro and Pidge will explain the details to you.”
“Shiro and Pidge?”

“Lance, you’re with me,” Shiro said, voice firm and giving a curt nod to Lance before he disappeared behind his hangar door. Keith felt Lance quake beside him, his mind cowering.

“Oh, quiznak,” Lance said under his breath.

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“Lance, are you listening to me?”

Shiro’s voiced echoed through Lance’s helmet, shaking him out of his thoughts and disentangling his mind from the familiar red glow of Keith’s as it grew fainter and fainter on their descent towards the planet.

“Land our lions in a clearing outside the jungle and proceed on foot right?” He had been listening, but when his brain was still back on the Castle, replaying his last moments with Keith before departure, it was hard to form any articulate responses to Shiro’s words.

“Yeah that’s right,” Lance shook his head and tried to clear his mind, looking down at Shiro on Blue’s display monitor. “We should be entering the atmosphere soon, so get ready.”

“I can’t believe that we, defenders of the universe, have been reduced to collecting buckets of weird tree goo,” Lance moaned bitterly.

“The Castle is our home now, Lance. And we can’t exactly defend the universe without it. If Coran says we need this tree sap, then we’ve got to get it.”

“I know, I know but still.”

As they made their descent into the thick cloud, Lance watched Red disappear in front of him. Keith’s energy was still glowing brightly through the dense fog. He smiled as he felt Keith’s unrestrained bliss and the lightless of his heart as he dove down – his pure joy of the flight. Lance let it flow through him. Their connection was strong, and though not as strong as it had been during the Galra attack, Lance hoped that it would be strong enough so that they could still communicate with each other when they arrived on the planet’s surface. Touching foreheads before leaving was impossible without the others seeing, but Lance couldn’t let Keith go without doing something. So when the rest of the team had left for their hangars and Coran’s back was turned, Lance had reached for Keith’s hand, squeezing it tightly. A familiar burst of energy had ignited between them as he’d focused every fibre of his being on Keith’s presence, letting their minds merge in a dizzying light. Keith’s face had been shining before him as his ‘Lion Vision’ kicked in, his eyes wide and mouth slightly open.

And then he’d had to let him go.

But his mind could still follow him and that was all that mattered.

As Lance and Blue broke through the cloud, he could see why Allura had said that they couldn’t use their speeders. Lance’s eyes widened in awe as he took in the vast, shimmering blue of the ocean before him, dotted with tiny islands covered with dense jungle. It was so—

‘Earth-like’.
His heart ached with a sudden, painful longing for home so intense that he had to look away. Keith’s mind was around his in an instant, consoling and kind. Blue’s and Red’s purrs also accompanied his warmth and brought Lance’s mind back to a focus. He looked ahead again.

“We’ll land on that island immediately ahead,” Shiro said, “It looks like there might be a clearing big enough for us to leave our lions.”

“Yeah I see it.”

And he really could, as though it was right in front of his face, even though it was still a few hundred metres away. ‘This ‘Lion Vision’ really freaks me out sometimes.’ He turned his enhanced sight towards Red, who was hurtling off in the opposite direction with Green towards the base of a huge and, thankfully, inactive volcano. Surrounded by the ocean, it formed an island in its own right. Allura’s face then popped up on Lance’s display monitor.

“Hunk and I have reached the cave systems and it is as I feared. The passageways are too narrow for the speeder, so we are proceeding on foot to find the crystal stalagmites.”

“Understood,” Shiro said, “We’re almost at the jungle. Keith, Pidge how’s it looking on your end?”

“We’ve just landed,” Keith said and Lance hated himself for how happy he felt hearing Keith’s voice and seeing his face appear on the screen before him. Being in the lions again for the first time after the Galra attack reminded him of the fear he’d felt as the comms had cut out. The silence from Keith had been excruciating.

“The ground looks too rocky and unstable for our speeders,” Keith continued. “But there’s a lot of that weird sand here—”

“Volcanic deposits.”

“Right, that. What Pidge said. There’s a lot of that around our landing site anyway, so we should be able to gather enough of it without having to walk too far.”

“Copy that. We’re at the jungle now. Everyone keep the team updated and be careful. Don’t get complacent just because there’s no enemy to fight. Stay focused.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“See you guys back on the Castle! And don’t worry, I’ll keep the princess safe.”

“Don’t worry, Hunk. I’m sure I’ll be perfectly fine.”

“Keith! Watch where you’re walking!”

Lance snorted. If he couldn’t team up with Keith, then at least Pidge would keep him from being an impulsive idiot. He felt Keith’s mind flash with mild irritation at his amusement. Lance felt certain that he was smiling however.

He and Shiro landed at the water’s edge and stepped out. Lance was sure the trees would have been tall enough to hide even Voltron itself, and the jungle was so dense that they had barely enough room to stretch out their arms without hitting more than one tree at a time. He groaned. Speeders were definitely out. Shiro tossed him a bucket and he caught it clumsily.

“Let’s go.”
Lance had barely filled half a bucket before Shiro had launched into what must have been a prepared speech.

“Lance,” he said and Lance almost slipped and cut himself with the tree sap knife. “I know it’s been a rough past week for us all with everything that’s happened, but I’d really like you to tell me what’s been going on with you.” Shiro’s warm hand then grabbed his arm with a light squeeze and Lance felt the tension in his body melt away. “I only want to help.” Lance turned to look at Shiro, the concern in his eyes wearing down his resolve even more.

Lance sighed and turned back to the tree, slicing open the strange, bulbous growth on its trunk and watching the blue, glowing sap seep into the bucket below. Shiro stood by him patiently, collecting his own sap, but Lance knew he wouldn’t wait forever. He sought out Keith’s mind and found it glowing faintly.

‘You’ve gotta help me out here, buddy.’

Keith was completely focused on whatever he was doing however. As Lance concentrated on his presence, he saw fleeting images of what Keith was seeing with his own eyes, mostly buckets full of the glittering, black volcanic sand and Pidge clambering over rocks in the distance. He looked back at Shiro again and remembered the affection laced with worry that he had felt from Keith earlier.

What are you afraid of?

I’m not afraid.

But he had been. Lance had felt it. And he knew Shiro would be able to help. That he wanted to help. But Keith didn’t want him to, and worse, he was trusting Lance to respect his wishes. Lance couldn’t imagine what Keith hoped to achieve by keeping this a secret for so long.

‘He’s doing it for the team.’

Right from the start that’s what it had been about. Helping the team.

‘And he wants Shiro to trust him again.’

Lance knew how deep Keith’s admiration and affection for Shiro ran, even before the bond, and now that he had felt it first-hand he knew for definite.

‘That idiot.’

Of course it had all been about not making Shiro worry. A weird mental link that they couldn’t understand or control yet properly? Of course Shiro would have been concerned.

‘But how is keeping secrets from him going to make him worry less, mullet-for-brains?!’

Lance groaned and put down his bucket. He was going to have to have a serious talk with Keith about the whole ‘trying to do everything by himself with no help’ thing. But for now—

‘I’ve got to tell Shiro something.’

“Shiro,” he said, swallowing thickly as Shiro turned to look at him. “You’re right. There is something going on.” He paused and looked down at his abandoned bucket, watching the sap shimmer and swirl as he felt for the comfort of Keith’s presence. He clung onto it and felt a small note of surprise from Keith’s mind as he did. Lance felt Keith’s confusion as he returned his touch,
but didn’t enlighten him. ‘I’ll explain to him later.’

“Something’s going on,” he continued. “But it doesn’t just involve me. It involves Keith too.” His heart hammered in his chest as Shiro regarded him with an intense, but caring look. Lance exhaled through his nose. His forehead was feeling clammy. He ran a hand through his hair and grimaced as he felt sap residue from his hands stick to the strands. “So it’s not just up to me to tell you, okay? Its Keith too. And for some reason he’s not ready, so… I’m sorry.” Sighing, he picked up his bucket again, avoiding Shiro’s gaze on the pretence of looking for another suitable tree. “Sorry I can’t tell you any more.”

Shiro was silent as Lance walked away and began to climb one of the trees. At least this way he could avoid his searching look. Keith’s probing mind was harder to escape from however. He could feel Keith’s frustration with him as he climbed higher towards a particularly large sap growth. ‘Will this help? Did I do the right thing?’

“Thanks for telling me, Lance,” Shiro called up to him from the ground. Lance looked down at him in surprise. “I get it. Sorry if I put you in an uncomfortable position.” Feeling a lump beginning to form in his throat, Lance could only nod at him before turning his attention back to the sap growth. It was just out of arm's reach on the branch slightly above and opposite him.

“It’s okay, Lance,” he could hear the smile in Shiro’s voice even from this high up off the ground. “I understand. When Keith is ready, he’ll come to me. He always does eventually.” Lance nodded at him again, an unpleasant feeling in his stomach, as he positioned himself as close as he could to the edge of the branch he was perched on. He clung onto a protruding knot on the trunk to steady himself. Slashing the growth with his knife, he rushed to catch the falling sap with his bucket. As he strained to get the bucket close enough, he felt for Keith again, sending what he hoped was a reassurance that everything was okay.

‘Don’t be mad at me.’

He edged further forward.

Keith was busying himself with buckets of sand again, but Lance felt a returning touch of, albeit disgruntled, acknowledgment. Lance itched to touch Keith’s scarf around his wrist, hidden under his armour.

He stretched his arm out further, readjusting his hold on the knot.

Mind still wrapped up in Keith’s, Lance heard Shiro say something from down below. Before he could ask him to repeat himself, a strong burst of alarm and panic from Keith flooded through him. His hands shook.

“Keit—?!”

Then the bottom dropped out of his stomach as his foot was suddenly balancing on nothing and the bucket slipped out of his hand.

‘Shit!’

“Keith? You’re zoning out again.”
“Hm? Oh, sorry.” Keith shook his mind free of Lance’s and turned to look at Pidge. “What did you say?” Pidge raised her eyebrows in exasperation.

“Really? I have to repeat myself for a third time?”

“Sorry.”

“You’ve been acting… weirder than usual.” Keith snorted.

“Thanks.” He began shovelling the black sand into his bucket again.

“So what’s the deal with you and Lance lately?” Keith coughed as he inadvertently flung the sand-filled shovel too far to his left, missing the bucket completely and sending cloud of volcanic ash into his own face.

“W-what?” he spluttered, trying to wipe his face as best he could. “What deal?” The look in Pidge’s eyes was almost pitying. Mostly mocking.

“I wear glasses, Keith. I’m not blind.”

“Are your glasses even real? Or are they just part of your disguise?”

“I’m not disclosing that information.”

Keith laughed again and Pidge’s mouth twitched in a small smile. He turned back to his bucket.

“There’s no deal,” he said carefully. “We’re just… trying to be stronger. Stronger for the team.” When he looked back at her, her gaze was knowing and warm.

“Right,” she said after a long pause and left it at that. Keith smiled as he started to fill another bucket. His shovel then hit something solid with loud thunk. Curious, he dug through the sand and uncovered a small, black stone. Its surface shone like glass. He grinned and pocketed it. He’d show it to Lance later.

The Lance that was still ignoring him.

Keith glowered as he began shovelling again, more aggressively than before. He pushed back against Lance’s mind again but was met only with resistance. ‘Why is he being like this?!’

Pidge raised her eyebrows at him as he angrily trudged up to her and put the full bucket down with way more force than he’d intended. He clambered back over the rocky surface towards the lions where they’d stacked the empty buckets. Lance then reached out to him again at last with a quiet touch of reassurance, but that still explained nothing. Keith fumed and trudged on. ‘Stupid Lance! Why is he suddenly —?’

“Keith watch out!”

Pidge’s warning came too late however. Keith yelped in alarm as he lost his footing and slid down a vast expanse of steep, slippery rock. Luckily the soft, volcanic sand was there to break his fall. Pidge ran over and yanked him back up, helping him to his feet.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah the sand broke my—”

An agonising pain then tore through his right leg so intense that he couldn’t speak. He felt the
blood leave his face. Pidge was looking at him wide-eyed.

“Keith what—?”

Shiro’s voice then crackled through their helmets before he had a chance to respond.

“Lance is injured! I’m taking him back to the Castle now, but I’m going to need some help getting him to the cryo pod. He’s not in a good way.”

Keith was in Red’s cockpit before Shiro had even finished his sentence.

Keith burst through his hangar door just in time to see Shiro dragging Lance out of his own.

“Keith! Get his other arm for me.”

Keith felt sick as he took in the sight of Lance’s right leg and felt the dullness in Lance’s mind as he appeared to be slipping in and out of consciousness. Their connection was the weakest that he had felt in a while. It terrified him. Lance’s face looked pale even against the white of Shiro’s armour. He hoisted Lance’s other arm over his shoulder. Lance’s pain reverberated again through his own leg.

“I got Blue to follow me and Red back to the hangars,” Keith said as they began making their way down the corridor towards the cryo chamber. Coran’s troubled gaze followed them as they left.

“What happened?!?”

“Urrfell,” Lance said before Shiro could speak, voice muffled into Shiro’s shoulder. Keith glowered at him.

“You fell ?”

“Outta tree.”

“Idiot!” Lance turned his head towards him, a slack-jawed grin on his face that made Keith want to shake him. Lance’s mind was clouded with pain.

“Itssyourfault,” Lance slurred at him, eyes unfocused.

“What?”

“I think he broke his leg,” Shiro said, brow furrowed in what looked like guilt. “He was trying to reach for one of the higher up sap pods and slipped. I tried to warn him that he was getting too close to the edge but—”


“What are you—?”

“I climbed sooo many treesazza kid,” Lance continued like he hadn’t heard him. “Never broken my leg before though.” He gasped as Shiro hoisted him further across his shoulder and squinted at Keith’s face.
“Why’s your face allamess?” He said. Keith frowned at him.

“What’s that supposed to mean—?” Lance slipped his arm out of Keith’s grip and pawed clumsily at his face, gloved fingertips ghosting across his skin. Keith quivered under his touch. “What are you—?!”

“You’ve got that black sand on you,” Shiro said helpfully, a small smile on his face that eased the look of worry there. Keith rolled his eyes and turned back to Lance, taking his hand off his face and re-positioning his arm around his neck.

“Well you don’t exactly look your best right now either you know?” Not caring that Shiro was right there watching them, Keith loosened his hold on Lance’s waist to ruffle his sticky hair. “What’s this crap in your hair?”

“Tree goo.” Keith laughed despite the pitiful ache he felt in his chest. ‘You’re such an idiot. I hate you.’

By the time they reached the chamber, Lance had passed out again, head lolling on Keith’s shoulder. Together he and Shiro managed to lift him into the pod and set the timer as instructed by Coran over the loudspeaker. Breathing heavily, they both sank down on the floor. Keith rested the back of his head against the pod. It vibrated with energy, but it wasn’t the same as Lance’s. Shiro put a hand on Keith’s shoulder, releasing tension there that he didn’t realise he had. He relaxed into his grip. They sat quietly for a few moments on the cold floor, absorbing the sound of the electronic hums around them. The room was dark with the Castle in low power mode and only the cryo pod to bathe them in an eerie, blue light. Giving his shoulder a final squeeze, Shiro got up.

“Are you coming?” he said, looking down at him. Keith hated the weariness he heard in his voice.

“In a bit. I’m going to stay here a little while.” Shiro looked at him, an odd expression briefly crossing his face, before it settled into an understanding smile that made Keith feel a strange uneasiness in his stomach.

“Okay. I’ll see you later then. Don’t forget to come to dinner.”

“I won’t.”

“Good.” Keith gave him a weak smile as he left. When he could no longer hear Shiro’s footsteps, he got up and turned to look at Lance’s immobile form suspended in the pod. Keith leant his face into the side of the cool glass exterior and closed his eyes. He felt for Lance’s energy. When he found it, it was cold. Unresponsive to his touch. He tried again.

‘Can you feel me in there?’

Keith let his mind encase Lance’s, holding it close. He felt it stir.

‘Can you feel me?’

He held it tighter.

‘Feel me.’

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Thank you so much for all the support/comments/kudos! I'm really touched by the response so far <3 Feel free to send me asks/chat on tumblr (purpleneutrino.tumblr.com) as I always love talking to new people! (If it takes me a while to respond it's probably because I'm being shy and thinking too much about my response, or my internet died).

Comments are always highly appreciated. Artwork coming soon! <3
Artwork/animation now added!

Tumblr link [here](http://purpleneutrino.tumblr.com)!
“Hey, Lance.”

“…”

“How many fingers am I holding behind my back?”

“…”

“You’re pretty bad at this you know?”

“…”

“Lance?”

“…”

“You can hear me in there I know it. I can feel you so don’t ignore me.”

“…”

“You’ve just got to try harder.”

The world was grey to Keith, as though Lance had gone and taken all the colours away with him. Lance’s mind was gone, the loss of its familiar, comforting presence leaving Keith with a dull emptiness. And it hurt. A raw, hollow hole. Only when he was in the cryo chamber could he feel the faint glow of Lance’s energy permeating his own. When Keith let his mind reach out and grasp onto it, he could sense its fragility and it induced a hot wave of dread within him. According to Coran, the cryo pod had detected multiple fractures and cracked ribs as well as the clearly broken leg. But what worried Keith the most, was the news that Lance had also hit his head in the fall. Concussion had been an obvious side-effect, its effect on their bond however—

Keith tried not to think about it.
Right now, all he could do was linger outside the door to the cryo chamber where Hunk was currently checking and re-checking Lance’s vitals and muttering to either himself or Lance (Keith couldn’t quite tell). Hunk didn’t need to do this of course (the pod would alert Coran immediately if anything was wrong) but he did it all the same. It must provide him with some assurance Keith thought, and he couldn’t judge him for that. Not when he was guilty of doing the exact same thing (when he allowed himself to be alone in the chamber with Lance that is).

Leaning against the doorframe outside the room, Keith closed his eyes and let Hunk’s soothing murmurs wash over him as his mind meandered upstream, chasing the broken fragments of light that he knew to be Lance’s consciousness. He somehow felt worse than when Lance had been injured during Sendak’s attack, despite Lance’s injuries being far less severe this time around. Keith’s frustration felt the same as it had back then, but now an uncomfortable ache lay heavy in his chest along with it. It was different now. They were closer than they had been back then.

And he wasn’t ready to let the team know that yet.

So he hung back from visiting Lance during the day, waiting instead until everyone had settled into sleep. Then he would venture into the dimly lit chamber, feet cold on the metallic floor, but heart warmer with the presence of Lance, however faint, brushing up against his. Though still weak and unresponsive, Lance’s energy made the greys become less grey and loosened the suffocating weight of pain that Keith had been carrying around with him all day.

“Keith?”

Keith gave a start at Hunk’s voice and opened his eyes to find Hunk regarding him with a look of concern. He hadn’t noticed Hunk leaving the room.

“Hey, what’s up?” Keith said, trying his best to appear nonchalant but knew he was failing miserably. Not a lot got past Hunk.

“Are you okay, dude?”


“You looked sort of — ah — never mind. You checking up on Lance?” Keith flushed. There wasn’t really a way out of that one.

“Kind of,” he said, feeling the heat climbing on his face. He turned to look at the boy in question, finding it easier to do than meeting Hunk’s gaze. “How’s he doing?” Hunk sighed, running a hand through his hair, his headband askew.

“About the same as yesterday,” he said. “And the day before that and… ahh I’m not worried or anything—” Keith tore his gaze from Lance’s pod to look at him sharply. “Well, I mean, it’s not that I don’t trust Coran, but Lance’s leg is taking longer to heal than he originally predicted and there’s no real way to tell quite how bad his concussion is from the data that the pod is giving us so…”

Keith’s stomach lurched and his mind sought out Lance’s with a frantic urgency. ‘He’ll be okay.’ Fragmented, but stable, Lance’s energy pulsed rhythmically. ‘He’s got to be.’ He was vaguely aware of Hunk watching him closely, but wasn’t prepared for the warm hand on his shoulder.

“Hey, it’s okay, man. He’ll be fine—” Hunk said, his demeanour now much less panicked. Keith had a feeling that this was meant for his benefit and felt himself blushing profusely. Was his concern that obvious?
“I’m like ninety-nine percent sure that we’re both worrying over nothing,” Hunk continued, his smile earnest. Keith felt compelled to smile back. His eyes then widened as he felt something stir within Lance’s head. Something bright and yellow-gold—

*So Hunk is yellow?*

*Is that weird?*

Lance was thinking of Hunk.

After almost three days of nothing, Keith didn’t dare believe it, but as he concentrated harder he became more certain. Colours were dancing through Lance’s head again — vivid yellows and deep blues. Keith had to fight to stop a grin from breaking across his face. Lance’s mind was *awake*.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Keith said, realising that he’d probably been silent for quite some time now. “He’ll be fine.” Hunk grinned at him.

Trying not to look as reluctant as he felt, Keith let go of Lance’s mind and pushed himself up off the wall, making to leave. Maybe he’d visit Red again.

“You’re going?” Hunk said, interrupting his train of thought. Keith shifted his weight from one foot to the other, his heart beating uncomfortably hard against his rib cage. He crossed his arms in an attempt to contain it.

“Well, I wasn’t planning on staying.”

“You don’t have to put on an act you know?”

“What?”

“We all care about him. It’s okay to stay if you want.”

“…right.”

“I won’t tell him if that’s what you’re worried about. Though considering he gave you that,” he gestured towards Keith’s chest, “I don’t think it’s something you need to worry over.” Keith realised with a jolt that the pendant Lance had given him was swinging freely. He’d forgotten to conceal it beneath his shirt.

“That’s his favourite stone isn’t it?” Hunk continued. “He wouldn’t have given you that if he didn’t care about you as a friend.” Keith’s throat contracted and he clenched the pendant tight in his fist. “Besides,” Hunk said, sounding smug, “he’d be a hypocrite if he made fun of you for caring when he was the one moping outside your cryo pod last week. And you were in there for less than twelve hours.”

Hunk’s words ringing in his ears, Keith turned his head away from him to stare heatedly at Lance’s suspended form again, feeling light-headed. He barely registered when Hunk patted his shoulder, his hand feeling cooler now in comparison to the mortifying heat that was now coursing through Keith’s own body.

“Let me know if anything changes,” Hunk said with a small smile.
“Yeah,” Keith managed to force out, throat still tight. Lance’s mind swam with gold and brilliant blues. Hunk walked away and Keith finally let himself step over the threshold of the chamber. The air inside the room somehow felt denser than it did outside. He trailed his fingertips over the glass pod surface. It didn’t feel as cold as usual. Keith pressed his forehead against the glass and Lance’s presence engulfed him.

“Hey,” Keith said, voice soft and his breath fogging the glass. “You can hear me right?” He gasped for air and sunk shakily to his knees as the intensity of Lance’s energy rose and surged through him, awash with colour. Blues so deep he felt like he was drowning—

—and then it was gone. Keith’s heart gave a jolt of panic before he felt again the familiar warmth of Lance’s mind around his. Weak with relief, he let his body collapse completely against the pod, feeling like he could breathe properly for the first time in three days. His throat stung.

“ Took you long enough,” he breathed.

He must have missed dinner by now Keith thought, but it was hard for him to keep track of time with the lack of Altean time pieces in the Castle. He couldn’t really bring himself to care anyway, not when Lance’s mind was lit up like an aurora around him.

According to the display on Lance’s pod, Keith had been here for 6058 ticks which meant absolutely nothing to him. Keith wished he hadn’t zoned out when Pidge had told them all how to convert ticks into Earth time. If he had to guess, he must have been in the cryo chamber for at least two hours now. During that time he had left the room only once to retrieve his tablet, on which he was now writing frenzied notes as he attempted to translate the myriad of different hues and shades that emanated from Lance’s head. They shone around Keith like a vast nebula in his mind’s eye, possessing his mind with a vividness so intoxicating that Lance’s presence seemed to become almost tangible. Keith reached a hand out in front of himself, towards the endless, shimmering stream of consciousness as it appeared to glide through his outstretched fingers, caressing his fingertips.

Was Lance awake? Could he hear him speaking? Or could he somehow sense the words from Keith’s own mind? Keith wasn’t sure. He’d heard stories of patients in a comatose state being able to hear their loved ones talking to them by their bedside despite being unconscious. Was this the same thing? It was distinctly different to what he felt when Lance was sleeping. Keith couldn’t feel Lance’s emotions as he usually would through their bond, but the colours of his thoughts were as vibrant as though Lance were painting them right before his eyes.

“How many paladins of Voltron are there?” Keith would ask, and Lance’s mind would spark with a dazzling orange light.

‘Five.’

Keith had remembered that from when they’d done these kinds of exercises before. He noted it down.

“Who was with me earlier outside this room?”

A rush of golden-yellow light shone around him like a thousand solar flares.
‘Hunk.’

“How old are you?”

Fiery-red bursts followed in quick succession by an intense purple that stained his retinas—

‘Nineteen.’

“What colour is Pidge?”

A dusty, warm orange that reminded him of when the sun set on the desert plains back home, burned in his mind, flecked with lush greens that took Keith by surprise before realisation hit him. He gave a small snort of laughter.

‘Orange-green.’

“What do you think of Allura?”

Deep fuchsia. Keith rolled his eyes.

‘10 out of 10.’

“What do you think of me?”

Nothing.

“Who am I?”

The stone cold silence from Lance’s mind in response to his last questions convinced Keith more than anything that Lance must be able to hear him.

“Still refusing to tell me what colour I am huh?” Keith said with a smirk. Lance’s mind flashed with a petulant red. Keith added that to his colour-coded ‘Lance Emotions’ list. He absent-mindedly tapped the screen of his tablet and chewed his lip, curiosity curling in his gut.

“Are you awake or are you dreaming?” He wasn’t sure what kind of answer he was expecting. From what he had experimented with so far, any questions too abstract or complicated were met with an equally abstract and complicated array of unintelligible colour combinations. Nothing Keith could ever hope to translate to a coherent response. To Keith’s surprise however, Lance’s mind remained still, with only the latent, background hum of his energy swirling around him.

After a few moments, something surfaced. A soft wisp of pale lilac. It was a colour that Keith had seen Lance project before and had since decoded as—

‘Confusion.’

Lance didn’t know.

Keith frowned, worrying at the frayed edges of his gloves. He was going to have to do more research into this weird colour-thing that Lance had. Find out what it was actually called would be a start.

‘I should go back to the library again.’

But the thought of leaving was too painful. He didn’t want to deal with the empty ache again.
He grasped tightly onto the pendant around his neck and thought instead of the questions that he wished he could ask.

‘What am I to you?’

‘Do you hate being bonded to me?’

‘Are we really friends?’

‘How do you see me?’

‘Do you like me?’

Just thinking of the questions in his own mind was enough to set his face aflame and he angrily pushed the ridiculous thoughts aside. This bond was messing with his head.

He needed to get out of here.

Before Keith could change his mind, he stood up, shaking the prickly numbness from legs and unravelling his mind from the inebriating colour medley that was Lance’s head. He’d meant to walk straight out, for he knew that if he looked back at Lance even for a second, his will to leave would be snuffed out instantly. But Lance’s mind stirred as Keith began to move and his feet became lead. Soft, questioning lilac drifted through his open mind again.

“I’ve got to go now, sorry,” Keith said, his words stiff. “I’ll come back again soon though.”

It took every ounce of willpower that he had left not to turn around and let himself be drawn back in by the gentle tug of Lance’s mind on his. He stepped over the threshold and Lance let him go.

The world looked even greyer than it had before.

Keith flinched as Shiro dropped a pile of electronic books onto the table in front of him, the sudden noise startling him out of his thoughts.

“Ah sorry,” Shiro said, looking sheepish. “Didn’t mean to surprise you.” Keith grunted in response, rubbing his temple as his head began to ache. “I found some more books that I thought might be useful for you.”

“Thanks,” Keith said. It was really starting to worry him just how much affect Lance’s injury was
having on his usually impeccable attention to his surroundings and sense of danger. Not that Shiro carrying a bunch of books posed any sort of danger to him of course, but he hadn’t even noticed that Shiro had been behind him.

“What were you thinking about?” Shiro said, interrupted his musings. Keith lifted his gaze towards him and was relieved to see that he looked merely curious as opposed to concerned for once. Keith sighed.

“Nothing in particular.” Lie. “I’m just a bit tired.” Lie, lie, lie. “From all this reading you know?” Lies. Shiro could see it of course. Keith had never been able to lie to Shiro. He could probably tell what Keith had been thinking about too. He’d just never say it.

‘You know exactly who I was thinking about don’t you?’

“Okay,” Shiro said, face unreadable. He took a seat beside him, sinking down heavily into his chair and slinging an arm behind the back of Keith’s. “So I’m guessing this is part of the studying that you and Lance have been doing recently?” Keith jerked his head towards him so fast he almost pulled a muscle.

“What?” When had Lance talked to Shiro about this? ‘What’s that idiot gone and said?!’

“He told me that you two were researching into ways to counteract this new Galra tech. I assume that’s why you asked me to help you find all these books on telepathic bonds and stuff. We need to find a way to stop them interfering with our mental links with our lions right?” He smiled. “Lance said it was your idea.” Keith resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

‘Of course he did.’

Shiro’s words instilled a pleasant warmth in his chest however.

“Yeah that’s right,” Keith replied. “We thought it might help out Hunk and Pidge with their tests and stuff. Once the Castle is fixed you know?”

“You might not have to wait too long for that.”

Keith and Shiro turned around at the sound of Allura’s voice at the library door. Keith frowned. How long had she been there listening?

“Coran has just informed me that the Castle should be back in full working order by the end of the day,” she continued, making her way over to their table and peering down with curiosity at Shiro’s precariously stacked books. “All thanks to the work that you did gathering the necessary resources needed for repair.” She beamed brightly at them.

“No problem at all, princess,” Shiro said with a broad smile. Keith gave her a curt nod in turn, still watching her warily as she leant over the back of his chair to pick up the book that he’d since abandoned in favour of Lance-filled daydreams.

“This is a very——” she paused, her hands tracing over the book title with a delicate brush of her fingertips, “——interesting area of study that you’ve chosen, Keith.” She turned to look at him and the look in her eyes was so penetrating, it felt for a moment as though she knew everything, even the thoughts nestled ever so deep in the recesses of his mind. And Keith felt oddly calm about that.

“He and Lance have been working on this together,” Shiro interjected, seemingly oblivious to the unspoken conversation that was happening beside him. “Trying to help us understand more about how the bonds with our lions work.”
“I see.” She spoke as though she hadn’t quite heard him, but regarded him with a soft smile. With her gaze no longer boring into his own, Keith felt like he had a voice again. He swallowed, his throat very dry.

“Do you... have any recommendations for any Altean texts on this topic, Allura?” he said, his words coming out slower and more deliberate sounding than he’d intended. “You seem to know a lot about this kind of stuff.” He wasn’t sure what prompted him to say that, but he somehow knew it to be true. His suspicions were confirmed when he saw her eyes widening slightly as she looked over him, her next words full of meaning.

“I do actually. Would you like me to help you?”

“Yeah, that would be great. Thanks.”

“Not at all.” When she smiled at him, Keith then understood.

She knew.

‘She knows about the bond.’

She had known from the very start.

‘Why hasn’t she said anything until now? What else does she know?’

What was he going to say to her?

“I’ll leave you both to it then,” Shiro’s cheerful tone clashed horribly with the mixed feelings of apprehension and relief that churned in Keith’s stomach, making him slightly sick. “See you later, Keith,” Shiro nodded to Allura, “princess.”

“S-see you,” Keith struggled to get out as Allura cheerily waved Shiro out the door. When he was gone, she turned back to Keith with a sympathetic look. It felt like they had been looking at each other for an age before she finally spoke.

“You and Lance,” she began, making to straighten out and sort through the book pile in front of them, “you’ve been working on this all by yourselves?”

‘All this time?’ her eyes seemed to say. A rush of emotion swelled within him and he felt a burning in his throat and behind his eyes. Keith nodded.

“Yes.”

“Hmm.” She pushed a section of books towards him. “These ones would be the best place for you to start.”

“Thank you.”

“It was good of you to take over Lance’s tree sap collecting duties in addition to your own after he got injured,” she came out with suddenly. “It must have been... difficult for you.” Keith knew she wasn’t talking about buckets of sap.

“Yeah,” he replied, clutching his right leg as a phantom pain sprung up and began to spread along it. She watched him as he rubbed small circles into the muscle of his calf until the pain dissipated.

“It is unusual,” she pressed on, “how much longer he’s taking to heal compared to our predictions.” Keith looked up at her, curious. “Nothing to be too concerned about I should add. He
will heal eventually. But the delay seems to indicate that the energy he’s receiving from the pod, the energy he needs in order to heal, is not being directed to the injured areas of his body properly. This means that some of the energy must be getting directed elsewhere. But why this is happening we don’t know.”

Keith wasn’t sure what to make of all this. He clenched his fists in his lap. His knuckles brushed against the black, volcanic stone that he’d been carrying in his pocket since the day of Lance’s injury.

‘Just get better already, idiot.’

“He’ll be okay,” he found himself blurtling out. “He’s probably just being dramatic.” Allura laughed at that and a small smile to broke across his own face.

They fell into a companionable silence, Keith making notes on his tablet as Allura made corrections to some of the badly translated Altean passages. It was quiet, productive, peaceful, nice…

And it made him miss Lance more.

When he found himself re-reading the same passage about five times in a row, Allura gently suggested that they should stop for the night. Keith begrudgingly agreed. He decided to take a few books back to his room anyway. Allura pretended not to notice.

As they began to part ways towards their respective rooms, Keith called out to her, unable to stop himself.

“Allura?” She turned around to look at him inquisitively.

“Yes, Keith?” The words he wanted to say suddenly felt too large in his throat.

‘Why are you helping me with this? You must have some other reason. I know it.’

“Why?” he said eventually, facing burning at how vague his question had ended up sounding. Allura however regarded him as though with perfect understanding.

“The same reasons as you,” she smiled. “And then some.” She laughed as Keith frowned at her response.

“What do you mean?”

“I haven’t quite figured it out myself yet.” Keith raised his eyebrows at her, but she didn’t elaborate any further. Instead, she pointed down at his clenched fist. “Could I ask where you found that black stone you’re holding?”

Keith blinked at her in confusion, before he realised that he’d been turning the strange rock over and over in his fingers as they were talking.

“Can I take a look at it?” she said, and he handed it over to her wordlessly. He watched her sweep her fingertips over the glassy surface, her silvery hair falling over her shoulder as she brought it closer to her face to examine it better.

“I found it back on that island planet,” he said, feeling an uncharacteristic shyness. He hadn’t meant to show it to anyone other than Lance. “On the volcano island Pidge and I were on.”
“Obsidian,” she said, her eyes had a peculiar gleam in them. “It’s very nice.”

“Thanks. I collect them.”

“Collect obsidian?”

“Interesting rocks, pebbles and things.”

“Fascinating.” She had that funny expression on face that she sometimes wore, a cross between bewilderment and a genuine interest, when confronted with human habits and customs that were distinctly alien from her own. It must not be common for Alteans to collect things for the fun of it Keith supposed.

“So you were going to keep it for yourself?” she asked, handing it back to him.

“Yeah I guess,” he said, feeling like he was being analysed under a microscope. “I was going to show it to Lance before he, you know… ” He avoided her eyes, not even sure what he was saying any more. “I’m carrying it in my pocket so that I don’t forget to show it to him when he wakes up.”

“You should give it to him.” Keith gaped at her, red-faced.

“W-what?”

“Give it to him,” she repeated. “I think it would be a good idea.” Before Keith could even begin to put together an articulate response that didn’t solely consist of garbled strings of stuttered half sentences, she’d already turned and waved goodnight with an amiable smile.

“Goodnight, Keith.”

“N-night, Allura.”

He lay awake in bed, turning the obsidian over and over in his fingers for a long time afterwards.

‘Keith?’
‘…’
‘Keith is that you?’
‘… Lance?’
‘Yeah it’s me.’
‘What do you want?’
‘I… don’t know. Where are we?’
‘What do you mean?’
‘It’s kinda dark here. Can’t see where we are.’
‘Go to sleep, Lance.’
'Are we in a cave?'

'What are you talking about?'

'It’s dark. I don’t like the dark. I told you that.'

'It’s dark because it's night.'

'But you said it was “always night in space” remember?’

'…'

'Keith?'

'Is this not a dream?’

'…'

'Lance?'

' “Are you awake or are you dreaming?” ’

'What?’

'That’s what you said to me.’

'Wait, what? Lance?’

'…'

'Lance!’

Heart racing and doused in a cold sweat, Keith lay on his bed, breathing heavily. The obsidian was digging into his palm through his gloved fist. He tore off his sweat-drenched day clothes that he’d accidentally fallen asleep in again and pulled on a clean shirt, hands shaking. He quickly made for the Castle washrooms and splashed his face with cold water as he willed his heart rate to slow down. He tried to recall the fleeting words that he’d heard echoing in his mind.

Lance’s words.

Lance had spoken to him.

He splashed his face again.

It had to have been a dream. The bond was messing with him again. There was no way—

They had never managed to exchange words telepathically before. Emotions and educated guesses at thoughts, sure. But not words. Certainly not full conversations. How was this possible? Lance was weakened, injured, and unconscious. And Keith had been asleep. At the other end of the Castle no less. It made no sense.

Water dripped into his eyes with an unpleasant sting. He stared unblinkingly down at the sink.
“Just a dream,” he said to the drain.

His stomach growled loudly.

He was hungry and sleep deprived. No wonder he was having fever dreams. Keith hadn’t eaten since lunch yesterday. His stomach growled again. Yes, that made more sense.

Keith sighed and towelled his face and bangs dry, grimacing at the dark circles under his eyes.

“Time for an early breakfast I guess.”

The green goo didn’t do anything to quiet the words of dream-Lance that still resonated around his head.

Lance was definitely stronger. Four days now into his cryo sleep, Keith could sense his energy in the corridor leading up to the chamber without having to stand right outside the room. He could feel Lance responding to him as well. His sky-blue light encircled him in warmth as he approached, making Keith’s face heat up at the intimacy of it all.

Which was strange he thought, because it was nothing different to how they’d let their minds interact before.

No.

Keith himself was different.

When he acknowledged that, it wasn’t strange at all.

The obsidian felt heavy in his pocket.

Refocusing his mind, he walked over to Lance’s pod, fingers automatically reaching towards the holographic display to check Lance’s vitals. He grinned as it showed Lance’s leg to be almost healed.

“Hey. How’re you doing?” Lance’s energy thrummed in response. Keith bit his lip. He’d half expected to hear Lance’s voice in his head again. He wasn’t sure if he was disappointed or not.

His lack of sleep then hit him all at once and he slumped to the floor. It was late and he’d been awake for roughly twenty Earth hours now since waking up from his weird fever dream. He shrugged off his jacket and rolled it up into a makeshift pillow, laying down at the foot of the cryo pod. He stared up at Lance’s face, so very still and unlike him.

“You face looks weird from this angle you know?” He laughed when he saw a red flare of annoyance surface in Lance’s mind.

“You’re looking pretty good,” he said, “You’re looking pretty good though for someone who hasn’t had a shower for four days straight.” He froze as his brain caught up to what it had just blurted out in his sleep-deprived state.

“You’re looking pretty good.”
Looking.
Pretty.
Good.

He covered his reddening face with his hands. Lance’s mind was excruciatingly silent. Keeping his eyes firmly shut, Keith removed his hands from his face as Lance’s mind stirred again with the usual nonsensical kaleidoscope of colours. He had to be laughing at Keith.

“Look, I’ve not slept for over twenty hours okay? I didn’t mean — just… forget I said that. And don’t you dare remember it when you wake up.”

Suspicious silence.

Keith scowled.

“Whatever.” He turned on his side, away from the pod, ears still burning.

After a while he felt foolish for sulking in a room with an obviously unconscious person and turned back around. The floor was ice cold on his back and his jacket too thin, making it a poor pillow substitute, but he felt like he could fall asleep at any second all the same. Lance’s mind was encasing him like a warm blanket. He let himself sink into a soft blue of contentment.

“Do you remember talking to me last night?” he said quietly. “Or did I dream that?”

Bright lilacs and blues from Lance floated through his mind.

“I heard your voice. You said it was dark.”

Lance’s energy pulsed as though in thought. Keith waited.

More lilac. Keith gave a wry smile.

“Thought so. Definitely a dream then.” He looked back up at Lance’s face again. “Or maybe you just don’t remember?”

Keith closed his eyes again and tried to clear his mind.

‘Maybe this will work.’

He concentrated on visualising Lance’s face in his mind.

‘Lance? Can you hear this?’

Nothing.

‘Lance?’

“Come on buddy,” he whispered. “I know you can do this.”

‘Lan—’

“Keith?”

Keith couldn’t hold back a choked yell as Pidge’s voice abruptly cut through his consciousness, sending him into a coughing fit. He rolled onto his side away from the pod, trying to catch his
breath. Pidge’s feet were right by his face.

“Pidge! What the hell?!”

“Sorry!” she said, holding up her hands defensively. “I didn’t know you were sleeping.” She looked around the room with searching eyes as though looking for something. “I thought I heard voices in here.” Keith got to his feet and attempted to steady himself.

“I talk in my sleep.”

“You were talking to Lance weren’t you?” she said, not even bothering to acknowledge that he’d spoken, never mind wasting energy on responding to his terrible lie.

“Shut up.” His retort was so limp and lacking in resolve that he might as well have not spoken and saved himself further embarrassment. Lance’s mind burnt orange-umber.

“Relax, Keith. Hunk does it too. No need to get defensive. Although,” she made a show of humming and rubbing her chin in mock thought. “He is his best friend.” Keith bristled.

“Pidge I—”

“Something weird happened on that island planet, Keith,” she interrupted, face serious but not unkind. “And I’ve been patient so far waiting for you to come clean and explain what’s going on between you two, but I’m not sure how much longer I can hold back—”

“I like him, Pidge.”

Keith felt as though he would topple over from the sheer force of how hard and fast his heart was beating against his chest. He watched as Pidge’s eyes grew wider behind her glasses, making them look even more owl-like than usual. A few ticks passed before she looked away from him, her face slightly pink.

“Well, I thought as much, but I didn’t expect you to come out and say it like that,” she muttered, scratching her head in embarrassment. “Congratulations I guess?”

“T-thanks.” Keith stared at her intently, mind racing as he felt his face grow hotter. Lance’s mind was still.

“Do you, um, want to talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“Sure?”

“… maybe outside.”

“What’s wrong with talking in here?” She gestured her head towards Lance’s pod. “It’s not like he can hear us.”

“You’d be surprised,” Keith thought. ‘Or maybe she wouldn’t be? She was Pidge after all. He sighed.

“Fine.” Keith could only pray to the stars that he was right about Lance having trouble holding onto memories in his comatose state. He sat back down on the floor and Pidge joined him, adjusting her glasses awkwardly and clearing her throat.
“So…”

“So.”

“Do you think,” she glanced up at Lance’s sleeping form and back to Keith again. “Do you think he feels the same?” Keith looked away from her. He definitely didn’t want this conversation.

“There are times when I think so,” he said, feeling like he was talking with thick treacle stuck in his mouth. “But it’s complicated…” He trailed off. It wasn’t like he could talk about the confusing nature of their bond and its unfortunate side effects.

Or maybe he could?

Pidge was by far the smartest and most level-headed of the crew he reasoned, and the best at keeping secrets that’s for sure. She could probably help them out in secret without it becoming a burden on the team as a whole.

He looked up at Lance, tracing his eyes over his immobile form and too relaxed facial features. Maybe he’d wait until Lance woke up first.

Keith looked over at Pidge as she yawned loudly and shifted beside him, stretching unnecessarily as she stood up.

“Well, that’s as much relationship advice as I’m willing to offer—”

“You didn’t give any.”

“Exactly,” she turned to him with a mischievous grin. “Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone either.” Keith’s shoulders sagged in relief. “But if you think the others aren’t getting at least a little bit suspicious, you’re more of an idiot than the one you’re crushing on.”

Keith groaned and threw his balled up jacket at her fast retreating form. She ran laughing out the room. He stared down at his jacket on the floor for a few ticks before a thought struck him.

“Hey, Pidge! Wait!” He caught up with her just before she rounded the corridor.

“What?”

“What’s it called when people see things, things that don’t have colours, as having colours?” She raised an eyebrow.

“You mean synesthesia?”

“If that’s what it’s called, then yeah.” Pidge laughed at that.

“Why do you want to know?”

“Lance has it.”

“Oh?”

“He thinks numbers have colours.”

“I see…”
“Words too. And people and places.”

“Weird.”

“Yeah, that’s what I said. Hunk is yellow to him.”

“Huh. What colour am I?”

“Orange.”

“… I should be green.”

“Exactly!”

His jacket lay forgotten on the cryo chamber floor.

‘You left without saying goodnight. Rude.’

‘Huh?’

‘You came by again last night didn’t you? At least I thought you did.’

‘Lance?’

‘No it’s Coran. Of course it’s me.’

‘I’m trying to sleep.’

‘Well I was trying to sleep and you woke me up saying weird things, so it’s only fair that I return the favour.’

‘What are you talking about? You’re in a coma. How can you “try to sleep” when you’re already in a chemically induced sleep?’

‘To be honest? I’m not sure.’

‘There’s a surprise.’

‘Am I awake or am I dreaming?’

‘Are you asking me?’

‘Maybe. Are you awake or are you dreaming, Keith?’

‘That’s not what I meant.’

‘I know. You left your jacket by the way.’

‘What?’

‘…’
It didn’t feel like waking up. More like he’d been awake the entire time but with his eyes closed. He felt tired enough for that to be the case anyway. Tired yet wide, wide awake with more of Lance’s words bouncing around his head and heart racing like he’d just taken a long run off a cliff edge.

Keith groaned and tugged roughly at the hair on the sides of his head. His head hurt and Lance’s voice would not go away.

‘Just shut up!’ he yelled internally.

‘Where am I? What happened? Oh right I fell. Ow! It’s way too bright in here!’

Wait a minute.

‘What the quiznak is wrong with Coran?! Why has he put the Castle lights on so bright?’

This was—

‘And where is Hunk?! I refuse to believe that Pidge and Shiro are the only ones who came to tearfully celebrate my glorious return to the land of the living. He’s meant to be my best fri— OW SHIT HUNK WHY?!’

Lance.

‘WHY WOULD YOU HUG A MAN HARD ENOUGH TO CRUSH HIS BONES WHEN HE HAS JUST SPENT A GOOD AMOUNT OF TIME GROWING THEM BACK?! Oh god don’t spin me around Hunk please I’m going to be sick.’

Keith threw off his blankets.

‘How long have I been in here anyway?’

Keith fell over in his attempt to put his shoes on and run at the same time.

‘And where’s Keith?’

His lungs burned from running—

‘Keith?’

Keith burst unceremoniously through the cryo chamber entrance, panting and hair awry. He brushed it irritably off his face, trying to blow the loose strands away from where they clung to his now sweaty face.

Hunk was crushing Lance in a humongous hug, tears in his eyes as he babbled. Shiro and Pidge were beaming at them both as Coran already set about cleaning up the cryo pod behind them.

And Lance was —
Keith had to look away.

Lance was radiant.

He was grinning wildly despite his protests against Hunk’s tight hug, holding onto his friend close and patting his head consolingly as Hunk ranted into his shoulder.

Keith wondered if this was what Lance’s ‘Lion Vision’ was like.

“Hunk, chill out!” Lance was saying between laughs. “It’s not like I was shot down or anything. I just fell out a tree. No big deal.”

“Dude, you can die from falling that high you know?!”

Keith sidled up beside Shiro who grinned at him, putting an arm around his shoulders in a quick squeeze before clapping a hand on Lance’s back.

“Good to have you back, Lance,” Shiro said. Lance smiled brightly.

“Thanks! And ah, sorry for falling out a tree at your feet —”

“That’s fine.”

“—and throwing up in your lion—”

“Lance —”

“—twice.”

“Seriously it’s oka—”

“And thanks for lending me your emergency toothbrush afterwards.” Lance frowned. “Why do you even have that anyway?”

“I’m leaving now.”

Doubled up with laughter, Pidge wobbled after Shiro as he stalked out the room. “You have an emergency toothbrush in your lion?” Keith heard her whisper breathlessly.

“I like to be prepared,” Shiro whispered back. Keith couldn’t hold back his laughter at that. Lance turned to look at him as though only just realising he was there. Keith opened his mouth to speak but no words came out.

What in the Universe could he say?

Hunk’s eyes suddenly brightened and he grabbed onto Lance anxiously. Lance looked away from Keith again. Keith’s heart felt heavy.

“You need to eat!” Hunk said to Lance. “Wait right there I’ll bring you something!”

“Hunk wait! Can’t I just go to the —”

Hunk ran out the room.

“—dining room?” Lance turned to Keith again at last, shrugging. “Guess we’re waiting here then huh?”
“I guess.” Keith barely noticed as Coran tidied up his cleaning materials and slunk out the room after Hunk. Keith breathed in deeply. Lance’s scent saturated his mind as his super senses kicked in. He felt giddy.

“Keith?”

Lance’s voice was unusually quiet. Keith still couldn’t find the right words to say. So he thought of all the wrong ones instead.

‘I missed you.’

‘I thought our bond had broken.’

‘I’m glad you’re okay.’

‘I want to hold you, touch you —’

The desire to hold Lance closer was overwhelming. Keith took a step forward, reaching out towards him. Lance met him halfway.

It was nothing like the last time. Lance held him close, his hands on Keith’s waist, in his hair, pulling Keith’s head closer towards him and into his neck. Keith inhaled his scent and felt weightless. He clung harder onto Lance’s shoulders, feet unsteady. He could feel the muscles of Lance’s back through the thin fabric of his suit, moving beneath his fingertips and hot to the touch despite him being frozen in a cryo pod only moments before, so different to the last time when they had been separated by layers of flight suit and armour. Lance’s mind opened up anew and filled Keith’s with a dizzying ocean of colour and emotion. It mingled with his own befuddling mess of feelings to leave behind an indistinct but dazzling fusion that neither of them could fully understand but didn’t care to. All Keith knew was that yes, he definitely did like Lance. He liked him a lot. Bond or no bond.

At least, he hoped that it wasn’t just the bond.

He didn’t want to stop feeling this way.

And Lance—

Slowly, painfully, Keith started to pull away.

Was it the same for him?

Keith shut down his mind as hard as he could.

‘There’s no way to tell —’

Lance seemed reluctant to let him go, but Keith quashed that hopeful thought.

‘—not unless I ask him.’

He held onto Keith’s arms, then wrists, fingers —

‘And Hunk will be back soon —’

Lance’s fingertips trembled against his own before falling away.

‘Now is not the time.’
Lance’s mind ebbed as Keith looked up to meet his eyes once more.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Lance said, and Keith couldn’t contain his disbelief.

“That’s my line. You’ve been in a cryo pod for almost five days!”

“Really? Five days? I kinda thought that these fancy healing pod things would fix up broken legs quicker than that.”

“You also had multiple fractures and a concussion!”

“My point still stands. But anyway,” he looked at Keith with a firm intensity. “Are you okay?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Something happened to you right? I felt it!”

“What?”

“That’s why I fell!”

“What do you mean—?”

Keith then remembered Lance in his delirious state.

‘It’s your fault, ’ he’d said. Keith had thought that Lance had just been teasing him as usual. But he’d actually meant it? Lance was watching him with uncertainty.

“Something happened didn’t it? On that planet? I felt you panicking... ” He rubbed the back of his neck, avoiding Keith’s gaze. “I was worried about you.” Keith frowned at him as he tried to recall anything that could have possibly—

Wait.

‘Does he mean... ?’

“I slipped,” Keith blurted out. Lance looked at him blankly.

“You... slipped?”

“Slipped on a rock and landed in some black sand. I was okay. I wasn’t hurt.”

Lance was silent for a few moments, his face very pink.

“Oh,” he said at last.

“So,” Keith said after an awkward pause, “You fell because of me?” Lance groaned and buried his face in his hands.

“I can’t believe I broke my leg because you essentially tripped over your own feet.”

“I... ” Keith tried to suppress the waves of guilt that threatened to spill out of his head. “I’m sorry.” He must have done a much a worse job of holding back his projections than he’d thought however, because Lance’s mind flickered with annoyance and he gripped Keith roughly by the shoulders, startling him into looking up.

“Don’t be an idiot and start blaming yourself,” he said, face set in a determined scowl.
‘I’m the idiot here.’

The lone bashful thought that wasn’t his own drifted through Keith’s mind. But before he could comment on it, Lance gave him a playful shove.

“Okay?” he said, eyes wandering over Keith’s face, searching.

“Yeah.” Lance’s hand lingered on his shoulder. Keith longed to lean closer into his touch. He moved away, Lance’s fingertips brushing his arm as he did.

“I should get going. Get something to eat,” Keith said. The air felt humid but not because of his ‘Lion Senses’.

“Alright.” Lance said with an unusual weariness. His mind was open, welcoming, questioning, but with a touch of something like discontent. Keith’s skin still tingled from where Lance had touched him.

“See you later.”

He started walking away before he could dwell on these revelations any more than necessary.

“Hey, Keith! Don’t forget your jacket.”

“Huh?”

“You left your jacket.”

Keith turned back around to see Lance holding out his jacket towards him.

You left your jacket by the way.

What?

The half-remembered, dream-like conversation resurfaced in his mind. Hesitantly, he reached out and grasped the fabric.

‘You said that to me before, remember?’ Keith thought as his eyes met Lance’s.

“Thanks,” Keith said, treading with caution through Lance’s mind but finding nothing.

‘Do you remember what Pidge and I talked about last night? Did you hear what I said?’

He didn’t know what kind of expression he was wearing, but whatever it was made Lance furrow his brow in confusion, eyes unsure.

“I must have left it in here last night,” Keith said watching Lance carefully. Lance seemed transfixed, hands still holding onto Keith’s jacket.

“You… came to visit me?”

‘He doesn’t remember.’

The resulting disappointment Keith felt took him by surprise. Lance didn’t remember his ill-timed
confession, his embarrassing, sleep-deprived remarks. Surely he should feel relieved?

‘But I want him to know.’

“Do you,” Keith licked his lips nervously, “remember anything from the past few days?” He could feel the cogs turning in Lance’s head as his energy hummed in deep concentration.

“You were… in my dreams,” he said. Keith raised an eyebrow and Lance immediately flushed red.

“That came out wrong! I mean… I think I remember us talking. In a dream.”

“It wasn’t a dream.”

“What?”

“I don’t know how, but we managed to talk. Telepathically.”

“You mean, actual words?”

“Yeah.”

“Seriously?!”

“I heard you this morning when you came out your pod.”

“Woah that’s awesome!”

“Your whining woke me up. It wasn’t awesome.”

“Hey you’d be whining too if you’d been stuck in that thing for five days! So,” he paused, eyes shining. “How do we do it again?”

“No idea.”

“Oh come on really?”

“You’re the one who always initiates it! How would I know?”

“Hmm.”

Lance’s eyes narrowed at him in a piercing stare, which would have made Keith feel uncomfortable if Lance hadn’t also brought his index and middle fingers to his forehead again in his mock mind-reader pose. Keith was about give him a disdainful look in response, but was stopped short as a loud, familiar voice rang in his mind.

‘Lance to Keith, Lance to Keith.’ Keith’s mouth fell open with incredulity. ‘Come in, Keith. This is your Captain speaking.’

“How did you do that?!” Keith couldn’t help but feel irritated at the ease at which Lance had apparently grasped this new skill. Lance shrugged.

“I just concentrated really hard on beaming the thought to you. Nothing special.” Keith glowered.

“I tried that for ages last night and got no response from you!”

“I’m just naturally better at this than you okay? Accept it. And why would you try it when I was asleep in the pod? Of course it didn’t work!”
“We had full conversations in our sleep!”

“We did?”

“Yes!”

“Huh. Well I guess we’ve just got to work on it.”

“I guess.” Keith rubbed his eyes, suddenly feeling very drained. Lance seemed to have that effect on him. For more reasons than one these days. “Anyway, I’m going to get something to eat,” he looked back at Lance, and felt his mind brush his own with a soft touch that sent tremors down his spine. “Do you want to come with me?” Lance nodded.

“Yeah, screw this I’m not waiting around for Hunk to deliver food to me when I’ve got five-days-worth of food to catch up on.” He began to stomp out the room. “I can’t believe he thinks I’m so delicate that I’ll just keel over from walking a few steps.”

Lance barely finished his sentence before his feet gave out underneath him. Keith leapt forward to catch him.

“Well he’s not wrong.”

“Shut up.”

“But if you’re so determined to get to the dining room, I guess I could spare a shoulder for you to lean on.” Lance huffed and folded his arms across his chest.

“Well, it is only fair that you return the favour after I selflessly carried you all the way from the control room last time.”

“Stop talking and put your arm around me.”

“Alright, pushy!”

Lance was smiling however.

‘Thanks.’

Keith smiled at the heartfelt thought Lance sent his way, faint murmur of hope stirred in his chest.

‘Anytime,’ he sent back.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the continued support! Find me on tumblr: purpleneutrino.tumblr.com (sending chats instead of asks might better as tumblr seems to eat my responses a lot -_- )

Artwork coming soon! ^-^ <3 Art now added! Tumblr link here!
Decoherence

Chapter by mackerelmademedoit

Chapter Notes

Credit to my bf for being my beta (and for getting into heated debates with me about the scientific nature of fictional, telepathic bonds).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance’s mind was a mess — a turbulent whirlwind of scattered, dream-like memories and jumbled conversations that he couldn’t make sense of even if his life depended on it. If Lance had to describe it, it was like stitching back together a garment riddled with holes, except the fabric was infinitely large, the patches were all the wrong colour and he’d run out of thread at around the hundredth hole. His head and figuratively thimbled fingers hurt from trying.

He sat up from where he’d been lying on Hunk’s bed and tried instead to focus on his friend sat opposite him. Hunk was talking. Or at least he appeared to be. His mouth was moving but all Lance could hear were echoes of Keith.

You can hear me in there I know it.

Who am I?

Don’t ignore me.

Lance squeezed his eyes shut and his mind erupted in multi-coloured starbursts — a flood of emotional memories that his brain had backlogged and decided to unleash upon him at seemingly random moments throughout the day, giving him little, if any, clarification of what he’d actually experienced during his time in the pod.

Do you remember talking to me last night?

What do you think of me?

It was nothing like the last time he had woken up from cryo sleep. That had only felt like waking up after a long nap.
Are you awake or are you dreaming?

This time he felt like he hadn’t slept at all. More like he’d been a fish in a tank, swimming blind, aimlessly drifting for what felt like an eternal, waking dream. Then he’d been hooked, dragged back up towards the surface and flung unceremoniously onto the floor, left gasping for breath. Everything had been too bright.

Maybe you just don’t remember?

“Are you okay? You’re spacing out on me again.”

Lance’s mind fell, abruptly, blissfully silent at Hunk’s words. Lance turned to look at him.

“Huh? Oh yeah I’m fine.” Forcing a grin, Lance hoped it looked at least a little bit natural. “It’s just… taking my brain a while to catch up you know? Still defrosting.” He grinned for real then as Hunk broke out into giggles.

“Yeah I guess you were in there a while.”

“Yeah.”

Silences between him and Hunk were usually always comfortable. The subsequent silence that fell made Lance want to jump back into the cryo pod for another week. He only had to take one look at Hunk’s face, eyes gleaming and mouth set into a determined frown, to know that he was gearing up to ask Lance something that was going to make him feel awkward in at least five different ways. As he began to sweat under the intensity of Hunk’s gaze, Lance was reminded once again of Keith and the fierce look in his eyes as Lance had handed him back his jacket that morning.

Do you remember anything from the past few days?

Lance knew in that moment that he had forgotten something important. That something niggled at the back of his mind and lingered in the darkness of Keith’s irises as they’d bored into his own, daring him, pleading —

It made Lance want to tear his own hair out in frustration.

He tugged at the scarf at his wrist instead. Hunk’s eyes followed the movement. Lance froze. He suddenly knew exactly what Hunk was desperate to ask him about.

‘I held Keith’s goddamn hand in front of his goddamn face like a goddamn idiot!’

Hunk opened his mouth and Lance blurted out the first thing that came to mind before Hunk had even taken a breath.
“So! Um… did you guys all come and visit me then?” He cringed inwardly as Hunk gave him an incredulous look.

“Duh, why wouldn’t we?” Lance smiled and looked down at the scarf on his wrist again.

“Everyday?”

“Mostly. I did anyway.” Hunk gave his shoulder a playful nudge with his own and Lance’s thoughts felt a little lighter.

“Thanks man.” He rolled the soft, red fabric of the scarf between his fingertips, chewing his lip as he considered his next words. “Err, how about the others?”

“He came to visit you, Lance if that’s what you’re asking.”

“I didn’t mention Keith!”

Hunk regarded him with a deadpan stare and he felt his face flush angrily in response.

“Lance—”

“Dude—”

“Just—” Lance clenched his jaw and held up his hands when Hunk looked like he was about to interject again. “He said he left his jacket in the cryo chamber the other night okay, so I was just curious!”

“Uh huh.” Lance fought the urge to childishly tug on Hunk’s headband, “He visited you most nights I think.”

“You think?”

“According to Pidge.”

“Pidge?!”

“He’s not as good at sneaking around as he thinks he is.” Lance snorted.

“Why was he even sneaking?”

“Hmm, I don’t think he wanted to be seen visiting you during the day.”

Lance rolled his eyes and tried to ignore the small pang of hurt in his chest. Hunk threw out his hands, looking vindicated.

“Right? I told him it was fine and that we all cared about you, so he shouldn’t worry —” A small smile twitched at the corner of Lance’s mouth.

‘So he was nervous? He did care.’

He brought a hand to his face. It was starting to feel warm again.

“—and you went and waited outside his pod when he was in there—”

What? Lance’s mind came screeching to a halt. “Wait, wait, wait, Hunk back up —”
“—so it’s not like he should be embarrassed or anything. We’re all friends right?”

“You told him that?!”

“… it may have slipped out.”

“HUNK!” Lance screeched, his voice cracking unpleasantly. He was so hot now he couldn’t feel his face.

“What?”

“This is why I don’t want to tell you secrets anymore!”

“Sorry, sorry! It’s just hard sometimes you know? And it wasn’t exactly a secret!”

Lance pursed his lips and fell back down onto the bed, turning his face away from Hunk and opting instead to mutter into the bed sheets.

“You didn’t have to tell him though.” Keith’s scarf was burning him. He tugged at it agitatedly. Hunk was watching him again but Lance was past caring. He braced himself.

“I’ve been meaning to ask,” Hunk said, all of a sudden sounding more hesitant with his words. Curious, Lance peered up at him. “Is that… Keith’s?” He pointed down at the offending red fabric and Lance hastened to pull down his jacket sleeve.

“Nope!”

“I’m pretty sure —”

“It’s definitely mine.”

“You guys are spending a lot more time together lately.”

“We’re not!”

“And you were holding hands at the table…”

“Okay, one: that was an accident! And two: it wasn’t holding! Just… touching. Accidentally.” Lance flailed his arms desperately, but Hunk ignored him and ploughed on.

“I mean, it’s great! Really great for team that you’re, err, bonding more and everything but…” Brow furrowed, Lance narrowed his eyes at the tentative tone in Hunk’s voice.

“What?”

“I’m glad you’re better friends now but… ” He glanced nervously at him. “We’re still cool right?” Lance blinked at him.

“What are you talking about? Why wouldn’t we be?”

“You guys have a lot in common —”

“Hardly.”

“You’re both great pilots.”

“You’re a pilot too!”
“I’m still only an engineer at heart.”

“Hunk, you’re not making any sense.” A thought then struck him and he bit back a grin. “…are you jealous?”

“No, no, no I’m —” Lance felt a little smug at Hunk now being the one squirming, hands gesturing frantically.

“You totally are! You’re _friend jealous!_”

“I’m not! It just... it feels like there’s something you’re not telling me.” Lance held his breath as guilt began to prickle again in the pit of his stomach. “Something you’re going through that you can talk to Keith about but not me for some reason.”

“Hunk —”

“I just want you to know that, whatever it is, you can tell me. I’ll understand.”

‘I know you will.’

“It’s nothing like that.” Lance swallowed, meeting Hunk’s gaze with difficulty. “There isn’t anything that I would prefer to talk to Keith about instead of you. You know that.” It wasn’t a lie, but it hurt in the same way all the same.

‘It will have to do. For now.’

Hunk finally relaxed and gave him a warm smile. Lance felt the pain in his chest ease a little. He closed his eyes and settled more comfortably into the bed.

“So...” Hunk said after a while, his smile twitching into something more sly. “When do I get _my_ friendship pendant?”

Lance threw a pillow at him.

‘Keith?’

‘...’

‘Are you there?’

‘Yeah I’m here.’

‘So I guess this telepathy thing works better when we’re both sleeping huh?’

‘I guess.’

‘I can actually hear your thoughts!’

‘So?’

‘This is the first time I remember hearing them.’
'I never hear them during the day, but you hear mine all the time right?'
'Yeah. You don’t shut up.'
'Hey! At least I can do it. You’re not even trying.'
'I am! It’s just… hard.'
'It’s a piece of cake! You’re doing it right now'
'It feels easier this way.'
'Maybe because you’re actually chilling out for once.'
'What’s that supposed to mean?'
'Dude, you’re kidding right? You’re way too intense. Like, all the time. It worries me.'
'You worry about me?'
'Arghh, not like, well… Yeah actually I guess I do? I worry about everyone. All the time.'
'…'
'Sorry it’s weird talking like this. It’s like…'
'Floaty?'
'Yeah! Like you’re in a dream. No filter. I just say whatever comes into my head without thinking.'
'That’s because we ARE thinking.'
'Oh. Yeah you’re right. Wow I say stupid shit sometimes.'
'Haha so you admit it?'
'Wait no I didn’t mean that!'
'I’m never forgetting you said that to me.'
'Keith!'
'Never.'
'Urgh.'
'…'
'…'
'You’re not stupid though, Lance.'
'Um…'
'You actually have pretty smart ideas sometimes.'
‘… thanks?’

‘… shit.’

‘Ha!’

‘Shut up.’

‘You think I’m smart!’

‘No, I think you have smart ideas. SOMETIMES!’

‘What else do you think about me?’

‘You are — no. I’m not talking to you anymore. Go back to sleep.’

‘I’m what? We’re already sleeping.’

‘Go away, go away, go away, go away go—’

‘Fine, whatever.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘You shouldn’t think that about yourself.’

‘Keith?’

‘Sorry. It’s hard to stop, you know, thinking. Keep my mind blank.’

‘It was one comment. Let it go buddy. I’m fine. I mean, thanks for caring, but I’m fine. Seriously.’

‘You think stuff like that all the time though.’

‘I do?’

‘You don’t notice?’

‘Not really?’

‘You have those thoughts a lot.’

‘Isn’t that normal?’

‘I don’t know. I’ve not exactly heard anyone else’s thoughts have I?’

‘Good point.’

‘But even if it’s normal, you shouldn’t be thinking that.’

‘Jeez, how bad AM I?’

‘You say stuff like “Ah I’m such an idiot”, “I mess that up all the time”, “Wow I’m really bad at this”, “I wish I was as good as that”, “I’ll never be that good”. It doesn’t sound like you. I don’t get it.’
‘Wow.’

‘Sorry.’

‘No, no it’s fine. Shit. You heard all that? You’re not messing with me?’

‘Why would I make that up?’

‘Okay, well this is embarrassing.’

‘Sorry.’

‘Stop apologising! I should be doing that.’

‘What? Why?’

‘Because you had to hear all that.’

‘It’s fine. I manage to block you out most of the time. And you don’t broadcast all your thoughts.’

‘Thank God.’

‘Just a lot of them.’

‘Kill me now.’

‘Relax. I haven’t heard anything too bad. Yet.’

‘Apart from all the embarrassing stuff you just listed before.’

‘It wasn’t that bad.’

‘…’

‘Lance?’

‘I don’t know why I was thinking that stuff.’

‘Do you believe it?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘Well you shouldn’t.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘Keith?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Thank you.’

‘…’

‘…’
‘That’s okay.’

‘…’

‘Lance?’

‘I’m... I think I’m falling asleep. Again.’

‘I thought we were already asleep?’

‘A sleepier sleep.’

‘Deeper.’

‘Huh?’

‘It’s a deeper sleep. And... me too. I think.’

‘Good. I’m happy.’

‘What?’

‘I’m... happy. Night, Keith.’

‘Night, Lance.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘..’

‘I’m happy too.’

“I want to tell Hunk.”

Keith turned around to look at him, a familiar, tiny frown on his face that Lance for some reason had begun to find endearing. A fleeting whisper of apprehension from Keith’s mind brushed against his own before it was quickly whisked away as Keith erected a mental wall. He was getting better at that lately Lance noticed.

“About...?” Keith said, voice wary.

“Us.” Keith’s ears went pink as Lance felt his own face colour.

‘Bad wording.’

“I meant this!” Lance said hurriedly, gesturing frantically between them. ‘Nope still bad.’ Keith was looking more mortified by the second. “Our bo— the bond.” Keith made a face. ‘Nailed it.’

Keith looked away from him, picking at his gloves.
“No,” he said, voice clipped. Anger flared in Lance’s gut, a feeling he recognised and often associated with Keith, but it now felt strangely foreign. He wondered when that had started happening.

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t think it’s a good idea right now.” Lance felt something within him snap.

“Dammit Keith, how long are you planning to keep this up?! You’re not protecting anyone you know?”

Lance knew immediately that his impromptu outburst had hit a chink in Keith’s armour. He felt Keith’s defenses crumble and his mind begin to simmer with resentment. Lance felt a chill run through him as Keith turned back around to look at him, face hard and cold.

“Did you come to my room to lecture me, or to practice this telepathic thing?” Keith said scathingly. “Because if it’s the first one, then I think you should leave.” Lance swallowed, any response he may have had extinguished by the molten ripples of fury that emanated from the other boy, along with his sharp words.

‘I messed up again huh,’ Lance thought.

To his surprise, he felt Keith’s anger then begin to cool rapidly, as though Lance and Blue had hit it with one of their ice beams. When he met Keith’s eyes again, his gaze had lost all of its original harshness. Lance opened his mind to Keith’s but felt and heard nothing.

“What are you thinking?” He said, keeping his stare firm as Keith looked startled.

“Huh?” he said after a long pause. Lance sighed.

“I meant… broadcast your thoughts to me. I’ve barely heard yours. We’re meant to be practicing aren’t we? I want to know what you’re thinking.”

“Right.”

Lance almost wished he hadn’t said that. With Keith’s look of intense concentration directed at him, he found it hard to breathe. He closed his eyes and emptied his mind, listening.

‘I told you not to think those kinds of things about yourself.’

Lance choked on his own spit. Even though he’d been listening out for it, hearing Keith’s voice in his head like this during the day when he was wide awake wasn’t any less disconcerting. Face flushed and eyes shining, Keith was grinning at him broadly.

“Did I do it?” he said, his mind teeming with a tentative excitement, even if his words betrayed a note of uncertainty. His voice rang louder than usual in Lance’s ears despite his soft tone, the usual sign to Lance that his ‘Lion Hearing’ had kicked in. All kinds of sounds began to make themselves known around him, threatening to drown out his mind. Keith was waiting on his response, a small crease forming in the middle of his forehead as he drew his eyebrows together in slight concern. Lance could hear the air rushing through Keith’s lungs as he took a breath, preparing to speak. Garbled noises tumbled all around him, suffocating, getting louder and louder, building up to a crescendo, and then —

A steady beat.
Keith’s heart.

Lance clung onto it and focused. Everything else began to melt away. The overwhelming background noises fading steadily with each heartbeat until it was all he could hear. Unconsciously, he brought his hand to his own chest, feeling his heart slowly fall into sync with Keith’s.

“Lance? You okay?”

Keith’s voice was a normal volume again and the comforting beat was gone. Lance exhaled slowly. He missed it already.

“Y-yeah sorry,” he said. “It’s just weird hearing your voice in my head you know?” He wasn’t sure why he was lying, but it sounded better than: ‘I just used my super hearing to listen to your heartbeat and found it much more calming that I probably should have done’, at any rate. His worries were pushed aside however as Keith was grinned wildly at him again.

“So it worked? You heard me?”

“Yeah.”

“Awesome!”

He was so used to seeing Keith seemingly mastering everything he set his mind to with ease, that Lance couldn’t help feeling taken aback by Keith’s unbridled enthusiasm at his success. It was oddly charming.

“What did you mean by that anyway?” Lance said, trying not to let himself get caught up in the exhilarating light of Keith’s mind. “Think what things about myself?” Keith frowned at him.

“You were having those thoughts again. The ones we talked about last night.”

Ah. Lance had forgotten about that. Keith avoided his eyes, the flush on his face now more pronounced and irate. Lance shared in his discomfort. ‘Why was this so much easier to talk about last night?’ He fidgeted with edges of his jacket sleeve. Keith’s voice then floated through his mind again.

“You didn’t mess up.’

Keith’s voice in his head was noticeably softer than his normal speaking voice. It kind of sounded like —

—like it had done when Lance had been in the pod.

“You and Hunk,” Lance blurted out, making Keith’s eyes snap back towards him in surprise. “You were talking outside my pod.” Keith’s eyes widened.

“You remember?” Keith’s mind swirled around Lance, equal parts curious and apprehensive.

“Hunk was talking to me,” Lance recalled the bright, golden-yellow of Hunk’s light breaking through darkness. “And then —”

‘I heard your voice.’

Lance remembered now. After he’d been trying so hard and for so long to reach out of the dark and unforgiving cold of cryo sleep, he’d finally felt it.
‘I hadn’t felt your presence in so long.’

Keith had been so warm, his voice painting colours all around him.

―you decided to stay,” he finished, unable to keep a smile off his face. Keith’s mind was still and quiet as he stared back at Lance.

“Yeah. I did,” Keith said at last.

“And you asked me a lot of dumb questions.” Keith laughed.

“Yeah.”

“Hunk wasn’t nearly as demanding of me in my wounded state.” Keith laughed again, eyes softening into a warm but contemplating look as they met Lance’s.

“Why do you want to tell him so much about this anyway?” he said. “What good will it do?” There was no trace of his previous anger, his face serious and sincere. Lance pondered over what say.

‘Because he’s my best friend and I hate lying to him about this.’

“It’s not lying. Technically.” Lance flinched at Keith’s response. Someone replying out loud to his thoughts was not something he could ever get used to he was sure of it. He rubbed the back of neck.

“Ah shoot, I did it again didn’t I?”

“Did what?”

“I didn’t mean to send that thought to you.”

“Oh.”

‘Damnit.’ Lance gritted his teeth with the effort of trying to keep his thoughts from racing. ‘I’ve got to get this under control or I’m going to end up thinking of something really stupid.’

Keith bit his lip as though holding back a grin.

‘Oh crap he heard that didn’t he?’

Keith was vibrating with suppressed laughter.

“Stop laughing!”

He only laughed harder. There were tears in his eyes as he clutched his stomach and Lance couldn’t help smiling then when Keith’s mind, overflowing with amusement, interspersed with his own. Lance’s heart felt light.

‘You should smile more,’ Lance thought.

Keith’s laughter stopped abruptly. Lance could only stare at him as his own mind flatlined.

“Uhh,” Keith said. His mind was moving too fast for Lance to get a lock down on anything, cycling through a multitude of emotions faster than he could blink.

“Y-you’re too serious!” Lance said hurriedly, desperate to rectify the increasingly awkward
situation. “You need to, you know, relax and laugh more! You’re actually a fun guy to be around and… yeah.” This was going terribly. Whatever ‘this’ was. For the second time in the past few days Lance found himself wishing that he could crawl back into the cryo pod and sleep for a few thousand years.

Strangely enough, Keith didn’t look mad. He didn’t even look too embarrassed. In fact, he had a small smile on his face, his mind swimming with something that felt to Lance like a warm fondness. He then realised with a start that Keith was now alarmingly close. Lance tried to take a step back but couldn’t move. There was a familiar look on Keith’s face, the kind of expression he got when he and Red were pulling off a skilful battle manoeuvre. With that look coupled with the warmth of Keith’s mind and the slight redness of his face however, it left Lance with a feeling of unease. Keith then opened his mouth to speak and panic rose up within Lance like bile.

“Lance I—”

“-look, this bond is weird okay?” Lance interrupted, half expecting real bile to come out his mouth instead of his jumbled words. “It makes us think, see, do, feel all these things that we wouldn’t usually do!” Something shifted in Keith’s mind at that. “All I have to do is touch you and I can see for miles. Your whole face lights up like a supernova and your eyes—”

It was happening now as he spoke. Keith’s skin was ethereal, glowing, his eyes shining bright with the reflected the broken light, the most vivid colour he’d ever seen them. Every eyelash appeared to be trembling.

“—and I can hear everything!” he babbled, something unpleasant settling in his chest as he saw the smile fading from Keith’s face. “Hunk snoring two doors down from me, the mice scurrying around Allura’s chamber on the other side of the Castle, your heartbeat when you sit across from me…” Keith mouth opened and closed, but he said nothing. “That’s not normal. That’s not me.” What was he saying? Why was he saying all this? “It’s got nothing to do with me.” He paused to catch his breath, heart pounding. “I’m sorry. I can’t control it. Can’t control these thoughts and feelings I’m having. It controls us.”

They stood in silence. Lance fought to control his breathing as Keith’s stare burned into him.

“As I was saying,” Keith said after a few moments, carrying on as if Lance had merely commented on the weather. “I wanted to give you something.” Lance watched, dumbstruck as Keith dropped his eyes, bangs concealing his face, as he made to pull something out his pocket. He thrust his outstretched palm towards Lance.

“Here,” he said, eyes focused somewhere over Lance’s left shoulder and a light flush beginning to creep across his face. Lance blinked down at the small black stone in Keith’s hand.

“I found it on that weird volcano island,” Keith said, still not quite meeting his eyes. “It’s obsidian. I thought maybe… you’d like to have it. To start a new collection. Or something.”

Lance gaped at him.

“Whatever, just take it!” Keith said hotly, grabbing Lance’s hand and slapping the stone into his palm with enough force to set it stinging. As he turned to stalk out the room, Lance’s brain began to work again. Gripping the stone tightly in his hand, he reached out with his other to grab Keith’s arm before he could storm out the door.

“Keith, wait!” Keith turned to him, face now furiously red.
“What?!”
“T-thank you.”
“Don’t mention it.”

He pulled his arm free of Lance’s grip, albeit with a much more gentle motion than what the forceful delivery of his words were suggesting, and walked briskly out the room. Lance called after him.

“What are you going?”
“Back to my room.”

The door shut behind him with a metallic hiss. Lance stared after him, bewildered, speaking aloud to the now empty room.

“But this is your room.”

---

**Obsidian:** A stone of truth, protection, integrity, honesty and healing. Particularly effective as a shield against psychic attacks and repelling negative thoughts. Bringing clarity to the mind and clearing confusion, its reflective surface serves as a mirror through which one can more clearly see who they truly are, thus revealing one’s true capabilities. Obsidian works to dispel emotional blockages and past traumas to instead promote qualities of strength, compassion and courage, allowing the inner warrior to awaken. This powerful stone provides support through times of change, urging exploration of the unknown and opening up new horizons.

Lance peered down at the translated Altean passage, re-reading it a few times to make sure. His heart lurched in his chest. What did Keith mean by giving him this stone? Flustered, he tossed aside the electronic textbook and flopped down onto his bed. He held up the stone in question to his face, taking in his own reflection on its black, glossy surface. Smirking, he angled the stone to admire his face from different angles. It really was like a mirror.

“Looking pretty good, McClain,” he said out loud to himself. And before he’d had the chance to feel foolish at his own remark, a memory bubbled up to the surface of his mind.

*You’re looking pretty good though for someone who hasn’t had a shower for four days straight.*

Lance yelped as he promptly dropped the stone onto his face.
‘Lance, are you there?’

‘...’

‘Sorry about getting angry earlier.’

‘Keith?’

‘...’

‘Which time? Because there was more than one time.’

‘All of them.’

‘Wait, do you mean just today, or are going to say sorry for every single time you’ve got angry in your life up until now? I’m pretty sure I’ll die of old age by the time you’ve finished apologising.’

‘Lance...’

‘It’s all cool, man. Apology accepted.’

‘Cool.’

‘Cool.’

‘...’

‘...’

‘Do you like it?’

‘...’

‘The stone.’

‘I got that.’

‘...’

‘Yeah I do. Thanks.’

‘You’ve already said that.’

‘Well I’m saying it again, so deal with it.’

‘I’m glad you do.’

‘What was that?’

‘Nothing.’

‘...’

‘...’

‘So have I got to get YOU something now?’
‘What? No!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you don’t have to. Why should you?’

‘Because you’ve given me two presents now!’

‘Don’t say it like that!’

‘But it’s true!’

‘It sounds weird!’

‘Well you should have thought of that before you gave it to me.’

‘I was trying to be nice!’

‘Either way, I’m still one present up.’

‘The scarf doesn’t count. That was different. And stop calling them presents.’

‘Whatever you say.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘…’

‘You said it was your parents’ right? The scarf?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Do you miss them?’

‘…’

‘Sorry. I was just curious. About your family. I miss mine a lot.’

‘…’

‘Keith?’

‘Yeah I do. I do miss them.’

‘…’

‘I miss my mother.’

‘Me too. What’s yours like?’

‘She’s dead.’

‘Shit, Keith I’m —’

‘Sorry, sorry! Shit I didn’t mean to think that. It was just the first thing I… shit.’
‘…’

‘Sorry that was —’

‘It’s fine, Keith! Seriously.’

‘That was really bad.’

‘…’

‘She was nice. Kind, happy, smiled a lot and all that. That’s what I meant to say. Meant to think.’

‘…’

‘Sorry.’

‘Keith.’

‘…’

‘It’s okay.’

‘Thanks.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘What happened?’

‘…’

‘Oh quiznakking quiznak! Stupid brain! I didn’t mean to think that. Forget it.’

‘She got sick.’

‘…’

‘I’ve made this worse haven’t I?’

‘No, no I’m pretty sure that was my fault this time.’

‘.’

‘It’s okay though. You can talk about it if you like. I’m actually a pretty good listener.’

‘I think I’m good. But thanks.’

‘…’

‘…’

‘What about your dad?’

‘…’

‘Ignore me. I’m thinking dumb things again. You don’t have to answer.’
'I never met him. I think he’s probably dead too.'

‘…’

‘My mother said he was a good person though. I wish I could have met him.’

‘…’

‘The scarf was his. He gave it to her before he went away. She told me.’

‘Shit, Keith… Why did you give it to ME? Something that important…’

‘…’

‘Keith?’

‘Because…’

‘…’

‘…it seemed…right.’

‘Are you…?’

‘…’

‘You still there?’

‘…’

‘Buddy?’

‘Sorry I think I’m…’

‘…’

‘…a bit tired now…’

‘…’

‘…’

The more Keith read about this ‘Quintessence’, the less it all seemed to make sense to him.

He groaned and pushed his hair irritably off his face and out his eyes. Maybe such a thing was just too abstract and other-worldly to translate coherently into English. But Allura had translated these passages herself and has assured him that her translations were as close to the original text as it was possible to be. He tried to read the last passage again:

*The basis of any bond formation relies upon the nature of each subject’s Quintessence. At the time*
of writing, no such bond has successfully formed between two participants whose Quintessence is incompatible. It is from this fact alone that the first, most basic postulate of Quintessimal Mechanics can be defined as such:

1. The strength of the bond is directly proportional to the compatibility of the subjects’ Quintessences.

A distinction must be made, however, between what we define as ‘compatible’ and what we define as ‘complementary’, as this additional variable has drastic effects on the ultimate nature of the bond forged, as well as enhancing the effects of the original bond. These additional effects have been extensively documented in various studies [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] and their strength confirmed to be independent of the compatibility of the Quintessences [13] [14] [16].

Keith’s brain strained as he read and re-read the passage, his eyes beginning to glaze over. Compatible? Complementary? Surely they meant the same thing? He huffed and flicked through Allura’s notes on his tablet. When he came to the last page, he began to read:

In regards to variability across species, there is still much dispute over how and why certain species display an increased aptitude for forging mental links compared to others, but it is a widely accepted fact [11] [13] [17] [18] that those of Altean lineage are within the top 5% most telepathically gifted of all documented, sentient lifeforms in the known universe. Others within this top 5% include those of Balmeran (also top 1%), Heraclean, Galran, Vulpine, and Medusian descent [19]. The aptitude of sentient robotic lifeforms (including cyborgs and other such hybrids) to form mental links is, as of yet, unclear [20] (refer to section 6.2).

Keith scowled. This wasn’t helpful in the slightest. There was no mention of humans anywhere. Though it made sense he supposed, given the age of the book and the general… largeness of the universe. He doubted this author would have known humans existed at all.

He sighed and put down his tablet, hunching further into the small alcove of one of the deserted Castle corridors that had become his designated ‘quiet reading place’ for the past half hour or so. He opened his mind and sought out the familiar blue energy.

Nothing.

Good.

That meant he wasn’t nearby.

Keith relaxed his shoulders slightly, taking long, deep breathes. He focused on the air around him and thought of Lance. It ignited with his scent. Keith drank it in. His enhanced sense of smell had become a lot easier to control as of late. It was also a better way to keep track of Lance at a distance, what with the greater range and lingering tendencies of his powerful scent. Keith inhaled deeper. The scent was cold. Lance hadn’t been around here for a while. Relief washed over him.
Not that he was hiding from Lance or anything.

Keith drew his legs up to his chest and rested his forehead on his knees. A growl of frustration clawed at his throat. He’d been so sure of himself. So sure of what he was feeling and what he had felt in turn from Lance that day. The moment was there. The moment was right.

And then Lance had gone and said all that stupid stuff.

Keith exhaled through his nose and ran his hands roughly through his hair, holding back a wince as his fingers snagged on the knotted strands.

But maybe Lance was right. Everything that he’d read so far talked about the common side-effects of telepathic bonds: increased empathy, the desire for closeness to your bonded partner, the innate urge to protect and strengthen the link — these were all things that rang true and settled heavy and cold in the pit of Keith’s stomach.

If it wasn’t real, if his feelings for Lance weren’t real, then what were they? He brought his hands to his face and squeezed his eyes shut, pressing them down with his fingertips until he saw stars. It had to be more than that. More than the bond. He couldn’t believe otherwise. Didn’t want to. His head hurt and his heart ached and he knew it then.

‘I want to tell him. Need to tell him.’

He had to.

The raw need boiled like liquid fire in his insides, threatening to engulf him whole.

‘Patience yields focus’, Shiro liked to say. ‘Patience yields confusion more like,’ Keith thought. The longer he waited, the greater his doubt became. He curled up tighter into the alcove.

And all the more tired he felt.

He closed his eyes.

It was so hot.

‘Keith? Are you around here? I can hear you… I think.’

Lance.

Keith tried to open his eyes, but the full force of the heat hit him like the sun out in the desert at its highest point in the sky. He kept them shut. His bangs clung to his damp forehead and the side of his face. The edges of Lance’s presence started to encroach his own and he felt an odd mixture of comfort and dread. The sweltering blaze of heat got closer. Keith tried to push it away—

The flat of his palms met a hard chest that seared with heat under his touch. He started to recoil.

“Keith —”

He felt the gentle clasp of Lance’s hands on his wrists and was surprised to find that it didn’t hurt. The heat was dwindling away, leaving behind only the softness of Lance’s fingertips, delicate as
they brushed against the pulse points of his wrists. He finally opened his eyes.

“Are you okay? Where have you been all day?” Lance’s face was full of concern. “I’ve been looking for you.”

‘I know.’

Keith stood up, letting his hands fall from Lance’s grasp. He felt for a reluctance from Lance that never came. The resulting bitterness Keith felt was strong enough for him to taste on his tongue.

“Lion powers,” he rasped out. “But it’s stopped now.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“It went away just then,” Keith pressed, sweeping a tongue over his chapped lips. “When you touched my hands.”

‘Touch me again. Please.’

“Ah, good. Glad I could help then I guess.”

Something felt different and Keith couldn’t parse it at all. Everything about Lance was too quiet, too serious. He couldn’t feel anything from him. He couldn’t even hear a whisper of Lance’s usually runaway thoughts. Lance spoke again.

“It’s late, come on.”

Keith let out a small noise of alarm as Lance grabbed onto his arm and began to pull him down the corridor.

“Where are we going?” Keith’s heart rate quickened under Lance’s touch.

“You need to sleep,” Lance said, dodging his question. “I can’t believe you fell asleep on a cold floor.”

“I was just resting my eyes,” Lance snorted but didn’t say anything, still holding onto his arm as he walked faster. “How did you find me anyway?”

“I listened.”

“Huh?”

“I —” Lance paused and Keith watched as his ears turned pink. “I heard your heart beating.” Keith felt his entire body flush red hot.

“W-what?! How did you know it was mine?”

“Everyone’s is slightly different okay?! It’s like that with your heat-thingy right?”

“I guess,” his heartbeat felt unbearable now. “You’re not still listening right?” Lance stiffened.

“N-no. It’s stopped now.”

Keith didn’t believe that for a second. He tried to pull his arm away from Lance, but only succeeded in shifting Lance’s hold from his forearm to his wrist again. Lance didn’t seem to notice. They eventually came to a stop in front of Lance’s room.
“What are you doing?” Keith said as Lance let go of him to open the door.

“Come in.”

Keith clicked his tongue, but followed him inside anyway. Lance pointed towards his bed.

“Get in,” he said voice firm. Keith blinked at him. This would be the point at which most people would start trying to pinch themselves awake, he thought. He watched as Lance seemingly conjured a bundle of blankets and spare pillows out of thin air as he shuffled around the room.

“I’ve got the floor,” he said.

Oh.

“Lance,” Keith said warily, still frozen in the doorway. “What are we doing?”

“I told you. We’re sleeping.”

“But...” Keith narrowed his eyes at him. “Why couldn’t I just go back to my own room?”

“Mine was closer.”

“So?”

“We’re having a sleepover, Keith. Relax.” Lance grinned up at him from his blanket-pillow nest on the floor. Keith rolled his eyes at him, but didn’t have the strength to argue. The bed was inviting and Lance’s mind was warm. He kicked off his boots and shrugged off his jacket, getting under the blankets.

“Why do you wear your belt in bed you weirdo?”

Scowling, Keith threw the offending belt to the floor by Lance’s head with an irritated growl. Lance shrieked.

“Watch it!” Lance’s eyebrows scrunched up comically. “And don’t you dare put that knife under my pillow.”

“I wasn’t going to.”

“Good.” Keith turned on his side to look down at him.

“Why did you invite me here?” he said quietly. Lance smiled, a glint in his eye.

“I’ve figured something out,” he said and Keith’s heart gave a jolt. What was he talking about?

“What?”

“This telepathy thing,” Lance continued. “You find it hard to do during the day right?”

“Yeah.”

“But you have no trouble when we’re asleep. So I figured the best way for you to start getting better is by practicing like this.” He grinned. “When you’re relaxed and sleepy and less uptight.”

“Hey!”

“Sorry, but it’s true.”
Keith glowered at him and turned away. He wanted to be mad, but he couldn’t help remembering what Lance had said yesterday.

*You should smile more.*

He pulled the blankets closer around his face. They smelled like Lance which didn’t help anything at all. Lance’s mind curled around his own

“So, what do you say?” Lance said. “Want to try it out?” Keith closed his eyes and buried his face further into the pillow.

“Alright.”

‘Awesome.’ Keith started at the sound of Lance’s voice suddenly echoing in his mind. ‘Say something to me then.’ Keith felt at a loss. He swiveled around in the bed again, still clutching the blankets like a shield against his face, to find Lance watching him. He was bundled up in blankets on the floor, hair mussed and clinging tightly onto his pillow, eyes wide and bright. Keith’s mind was spinning. He found himself reaching out towards Lance before he could stop himself. Lance’s eyes grew wider.

“Keith what —?”

“Take my hand.”

Keith’s heart was frantic, but he fought to keep the tremble out of his hand as he held it out towards Lance.

“Huh? Why?”

“It might help.”

‘No,’ Keith thought, as Lance slowly reached out towards him. ‘I just really want to hold your hand.’

When Lance placed his hand in his, he waited for the familiar surge of energy between them, but nothing happened. Lance frowned.

“Are you concentrating?” he said accusingly. Keith looked down at their clasped hands in confusion.

“Yeah,” he said, absently running his thumb over Lance’s and enjoying the hitch he heard in his breath as he did so. “I guess I’m just too tired.” He realised then that he must have expended a lot of mental energy that day just from using his ‘Lion Senses’ to track and avoid Lance around the Castle. Lance sighed.

“Ah well. Worth a shot though I guess.” He started to withdraw his hand, but Keith held on.

“Wait —” Lance was looking at him oddly, eyes searching his face and mind clouded with apprehensive confusion. Heart thumping painfully against his chest, Keith tentatively relaxed his grip and laced their fingers together.

‘This still helps,’ he thought. He concentrated hard on projecting his words through Lance’s mind,
determinedly holding his gaze. Lance’s mind glowed as he looked back at him, a soft smile on his face.

‘Okay.’

Keith turned his head away from him into the pillow again, face burning. Lance gave his hand a light squeeze.

‘Is it easier now?’ Lance’s voice said in his mind. Keith smiled beneath the blankets.

‘Yeah.’

‘Wow we’re actually doing it properly! When we’re conscious!’

‘Yeah.’

‘Are you going to say anything other than “Yeah”?’

‘…Yes.’

Keith grinned as he heard Lance laughing from the floor. With the combined warmth Lance’s energy, his blankets, his hand in his own, Keith could almost pretend that Lance was right there beside him in the bed, holding him. Lance squeezed his hand again.

‘If we can learn to do this all the time,’ Lance said in his mind, ‘can we tell the others? Would you be ready?’ Keith didn’t know what to say.

‘I don’t know. Maybe. I just want to be sure.’

‘About what?’

‘About whether it would be the right thing to do.’ Talking like this, talking about this, was like lifting a weight of his chest the size of a small mountain that he somehow hadn’t even realised had been there. ‘Would it help the team? Or would it just make things more complicated? Make them worry. Shiro would worry. I keep making mistakes lately. Jumping into situations without thinking. Doing the wrong thing. Saying the wrong things —’

Keith turned to look pointedly at Lance who stared back at him, mouth open.

“I don’t want to do anything that would endanger the team ever again,” he said, out loud this time.

‘I don’t like hiding from everyone,’ Lance’s voice permeated his mind once more. ‘I just want them to know.’

‘I know.’

Keith’s eyes were heavy, his mind feeling like a wrung sponge. He could feel Lance’s mind beginning to ebb away too, his eyelids drooping as his grip on Keith’s hand became slack.

‘You don’t make mistakes, Keith,’ Lance spoke softly, slowly in his head. ‘That’s… my job.’

His mind stilled and Keith began to count the rises and falls of his slumped form. Lance’s pulse was steady under Keith’s fingertips...
When he came to, Keith was standing in a corridor. The Castle? He wasn’t sure. It was too dark to
tell. He felt around. The ground was cold. Suddenly feeling too heavy to get up, he crawled on his
hands and knees, feeling around again. The floor was smooth, too smooth.

‘What is this?’

The walls didn’t get any closer as he stood up, with great effort, and tried to walk towards them. A
black void.

‘A dream?’

It had to be.

He swallowed. This wasn’t like any dream he’d ever had.

“Hello?”

Keith whirled around, eyes scanning the darkness at the unexpected voice that echoed off
somewhere distant.

“Hellooooo,” it said again. It sounded closer. It sounded like —

“Lance?” Keith said uncertainly. He heard something like an exclamation, followed by eerie
footsteps that seemed to be coming from all directions at once. Then Lance appeared out of the
blackness.

“Keith?”

“Yeah…”

He stepped closer towards Lance, reaching out towards him. He had to touch him. Lance didn’t
move, just watched him wordlessly as Keith brought his hands down onto his shoulders. Lance felt
warm under his touch, but something felt different.

A dream.

“This is a dream right?” Keith said, still keeping a tight grip on Lance. He didn’t look up at him,
staring instead at the movement of the other boy’s Adam’s apple as he swallowed.

“I… I don’t —”

Keith looked up at the sound of Lance’s voice and wished he hadn’t. There was nothing left in him
anymore to hold him back as he put his hands on either side of Lance’s face. It wasn’t real, but it
felt real.

And Keith was too tired to care anymore.

Lance’s face was soft.

He swept his thumbs gently over the light flush of Lance’s cheeks, watching in fascination as he
trembled beneath him, eyes hooded as he leant into Keith’s touch.

Lance stepped closer towards him.
Keith shivered as he felt Lance’s hands on his own face and cupping the back of his head, fingers coming to rest in his hair. Slowly, carefully, Keith let himself be tugged forward. They froze, a hair’s breadth away from each other. Keith searched Lance’s eyes, wide, bright and fearful, and found something flickering there.

It was enough.

He kissed him.

When Keith woke up, his palm was cold and Lance’s hand was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Got my info about the mystical properties of Obsidian from these websites here

Thanks for the continued support!! Find me on Tumblr (open to asks/chats) ^-^ <3

ETA: I also have a new twitter now! Twitter

Artwork coming soon <3 Artwork now added! Tumblr link here!
Keith lay unmoving, tangled up in the scent of Lance’s bed sheets and heart beating like a hammer in his chest.

And Lance was still gone.

Keith brought his hands to his face and tried to breathe. A million different thoughts and feelings descended upon him all at once. He felt like he was suffocating under the weight of them. It had been a dream right? He clenched his fist, trying to remember the warmth of Lance’s hand in his.

The heat of Lance’s shoulders under his grip when he’d held him, the warmth of Lance’s skin when he’d touched his face with his fingertips, pressing his lips against his—

It hadn’t been a normal dream for sure. Keith looked down at the haphazard jumble of bed sheets and pillows that still lay on the floor, blankets tossed aside carelessly. Almost as though he’d been a hurry to leave. Keith swallowed thickly.

What did that mean?

His stomach squirmed uncomfortably. They shared emotions, ideas, images, and now thoughts too. Was it really inconceivable that they —?

“A shared dream,” he mumbled to himself, feeling repulsed at how hoarse his voice sounded. Keith chewed his lip and immediately began to recall the soft, tentative pressure of Lance’s lips against his own.

Dream Lance.

Or had he actually been there too? In Keith’s dream, standing there in front of him. Warm, solid and real. Kissing him back —

‘Did he kiss back?’

Lance had. Keith was sure. He sat up on the bed, hands still on his face and tracing his fingers over
his lips.

‘Or maybe…?’

Keith desperately tried to remember. Had he been in control? Of the dream? Of himself?

*Lance was in front of him. His form was vivid and bright. Keith had never felt so drawn to him. Never wanted to kiss him more than in that moment. He’d felt weightless, nothing to hold him back. And before he knew it, his hands had been on Lance.*

Had he forced himself on Lance? Had the intensity of the bond’s power overwhelmed him in his sleep-deprived state? Keith felt his throat seize up as he glanced down at Lance’s abandoned blanket nest again, dread beginning to rise in his chest.

‘I’ve got to find him. Talk to him.’

Keith disentangled himself from the bed sheets.

‘Why did he leave?’

He grabbed his belt from off the floor, his hands trembling with what he told himself was the cold of the metal buckle against his fingers.

‘Why did he leave me here?’

If it was just the bond. The bond messing with them and their emotions again. Surely they could get past this, right? He pulled on his boots with an unnecessary force, hurting his toes in the process.

Right?

It didn’t mean anything. Didn’t have to *mean* anything.

‘But it did to me.’

Keith wrapped his jacket tightly around himself. It provided little comfort. He stepped out of Lance’s room and let his mind unfurl, reaching out for Lance’s presence. Sensing nothing, he sought out Lance’s scent instead. The intoxicating scent engulfed him as his ‘Lion Senses’ kicked in. It was so strong here just outside Lance’s room.

‘Too much.’

A full body shudder ran through him in pleasurable waves so intense that they were painful. The scent burned in the back of his throat and made his blood run white hot. He tried to focus, sweat beading on his forehead as he gasped for air that didn’t leave him breathless.

‘Lance…’

Was he upset? Scared? Angry?

‘Where did you go?’

Keith latched on to the freshest and most powerful scent trail and stumbled after it, still on a dizzying scent-high that felt like his whole body was on fire. Lance had gone to the dining room.

‘Maybe he was just hungry?’
Keith followed the familiar path through the Castle towards the dining room, letting his ‘Lion Senses’ ebb away in favour of inviting another wave of fraught emotions and thoughts. If Lance hadn’t shared his dream, hadn’t experienced it, that would be okay too, wouldn’t it?

‘Just a dream.’

Then it wouldn’t count.

‘Only a dream.’

Just a projection of his own feelings. His own real feelings.

‘I want to kiss him.’

If it hadn’t been a real kiss, that was fine. Nothing was ruined. No one was hurt.

‘I want it to be real.’

He rounded the corner at the end of the corridor. At this range he could just about sense Lance’s presence, but his emotions were on lockdown as usual. Keith was still out of range of his thoughts.

‘What are you thinking right now?’

Lance’s mind shone around his and Keith’s heart ached. Lance had touched him. Lance had touched him back so gently, his eyes warm and full of an affection that Keith had seen there before. Felt from him before. It had been real. Felt so real.

‘He didn’t pull away.’

That he did remember.

Keith let the small flicker of hope linger in his chest as he walked the last stretch of corridor before the dining room door. He should be in range of Lance’s thoughts by now, but he heard nothing. He’d been so certain before that Lance had felt the same as him, only to have been thrown back harshly into the depths of doubt.

‘Should I ask him?’

Was it worth the risk?

‘I need to ask him.’

Did he remember the dream? Their dream. Did Lance want this just as much as him?

Keith closed in on the automatic doors, his mind open and searching. His head felt filled to the brim with nervous excitement.

‘I want to kiss him again.’

Just before the doors whooshed open, Keith felt the first flicker of emotion from Lance’s mind pass through him, along with a frantic flurry of jumbled thoughts.

‘...the door? He’s outside. I can feel — what did Pidge just say? He’s here. I’ve got to — shit my spork! Shit. Okay, concentrate — stop laughing Pidge! I’m an idiot. I can feel him. I can hear his — where did I drop it? Keith — focus — I’m so bad at this — ah, there it is — he can hear me — shit, focus...’
Keith stepped through the door—

‘Stop thinking!’

—and Lance’s thoughts silenced.

“Hey Keith,” said Pidge as Keith walked over to the dining table where she and Lance were sat, yawning and eating their green goo breakfast. “Why are you both up so early?”

“It’s early?” Keith said, taking a seat next to her, pointedly avoiding Lance who was sat on the opposite side of the table. His mind had stilled completely. Keith couldn’t bring himself to look at him.

“It’s approximately the equivalent of 6:25am Earth-time. Well, feels like 6:25am to our biological systems.”

“Why are you up this early?”

“I’m not. I just haven’t slept yet.”

“Oh,” Keith said, watching her with an impressed fascination as she simultaneously typed on her laptop and spooned green goo into her mouth at an alarming rate. Lance stayed uncharacteristically quiet. Keith looked over at him. Lance was staring back. The expression on his face made Keith feel as though he was careering down a steep drop from the Universe’s tallest roller coaster, his heart painfully light and lodged in his throat. For the first time in a very long while, Keith didn’t feel like he needed the bond to know what Lance was feeling. His eyes looked the same as they had then.

‘Before we kissed.’

Keith’s mouth was feeling dry and he realised then that his mouth had fallen open slightly. In the minute amount of time that it took for him to notice and promptly close it again, the look had disappeared from Lance’s eyes and the fragile moment collapsed into obscurity. The sinking dread settled again in Keith’s stomach. Pidge was mumbling away to either herself or them, Keith couldn’t tell. Regardless, he used it as an opportunity to focus all his mental energy into projecting his thoughts towards Lance.

‘Lance?’ Keith held his breath.

‘…yeah?’ Lance responded. Keith exhaled slowly through his nose. Good. He could hear him and was responding. For now.

‘You left,’ he said, his mind suddenly awash with questions, none of which he felt like he could ask without his heart leaping out of his chest.

‘Yeah,’ came Lance’s irritatingly short response. Keith narrowed his eyes at him. He became vaguely aware of the sudden pause in Pidge’s mutterings and her eyes on him. He remembered then what he had told her back in the cryo chamber. The atmosphere in the room became distinctly more stifling.

‘Why?’ he said to Lance. Pidge turned back to her laptop. She quietly pushed the remains of her food goo towards Keith, and he took it without thinking, eyes still on Lance. Lance continued eating his own food, the very picture of nonchalance, not looking at him.

‘I was hungry. Obviously.’
Keith almost voiced his frustration out loud then. He could feel the intense effort that Lance was putting into withholding his thoughts.

He was lying.

An inferno curled in the pit of Keith’s stomach and he felt his control on the bond and his ‘Lion Senses’ start to slip. The air around him got hotter and the world around him appeared to burst into flames.

‘What do you remember from last night?’ he said, hoping the tone of his internal voice sounded as scathing in Lance’s head as Keith would have intended it to sound out loud. Lance visibly balked and Keith inhaled deeply as Lance’s scent enveloped him again. An invigorating, smoky burn. He could smell the sweat forming on Lance’s skin and dropped his gaze to watch it bead and slide down Lance’s neck.

Lance didn’t answer him.

“Lance,” Keith said, forgetting the telepathy in light of his loosening control. Pidge looked up at that, frowning slightly at the harshness in his voice. The defenses around Lance’s mind faltered to let loose a fleeting trace of alarm, before he quickly erected them again.

“Talk to me,” Keith bit out, not caring anymore that Pidge was in the room, not caring that Lance was alight in his mind’s eye and hotter than a supernova across from him, and not giving a single damn that the only thing his scent-saturated brain wanted to do right now, was to lean across the table and suck the tantalising bead of sweat right off the infuriating boy’s neck, devouring him.

It took everything within Keith’s power to stop any projections of that image from reaching Lance’s mind. Lance stood up, his face twitching with the facade of calm.

“Well I’m done,” he said, pushing away his bowl that was still half-full, “so I’m gonna head to the showers. See you guys later.” Keith watched him wordlessly as he turned and walked away, not sparing a glance to either him or Pidge. Keith’s ‘Lion Senses’ simmered and died as though he’d been doused in icy water. It didn’t bring relief.

‘I don’t remember anything.’

Lance’s last, lone, hesitant thought drifted through Keith’s head. Before he could respond, the doors shut behind Lance, leaving his mind empty once more. He and Pidge turned to look at each other. Keith had to look away. The sincere look of pity on her face stung too much. He gave a start as her small, slightly cold hand encircled his own.

They stayed like that for a long time.

‘Are you there, Lance?’

Keith was lying on his bed, eyes closed, but wide awake. Reaching out with his mind.

‘Lance?’

He wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting. Their bedrooms had always been too far away from each
other for any sort of mental communication between them. Recently however, the delicate blue hue of Lance’s energy had begun to encroach on Keith’s, lapping at the edges of mind like a gentle incoming tide. Keith found that he slept better on the nights when the calming blue was there to soothe him. He couldn’t feel it tonight. He tried again.

‘Lance, can you hear me?’

Nothing.

Keith shifted in his bed. Despite them being identical, somehow he remembered Lance’s bed being a lot more comfortable than his. He let his mind drift.

‘Don’t think, don’t think, don’t think, go to sleep, go to slee — Keith — shit! Stop. Don’t think. Why is it so hard not to think? Okay, focus. Focus on nothing… darkness… blackness… black hair — no, not that — nothingness… whiteness… empty…

yes. That’s it. Think of that. Don’t think of that other thing — shit, no stop it he’ll hear — stop, focus. Nothing, nothing, nothing… there we go. Sleep — he slept here — no — Keith — don’t think, don’t think, don’t think don’t —’

‘Lance?’

‘Ah!’

‘Are you there? Did you say my name?’

‘No? Dammit, why do we always end up in this weird sleep-limbo thing?’

‘Sleep… limbo?’

‘Like, half-awake half-asleep thing.’

‘We don’t always.’

‘Hmmm…’

‘I think it only happens when we’re thinking of each other.’

‘What?! No I wasn’t— ’

‘Trying to reach out or whatever.’

‘I just wanted to sleep.’

‘You said my name.’

‘…’

‘Will you talk to me?’

‘I just want to sleep, Keith.’
‘I think the other night we might have shared—’

‘No, no I don’t want to talk about — don’t want to talk tonight, Keith. I just want to sleep. Please.’

‘You remember right?’

‘Ye— no. I don’t think — I don’t — stop. I’m sleeping. I don’t want to talk — don’t want to think about — stop.’

‘Lance I want to talk—’

‘You know what I used to think about to calm myself down when I couldn’t sleep?’

‘Wha—?’

‘The universe. How big it is. I used to start off thinking about Earth and how big it felt to me… How I’ve only visited like, one other country in my whole life. Then I’d think about the sun… our solar system… how much bigger the other planets were… and the stars.’

‘What about them?’

‘How big they are. Bigger than our sun. How a million Earths can fit in our sun and a billion suns can fit in Betelgeuse—’

‘Betel-what?’

‘Betelgeuse. The star? So yeah, that’s like… a lot of Earths. A LOT.’

‘…’

‘And there’s a hundred billion galaxies with a hundred billion of these huge-ass stars in them. That’s EVEN MORE Earths.’

‘How does this calm you?’

‘It makes me feel small, insignificant.’

‘And that’s… good?’

‘It’s calming. Our Earth is just a tiny speck. A pale, blue dot. Like Carl Sagan said you know?’

‘Carl who?’

‘Really, Keith? But anyway, the point is, it made me feel small… All my problems were small… They were nothing. They didn’t matter. If I messed up, what did it matter?’

‘…’

‘Then I was calm… Then I could sleep.’

‘…okay, but why are you telling me th—?’

‘But it doesn’t work anymore. Not since all this. Not since we became a part of team Voltron.’

‘…’

‘The universe doesn’t feel so huge now… Not any— not anymore…’
We ARE significant. I am significant. I can make a difference. What I do MATTERS now. What I do has... consequences.'

'...

'And it... sucks...'

'Lance?'

'...really, really... sucks.'

'...'

'...

Keith crouched in an alcove, waiting. He’d been here for hours now and his eyes and brain were stinging. His eyes from being awake since the early hours of the morning, and his brain from the effort of focusing every scrap of energy he possessed on Lance’s heat signature. It blazed just out of range for them to be able to detect each other’s presence. From the way his heat signature pulsed, Keith could tell that Lance was still asleep in his room. He watched for any small shift in temperature that would indicate Lance was beginning to stir. As soon as it did, Keith knew that he would have only a handful of ticks before Lance realised that Keith was approaching him. He’d have to be fast if he was going to catch him.

'You can’t avoid talking to me forever.'

Keith’s eye twitched. A small, white-hot ripple passed through Lance’s glowing form. The muscles in his cramping legs tensed. Was this it? The ripples began to spread. Keith bolted.

As he ran down the corridor and his ‘Lion Heat Vision’ began to fade, he could feel Lance’s mind morph slowly from a state of sleepy confusion to full blown panic as he undoubtedly began to sense Keith’s fast approaching presence. Keith knew immediately when he had got within range of Lance’s thoughts, as a loud chant of ‘Shit, shit, shit, shit!’ began to ring out in his head. Projected images from Lance’s head flickered through Keith’s mind as Lance appeared to formulating an escape route.

'Don’t you even think about it,' Keith thought menacingly, not caring whether Lance heard it or not.

He skidded around the corridor just in time to see Lance, half-running, half-stumbling out his room, his jacket on inside-out in his haste to leave.

“Lance!” Keith called out breathlessly, and Lance froze for a fraction of a second before power-walking away. Keith stared after him, panting for breath as Lance awkwardly put his jacket on the right way, refusing to turn around and look at him.

‘Quiznak! I wasn’t fast enough,’ he heard Lance thinking, and he saw red.

“Don’t run away from me!” Keith snapped and he felt the returning red-flash of anger of Lance’s
mind as he whipped around to glare at Keith.

“I’m not running!”

“Then where are you going?”

“None of your business!” Lance turned around again and stalked away, seemingly uncaring for once that his emotions were swimming freely in a fearful, angry mass of scarlet around him.

‘Away from you,’ thought Lance, and Keith never knew a thought could hurt so much. He ran to catch up and grabbed Lance’s shoulder, stopping him in his tracks.

“Why are you being like this?” Keith said. Lance’s shoulder felt somehow less real in his grip now than it had done in the dream. “Why can’t we talk about this?” Keith couldn’t even feel angry anymore as a strange emptiness overcame him. Lance turned around, looking down at Keith’s hand on his shoulder with a pained expression.

“I’m not being like anything!” Lance said, picking up and pulling Keith’s hand away from his shoulder in a motion that was too gentle compared to the heat in his words, “and there is nothing to talk about! I just have to go somewhere right now.” He stared down at his hand still clasped around Keith’s as if stupefied. Keith didn’t know whether he wanted to laugh or cry. And then Lance’s thoughts floated through his head again.

‘Shit, what can I say? Think!’

Keith wrenched his hand away. Everything was burning. Everything hurt.

“Stop lying!” he said, his throat contracting painfully. “You don’t have to be anywhere now. I can hear your thoughts.” Lance looked livid.

“Then stop listening to them and leave me alone!”

“It’s not like I’m trying to! You know I can’t help hearing them sometimes. It's hard to shut them out.”

“Try harder!”

“Why don’t you try harder to hold them back?”

“I have been!” Keith watched, heart thumping agonisingly hard as Lance gave a frustrated groan and buried his face in his hands. He could feel Lance’s mind unravelling in distress around him.

‘God, just leave me alone, please. I need to talk to Hunk. I need to talk to him about this. I need to tell him. Please —’

“Don’t tell Hunk!” Keith blurted out, and Lance lowered his hands to look at him. Keith didn’t recall ever seeing Lance’s expression being this cold.

“You know what, Keith?” he said after a brief pause. “I don’t care anymore.” He took a few steps back. “I’m fed up of this! I hate it! I hate this bond.” Keith felt the blood drain from his face as Lance’s words set off a flurry of runaway thoughts in his own head.

‘You hate being bonded to me?’

“I hate not being able to control myself, these thoughts and feelings —”
‘Are they not YOUR feelings?’

“I hate feeling helpless!”

‘I thought this made us stronger.’

“I want someone to help us. I don’t want to deal with this on my own anymore.”

‘We’re not on our own.’

“You’re not on your own,” Keith spoke his last thought out loud without thinking, but Lance only rolled his eyes in response.

“Yeah, yeah we’ve ‘got each other’ right? But that’s not what I mean. I want someone else to know! So I want to tell Hunk.”

“Allura knows.”

Keith regretted the words the moment they left his mouth. Lance stared at him, a look of blank shock on his face.

“… what?” he said in a soft voice.

“Allura… knows,” Keith said. The feeling of thick treacle in his mouth was back again.

“How long for?”

“I don’t know. A while?” Lance’s brow furrowed.

“And you didn’t tell me because… ?”

“Because I only just found out! You were still frozen!”

“That was almost a week ago!”

Keith bit his lip. He didn’t have a response to that. A simmering anger began to curdle away in Lance’s mind. It was a feeling that would have felt familiar to Keith if it had originated from himself, but it felt strangely alien coming Lance. It unnerved him.

“What else are you keeping from me?” Lance said, narrowing his eyes at him. The sudden surge of adrenaline Keith felt at Lance’s words made him nauseous. Now was not the time for a confession.

“I’m — I’m not —” he stuttered out. ‘I’ve been trying to tell you!’

“It’s no coincidence that you’re suddenly getting good at closing off your mind now, is it?” Lance interrupted quickly. He was trembling. “You’re keeping stuff from me despite all this that we’ve been through!” He frowned. “Have you told Shiro?” Keith glared back at him. He’d had it with Lance’s ridiculous fixation on telling Shiro.

“What are you talking about?! I haven’t told anyone! And I’ve been trying to get better at it for you!” Lance’s eyes widened.

“For… us,” Keith finished weakly, his face hot. “The team.” He didn’t dare open his mind to Lance’s right now. Lance’s face was contorted in a horrifying mixture of confusion and despair. After a few ticks of just staring at each other, air heavy, Lance’s shoulders slumped in defeat and he turned away, rubbing his face.
“Keith,” the quietness in his tone was terrifying. “I can’t — I can’t do this any— I can’t do this. I need to go. Just… leave me alone for a while, okay?” He starting walking away and Keith could only watch him, unable to stop his mind from reaching out after him. Lance’s voice echoed in his head.

‘You can’t just SAY stuff like that to me, you can’t! I’m — I’m messed up. I’ve messed up really bad, shit —’

It was like the air had been punched out of Keith’s lungs. He couldn’t let Lance leave like this. “Wait, Lance —!”

“I’m telling Hunk,” Lance said. Keith couldn’t say anything.

Mind bolted shut, Lance walked off without another word, verbal or otherwise.

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“Shiro?”

Shiro looked up at Keith from where he’d been doing push-ups on the training room floor. His eyebrows drew together with concern as he regarded Keith’s face.

“Keith? What’s wrong?” Keith rubbed at his face, gritting his teeth as his hands came away damp. “Can I talk to you?” he said.

---

“So… this whole time?”

“Yep.”

“This entire time?!”

“Yes, Hunk.”

“That’s how you knew where to find him on that Galra ship!”

“Yes, we’ve established this.”

“I can’t believe you guys! This entire time!”

Lance sighed. This was going about as well as he expected.

“Yes! Hunk! I got it!”

He rolled over on the floor of his room, turning away from Hunk next to him. Holding his breath, he slowly opened up his mind again for the first time since he had walked away from Keith. His head ached from the effort of keeping it shut. Keith was out of range. Before he could decide on whether he was disappointed or relieved by that, Hunk spoke again.
“Everything makes so much more sense now.”

“Well good, because it’s been a nightmare keeping it from you.”

“Everything except the ‘keeping it from me’ part.” Lance turned back around to look at him indignantly.

“I told you that was Keith’s fault not mine!”

“And the hand-holding part—”

“That had a purpose!” Lance flushed. ‘Most of the time.’

“Sorry, sorry I was just kidding.”

“Now’s not really the time for that, Hunk,” Lance said, not meeting his eyes. He knew he wouldn’t be able to deal with Hunk’s pitying looks right now.

“Sooolo,” Hunk said. Lance could see him glancing at him out of the corner of his eye. “Why tell me now?” Lance threw up his hands in frustration.

“I wanted to tell you for ages, but Keith wouldn’t let me!”

“You didn’t answer my question.” Lance exhaled loudly through his nose and relented.

“We kinda had a fight.” Hunk’s mouth twisted in an odd smile, eyebrows raised.

“That’s not exactly new, Lance.”

“Not like that. This was different. Those weren’t ever proper fights. Just joking around, you know? I never meant anything by it. Not now anyway. Keith knows that.”

“Right.”

“So it was… different.”

“How?”

“It’s not so easy to explain,” Lance said, and it was the truth. His relationship with Keith had never been a simple one, even before the stupid bond. And Hunk knew that!

“Try.”

Lance groaned. Hunk was relentless! He almost regretted telling him. Almost. Lance clutched the scarf-covered wrist of his left hand with the other, and said nothing.

“Lance, buddy, you can’t pull the silent treatment on me now after you drop a nuclear missile on me about you being telepathically bonded to Keith for the past month!”

“It’s really complicated okay?!” Lance snapped. “It’s not just hearing each other’s thoughts, which has only just started to happen by the way, and it’s nowhere near as cool as it sounds —”

“I can imagine.”

“We can feel each other’s emotions and stuff and it — it makes you want to… do things.” The back of his neck felt hot under his collar as Hunk regarded him with raised eyebrows. ‘Don’t you dare
“Like?” Hunk said, and Lance felt as though his face had burst into flames.

“L-like be closer to each other and, ah, touch and — arghh this is embarrassing, Hunk! You know what I mean! Don’t make me say it!”

“I don’t!” Hunk said, waving his hands frantically. “I don’t get it! How would I know?!”

“The bond gets stronger when we touch!” Lance blurted, desperate to drag himself out of the humiliating hole he’d dug himself into. “We get these weird ass ‘Lion Powers’ and—”


“Right?! Like super hearing and super vision. And we can sense each other’s lions, project images of ideas to each other—”

“Dude!”

“See what I mean now? It’s been terrible!”

“No way,” Hunk shook his head and pointing his finger at him. “No way, Lance. You are not saying that having superpowers is terrible.” Lance pouted.

“It is! Because I can’t control it and it sucks because it’s Keith and, you know? Keith is Keith. It’s — it’s hard!”

“There? Because you have to be friends with him now instead of pretending to be rivals?”

“He is my rival! Was — is — still is!”

“Lance—”

“Hunk.”

“Lance. Seriously.”

Lance tried to stare him down, but Hunk won. He stared up at the ceiling instead, all of a sudden feeling nostalgic for home. For the times that he and Hunk spent talking and laughing about stupid stuff like superpowers and classroom rivalries. It was much harder now that it was actually happening to him.

“It’s hard because it’s Keith,” Lance said at last after a long pause, his voice shaking slightly. “The bond makes me want to be close to him. All the time!” He ran his fingertips along the red fabric around his wrist. “Like… h-hold him, touch his hair, hold his hand — he — he glows Hunk! My stupid ‘Lion Vision’ makes his skin glow and I just — I need to touch him. And it hurts. It really hurts. Because I —”

Lance faltered, his words dying in his mind before he could even attempt to force them out. He wasn’t even sure what he’d wanted to say after that. Hunk was looking at him in a way that unsettled him.

“So, things got weird. And we fought about it,” Lance finished awkwardly. He could feel Hunk’s eyes on him still and he forced himself to look back at him. His stomach lurched as he recognised the seriousness in Hunk’s expression. ‘Speaking of nostalgia…’
“Don’t look at me like that, Hunk. Please.”

“Lance—”

“I know what you’re going to say—”

“—at the Garrison.”

“I don’t want to talk about the Garrison.”

“I’m right though, aren’t I?” Lance glared at him.

“That’s got nothing to do with what’s happening now.”

Hunk huffed and clenched his jaw, but he didn’t say anything.

“But my point is,” Lance said, electing to give that topic of discussion a hard pass. “The bond is too much! We thought we could use it. For battles and stuff—” Hunk’s eyes lit up.

“So that’s how you could take down those Galra ships!” Lance grinned.

“Yeah! It was pretty awesome! But we — we can’t use it.” Hunk looked at him in disbelief.

“Why not?! This is perfect! If it can’t be affected by their signal jammer, then we can use it to bypass it. Pidge and I can study it to see how it all works and—”

“No!” Lance shrieked, panicking. “If Keith wasn’t going to kill him already for telling Hunk, he would definitely be out for blood if Hunk and Pidge started running their weird experiments on them.

“Why not?”

“I just told you Keith and I had a fight! I don’t want to be around him right now, never mind studied like a lab rat!”

“But you’d be an adorable lab rat.” Lance laughed despite himself. ‘Dammit, Hunk! I’m trying to be mad at you.’

“Thanks man,” he said between giggles. “But seriously. I can’t. And the bond is too messed up right now. We can’t control it. And I — I can’t be around him. I just can’t.” Hunk’s put his hand on his shoulder and Lance relaxed into it.

“I get it. Sorry,” Hunk said sincerely.

“And I’m pretty sure he doesn’t want to be around me either.”

Hunk patted his shoulder again and Lance gave a small squeak of surprise as Hunk ruffled his hair. Laughing, Hunk dodged Lance’s attempt to pull on his headband. The morose atmosphere eased somewhat.

“So,” Hunk said, still laughing. “Who else knows? Who have you told?”

“Just you, but ah, Allura apparently knows.”

“The princess?!”
“She figured it out or something from the start. Jeez, that’s embarrassing now that I think about it…”

“Are you going to tell the others?”

“I want to. And I don’t give a quiznak what Keith says about it if I do.”

“Dude…”

“What?! Keith has been holding me back from this long enough and I—”

“No, no, I was going to talk about Pidge. She is going to kill you both for keeping this from her.”

Lance felt a shiver pass through him.

“Shit. You’re right.” He sat up and grabbed onto Hunk’s shoulders, “Hunk, buddy, you’ve gotta help me talk to h—”

“Keeping what from me?”

Lance and Hunk both jumped at the sound of Pidge’s voice in Lance’s doorway, hitting their heads together in the process. Wincing, Lance rubbed his head and then winced further at the venomous look in Pidge’s eyes.

“Pidge, learn to knock!” he squawked, scrambling to get behind Hunk. Pidge scowled.

“Learn to lock your door! Now, spill!”

It was really, really quiet without Keith. Insanely quiet. And coming from Lance that was something. Keith might not have matched him with his words, but his mind had always been teeming with his wonderful, wild emotions.

‘Wonderful.’

He really did miss them.

Clearly, because he had somehow ended up outside Keith’s room again. Lance wanted to slap himself. It was third time in the past few days or so that he’d ended up here after wandering aimlessly around the Castle, trying to avoid Keith, but somehow ending up outside his bedroom anyway. Thankfully Keith hadn’t been in his room on these occasions so far. Lance suspected that he’d been spending most of his time on the training deck with Shiro.

‘And avoiding me.’

He really had messed up this time.

Before he knew it, he had let himself into the bedroom, having memorised Keith’s key code a while ago, and started looking around. It was pretty plain now that he thought about it. He’d never noticed before when he’d been in here with Keith.

He threw himself down onto the bed. It looked like it hadn’t been slept in for days. Lance snorted. Maybe he’d been camping out on the training deck. Keith always seemed to fall asleep in the most
Then he remembered the night that he’d found Keith slumped against the wall, sleeping. Lance’s laugh caught in his throat.

Holding Keith’s hand.

Taking Keith back to Lance’s room.

Telling him to sleep in Lance’s damn bed.

Falling asleep holding his hand.

The dream.

The. Damn. Kiss.

Forgetting for a moment that it was Keith’s bed he was in, Lance flipped over onto his stomach and shoved his face into the pillow to muffle his screams of frustration. Keith had said not to think these things about himself, but damn if this wasn’t the time to think these kinds of thoughts now. He was an idiot. The biggest, quiznakking idiot. He’d messed up big time. Lance didn’t how it had happened or why, but he’d gone and kissed Keith. In a dream that wasn’t a dream. A dream that Keith had apparently also been present in and remembered very clearly if his reaction was anything to go by.

‘I am NOT thinking about this!’

He hadn’t even told Hunk. God knows it was embarrassing enough just experiencing it himself. And Hunk would only bring up the Garrison again.

The kiss had ruined everything. All the progress they had made with their bond, their friendship... Lance felt for the scarf around his wrist. How could they get past this? The obsidian stone in his pocket was digging into his leg as he lay on it. He rolled over and got it out, twisting around on the bed so that his head hung over the side. He held the stone up to the light. Keith had given him this. Completely of his own accord. Nothing to do with the bond at all.

Lance felt his face grow warm. It was a dangerous train of thought, but his mind meandered down it all the same. What if the kiss —?

‘NOT thinking about it!’

He leapt off the bed as though he’d been electrocuted. Then he noticed it. The corner of a box
poking out from behind the foot of the bed. Lance pulled it out for a closer look. It was full of trinkets. Alien trinkets.

“His collection huh?”

Suddenly overcome with an intense sadness, he pushed it back behind the bed. He was going to fix this. Get them back to where they’d been. Then Keith could show him his collection properly.

Clutching the obsidian tight in his fist, Lance quietly slunk out the room, locking the door behind him.

---

Keith smelt it before he’d even reached the corridor.

Closing his eyes, he inhaled, slowly and deeply, savouring. He shuddered. Lance had been outside his room again.

Keith had been making his way back to his room from the training deck, his enhanced sense of smell having kicked in during his sparring session with Shiro. Luckily it was a lot easier to explain to Shiro now why he would sometimes drop his Bayard and slap his hands over his nose and mouth, suddenly overcome with the urge to retch from the overpowering stench of sweat that permeated the room. It turned out that being abducted by aliens, escaping capture and then becoming a pilot of giant, sentient, robot cat, made Shiro very open to the bizarre concept of “super smell induced by a telepathic bond” and other such things.

And Keith was very glad now that he’d said “no” when Shiro had asked him if he’d wanted company walking back to his room. His legs were shaking as he rounded the corner and stepped into the corridor that led to his living quarters.

Lance’s scent was everywhere.

Keith inhaled another shaky breath that sent his insides burning. Why did Lance keep coming here? He moved forward slowly, limbs weak. In the three or so days that they’d been avoiding each other, Lance had apparently made a point to walk to Keith’s room at least once a day. After the first time it had happened, Keith had taken to sleeping on the training deck instead. The memory of their fight had been too fresh, too raw for him to cope with a scent that left him feeling both hot and cold and with a dull ache in his chest. Three days into Lance’s absence from his life, just the slightest whiff of his lingering scent was enough to leave Keith craving. Craving Lance’s presence, his touch, his warmth —

He arrived at his bedroom door.

Keith’s hand shook as he reached towards the keypad. As his fingertips grazed the cold, metallic surface, he froze. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end and a small, choked cry whimpered and died in his throat.

Lance had put his hand here.

He had gone inside.

Keith botched the code for his room twice in his haste to let himself in, his entire body red-hot and
He shut the door behind him, and the scent hit him with a wave so strong his knees buckled. Catching himself, he leant his head back against the door, panting heavily. His Bayard slipped out his grasp and clattered to the floor.

Lance had stood here.

Keith moaned softly, sweeping his damp bangs off his forehead. Lance had stood here. In his room — Keith drank in his scent, gasping — for at least a few minutes. Heat curled in the pit of his stomach. What had he been doing in here? Why had he been in here? Did he want to talk to him? Make amends, make things right?

With great effort, Keith pushed himself off the door, trembling to the middle of the room. He stopped, taking in the sight of his bed. It was all mussed up, pillow askew.

‘He was in my bed.’

“What the fuck, Lance?” Keith whispered. “What were you — why? What were you thinking?!

He crouched down at the side of the bed and slid his hands over the sheets, trying to breathe.

‘Shit.’

He clawed his way on top of the mattress and kicked off his boots, grasping the blankets in his fists.

‘Lance.’

Keith brought the blankets to his face, burying his nose deep into the softness of the fabric and closing his eyes. It could be Lance. Keith could visualise his face, the softness of his hair and skin, the warmth of his embrace—

Lance’s scent consumed him.

A low growl reverberated in Keith’s chest, breath coming in desperate gasps as he clutched the blankets closer to himself. Sweat slid down his forehead and clung to his eyelashes. Hopeful fantasies fogged his brain and squeezed at his heart. The air was humid in his lungs. He pressed the side of his face into his pillow and whined as he inhaled the traces of Lance’s presence there.

Maybe Lance did want the kiss.

Keith groaned and pressed his growing hardness into the mattress—

Maybe he’d come to tell Keith.

He ground down his hips—

Lance wanted it. Wanted Keith.

Keith was burning. ‘Too hot.’ He tore off his shirt that was sticking to his skin—

Lance would let him hold him again, kiss him.

Rolling over onto his back, Keith threw his head back into the pillow, panting. His mind was
saturated with the scent. Saturated with Lance. He slid down his pants and pressed down.

Keith would get to kiss him again. And again and again and—

His hands were searing hot over his stomach and the front of his boxers.

Lance would kiss him back and Keith would press fevered kisses to the side of Lance’s face, his jaw, his neck, all over—

Keith bit his lip to hold back a moan, stroking himself faster—

Lance’s hands were on him, touching him—

‘Lance—’

Keith’s mind was blazing, reaching out—

‘Lance—’

His whole body shook.

Keith needed him. Keith needed Lance to need him.

Energy surged through him, blinding and breath-taking, and for a moment, all he could see was blue.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Um...yes...

...artwork coming soon! <3

don't kill me

ETA: Artwork now done! On my tumblr here

Comments are always highly appreciated! ^-^ And I am open to asks/chats on tumblr! <3

Tumblr | Twitter
Probability One (Almost Surely)

Chapter by mackerelmademedoit

Chapter Notes

A/N: I had this chapter mostly written at the time of posting the previous one, but then for some reason my brain decided to add more (???). The result is this 11k beast before you. Ahahaha help me

Credit to my amazing beta for staying up until 4am with me to help draw up battle strategies on our whiteboard.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Princess?”

“...yes, Pidge?”

“I need your help.”

“My help? With what?”

“Convincing Lance to let us run some tests on him and Keith.”

“Oh? So they told you?”

“I found out.”

“... I see.”

“I knew something was going on! But Keith wouldn’t tell me.”

“...”

“But you already knew didn’t you? How? I assume those idiots didn’t tell you either.”

“No, they didn’t. But my life-force is bound to the lions, so I can sense distinct changes in their energies. I also have a high aptitude for forming mental bonds like the one Keith and Lance now share.”

“You’re telepathic?!”

“Oh no, I can’t read everyone’s mind, but Alteans as a species possess one of the highest percentages of telepathically gifted individuals among its population — people who are more adept at forming bonds than others. And I happen to be one of them. Not all of us are born with these abilities however. Coran is useless! We get tested from a very young age for telepathic capabilities, and he apparently set an all-time record low —!”

“...”

“Ahem, anyway, that is the reason why I am sensitive to, ah, telepathic energies and individual
quintessences.”

“Which I assume is how you knew which of us would be best suited to which lion too?”

“Yes, exactly!”

“…”

“Pidge? What’s wrong?”

“I’ve been thinking... What do you think about using this bond?”

“In what way?”

“Directly. As a tactical manoeuvre. But also indirectly. I think we should study it and use it to figure out how to develop our own tech and counteract the Galra’s signal jammer.”

“Which is why you want to run the tests?”

“Yes. And Hunk agrees with me.”

“I have been considering it. It seems that Keith and Lance also intended to use it as a battle strategy.”

“But now Lance is refusing! He says that they can’t use the bond that way anymore, but he won’t tell me why! I know they used it last time we fought.”

“Hmm…”

“What?”

“This is what I was afraid of. With their bond still being so newly formed, it is in a volatile state.”

“It’s too unstable?”

“Yes. Especially with the nature of Keith’s quintessence in particular.”

“Keith?”

“And also considering his feelings —”

“For Lance?”

“I thought it best not to interfere. It might have complicated things and upset a delicate balance within the bond as it was still developing. Historically this has had disastrous results.”

“With those guys, I don’t blame you.”

“…”

“But I’m still mad that they didn’t tell me! Any us! We could have helped. And Keith he —!”

“…?”

“He told me about how he felt for Lance, but couldn’t tell me this?! I knew something was wrong after we got back from the mission to that planet. After Lance fell — no — before he fell — the way Keith reacted wasn’t normal. It didn’t make sense! It was—”
“You’re cross that you didn’t figure it out for yourself.”

“Y-yes! But I’m a thousand times madder at them!"

“Pidge, you’re intelligent, but you can’t expect to have figured something like this out on your own.”

“Hmpft…”

“Statistically, the probability of their type of bond forming is incredibly small. Almost impossible in fact. It’s amazing that it happened at all! You couldn’t have known.”

“Huh. So you’re saying that for this event to happen, the circumstances must’ve been just right?”

“The situation, the nature of their quintessences, their emotions—”

“Emotions, huh?”

“Emotions towards potential bond partners are of vital importance.”

“Hmm… So the probability of Lance also feeling —?”

“Almost surely.”

“Ha!”

“Uh, hey Pidge, princess.”

“Hey, Shiro. What’s up?”

“I was just getting a drink. What are you two talking about?”

“Probability Theory.”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“I’ll leave you both to it.”

A longing. An overwhelming need. A feeling of desire, so deep and all-consuming it was painful. It washed over him, soaked into his skin and penetrated his entire being, tingling at the ends of his fingers in a hot flush. His heart was aching, squeezing in his chest like someone had it clasped tightly in their fist. And then — warm affection. But it hurt and oh god he couldn’t breathe! So hot, so hot! It was too much and—

Lance sat up on his bed, gasping. He ran a hand over his now clammy face and into his hair.

“W-what the hell?!!"
His heart was racing as his mind scrambled to grasp and cling onto the lingering trace of whatever it was that had surged through his mind so strongly.

‘Keith —’

It had to have been him, but what —?

“Oh god…”

Lance covered his burning face with his hands. The panic in his mind ebbed to give way to a familiar heat between his legs. He inhaled slowly through his nose.

‘This is not because of him. This is NOT —’

He tried to will it away, breathing steadily and eyes squeezed shut. The fact that he’d had the kiss on his mind all night didn’t help in the slightest.

‘We just need to talk it out. I’ll apologise for the kissing and —’

But oh god what was that?! What had Keith been doing? Lance couldn’t sense him at all anymore. Had he been outside Lance’s room?

No. He would have felt him leaving. The slow fade of his presence. Lance couldn’t feel anything right now. Lance got off his bed and peeked outside his bedroom door anyway just to make sure. Nothing.

‘He was out of range… ?’

But the burst of energy had been so strong and vibrant. It didn’t make any sense. It didn’t—

Lance’s face felt hot again as closed the door and tried to recall the fleeting rush of emotions that had coursed through him with a stifling heat. The energy that he’d sensed had felt so... intimate. He brought his hands to his face again. He hadn’t known Keith could even feel emotions like that. Had he himself ever felt anything like that? Lance couldn’t recall. What had Keith been thinking about to provoke that kind of reaction? Lance was tempted to go and find him and ask. Something that intense—

‘I’m not worried about him or anything… ’

It wasn’t a complete lie. Something that he had sensed within the energy, a softness, full of light and affection, reassured Lance that nothing bad had happened to Keith. Still...

‘Maybe he was dreaming? A nightmare?’

“I should check on him,” Lance muttered to himself, his hand twitching towards the door. He then looked down, and was acutely reminded of the predicament that he was still in. The heat stirred in the pit of his stomach again. Why did he have to have this kind of reaction to Keith’s energy of all things?

‘Just... don’t think about it.’

Or the kiss.

Or Keith.

Or kissing Keith.
Or anything.

He turned abruptly, away from his door, and fell back down onto his bed, clenching and unclenching his hands.

“Don’t fall asleep.”

Lance had been chanting this repeatedly to himself over the past half an hour or so. If what Keith had said last time was true, they might fall into that weird ‘sleep-limbo’ again. It would be impossible at this point to fall asleep without thinking about him. Lance couldn’t think of anything worse than connecting telepathically right now, except perhaps another shared dream. His eyes were heavy and his lower body ached.

‘Don’t fall asleep, don’t fall asleep, don’t—’

Keith.

What was he thinking right now?

‘Don’t fall asleep, don’t—’

He had to talk to him, work out what he could say to him. Lance gripped and tugged at the roots of his hair and winced. He was still hard.

‘Don’t fall asleep—’

He hadn’t let Keith talk. His heart gave a jolt at the realisation. He didn’t know how Keith felt about the whole thing.

‘Don’t fall—’

Maybe he—?

‘Don’t—’

No. He couldn’t assume. Not with the bond messing with their emotions like this. He had to hear it from Keith himself.

‘What do I feel?’

Lance wasn’t sure anymore. Nothing felt real. It was so much easier to just blame everything on the bond and how it had forced them together. He pinched the skin on his left arm.

‘Stay awake.’

It didn’t matter anyway how he felt. It had never mattered. Not then, not now, not ever. What mattered was that Lance didn’t take advantage of the closeness that the bond had provided for them. What mattered now was finding out how Keith felt.

‘We’ve got to talk about it.’

Tomorrow. Tomorrow he would find him, talk to him.

‘Stay. Awake.’

Maybe he’d ask Hunk for advice? But oh god then he’d have to tell Hunk about the dream.
‘I can’t tell him that, I can’t—’

He had to stop thinking about this. Lance longed to close his itching eyes, but didn’t dare. He had to stay awake. He needed a distraction. His hands crept lower on his stomach, his skin searing. Lance swallowed.

‘Don’t think about him.’

Keith had meant to visit Red as he usually would in the mornings when he first woke up. It was his usual routine: get up, wash his face, spend quality bonding time with his lion as he mulled over his plans for the day, spend an hour on the training deck with Shiro, shower, then have breakfast. Not even the unpredictable nature of the bond had interfered with this strict morning regime of his. Until today that is. At least, that’s what Keith attributed this situation to.

He looked up at the imposing form of Blue as she towered over him. It was easy to forget just how much bigger she was than Red when he and Lance were flying alongside each other. Keith felt her energy intertwining with his: cool and questioning. Her soft purrs resounded in his head. Red’s presence also lingered quietly at the edge of his own, curious. Blue’s eyes appeared to follow him as he approached her.

“Don’t tell him I’m here, okay?” he said. Her energy thrummed in response, which he took to be an affirmative. He curled up between two of the giant, metal claws of her right paw and closed his eyes. Her cool, metallic surface was soothing against the side of his head. Blue energy washed over him, so similar to Lance’s but distinctly her own — the energy he knew from the desert.

“How did I feel you out there?” he murmured. Blue growled in a way that Keith took to be the robot lion equivalent of a shrug.

“Yeah? Me too,” he said with a sigh. He leant his head back further into her paw. His limbs felt heavy from tiredness. A furious blush crept up his neck and high up his face as he remembered exactly why he was so tired and hadn’t slept much the past night.

“Don’t tell him that either,” he said stiffly. Blue didn’t respond. He turned his head and pressed his blushing face further into the cold metal. Stupid Lance and his room trespassing tendencies.

‘I miss him though,’ he thought. Would they still be able to form Voltron like this? Blue and Red both encircled his mind with gentle reassurances.

“I hope you’re right,” Keith sighed again and curled into a tighter ball. “I’ll talk to him today,” though how he was going to be able to look Lance in the face after last night he didn’t know.

He wasn’t sure when he’d fallen asleep, but when he next opened his eyes Shiro was looking down at him, eyebrows raised.

“Keith?” he held out his hand towards him. Keith took it gratefully and Shiro hauled him to his feet. “Are you okay there, buddy?”

“I’m fine,” Keith said, rolling out a crick in his neck. He must have slept longer than he’d thought if Shiro had come to look for him, probably wondering why Keith hadn’t turned up to their daily sparring session.
“Shall we go?” Shiro said, looking at him uncertainly, “You look like you could use some food.”

“Yeah, sure,” he said wearily. Making a show of brushing invisible dirt off his pants, he followed Shiro out the hangar, dragging his feet. Blue’s energy was a comforting embrace that he wasn’t quite ready to leave yet. “How did you find me?”

“Well you weren’t with your lion, so I took a guess that you’d be here.” Keith avoided Shiro’s eyes, flushing. He’d trusted Shiro with the nature of his and Lance’s bond the day of the fight. Disclosing his feelings for Lance in an emotional outburst part-way through had been an embarrassing side-effect.

“You’re bonded to him? Telepathically?”

“Yes! I don’t know how it happened, but on that day, when I was captured, I felt — I thought it was him and — I don’t — I don’t know HOW Shiro, but we’re stuck like this now! And we tried to make it work, but we COULDN’T! I just wanted to help. Help the team. I thought we could — I thought we could become stronger. Use it to our advantage against the Galra but I was wrong. I messed up Shiro and I don’t know how to fix it!”

“Keith, it will be okay—”

“He acts like he HATES me now because I tried to… but I thought he felt the same! I felt it! We can feel each other’s emotions. You can’t hide it! Not properly. I felt the same feelings from him I know it! The bond changes things, but it doesn’t — it can’t — at least I hope it doesn’t… I don’t want it to. These are MY feelings—”

“Are you saying that you —?”

“I’m saying that I like him! I… I like him a lot. And it really sucks.”

“Can you,” Shiro said, bringing Keith out of his reverie, “err, sense him from here? You can do that right?” Keith shook his head.

“He’s too far away right now.” Shiro gave him a sympathetic smile, and Keith knew that he’d sensed the double entendre in his words.

“Talk to him, Keith.”

“I will. I have, I — I’ve been trying!” Keith bit his lip. ‘Though I’ve probably made it a lot more difficult for myself now.’ He fought to keep the blush off his face.

“Now that we all know about this bond thing, it’s best that you and Lance sort things out quickly,” Shiro said, appearing not to notice Keith’s discomfort, or pretending not to. “Voltron can’t operate at its full potential, unless we’re all honest and open with each other. Not to say that we aren’t allowed the right to our own private thoughts and feelings, but we can’t let things fester.” He looked pointedly at him. “The team will fracture. You know that don’t you?” Keith sighed.

“Yeah, I get it.” He nervously felt for the stone pendant around his neck. ”And what do you mean ‘we all know’?”

“Well you told me,” Shiro said, counting off his fingers. “The princess figured it out, Lance told
Hunk and Pidge, Pidge told Coran —”

“Lance told Pidge?” Keith felt a rush of guilt. He should have been the one to tell her. He should have told her sooner, back when Lance got injured. ‘I’ve been an idiot.’

“My point is, Keith,” Shiro said, voice firm. “We need to be a team. You and Lance need to figure out how to work together again. Preferably now, as the princess has informed me that she wants to convene soon for a new mission briefing.”

“Now?” Keith said, his voice breaking horribly. He was going to have to face Lance sooner than he’d been prepared for. His heart was in his throat.

“Yes,” Shiro said. “So I suggest that you skip your training, grab something to eat and head to the control room instead.”

“R-right.”

“Keith,” Shiro gave his upper arm a light squeeze. “It will be fine. I trust the both of you to understand the importance of you getting along.”

“You’ve talked to him?”

“No, but I know him. We both know him.” He smiled. “He’s Lance, but Voltron is important to him too. So it will be fine. Trust me.” Keith gave him a shaky nod and stood frozen as he watched Shiro walk away in the direction of the Castle shower rooms.

Four days was a short period of time to be apart, but it wasn’t short enough for Keith not to feel as though all the air had left his lungs at the sight of Lance, slumped on the stairs by himself in the Castle control room.

“H-hey,” Keith said, and Lance looked up at him, surprised. Like Keith, he must have sensed the other boy’s presence as he’d approached the room, but not expected him to be alone. Keith couldn’t hear what he was thinking, but Lance let his emotions flow freely towards him: steely determination, apprehension, a bashful longing. Keith’s hands trembled at his sides.

“Hey,” Lance said softly. Tiredness pinched at his face and dulled his eyes. Keith fought the urge to rush up and embrace him tight. He needed to take this slow. Keith stepped forward cautiously and Lance let him. Lance’s mind beckoned towards him, weaving warm, hopeful ribbons of light around his own mind and pulling him closer. With Lance’s mind around his, breathtakingly blue, Keith came to a stop in front of him, his heart pounding. His throat was tight and raw with the strength of Lance’s emotions that collided and melded with his own. He’d missed Lance. He’d missed him so much.

‘I need to touch you. Please —’

Could Lance hear his thoughts right now? Keith couldn’t tell, but it didn’t matter to him anymore. Lance’s eyes were on him, watching as Keith took a seat beside him. Keith’s legs were shaking and he looked down, away from Lance’s gaze, to stare at his own hands instead, balled into fists on his thighs. Lance’s breathing sounded quicker than normal. Keith bit his lip and stole a glance over at him. Lance was fidgeting with his hands too, jiggling his leg in a nervous rhythm. Their knees
were millimetres apart. Keith longed to close the gap, feel Lance’s warmth pressed up against him again.

‘I need you to touch me. Let me touch you —’

Could he? Did he dare? What would happen? His mind and body strained with the effort of fighting the invisible, magnetic force that pulled them together.

“Keith?”

Keith looked up at the sound of Lance’s voice and met his eyes again. The dullness in them was lifting, making Keith’s heart feel lighter than it had in days.

“I’m sorry,” Lance said, his voice quivering, but gaze steady. “For — for not — for everything.” Lance’s feelings hit him like a tidal wave — so strong, so full of remorse and a painful, deep affection — a plea for forgiveness. Keith couldn’t speak, only nod at him, his eyes and throat burning. Instead, he let Lance feel — feel his emotions, leaving them bare before him as he opened up his mind to its fullest extent.

‘It’s ok,’ Keith thought, willing his words to reach Lance’s hurting mind. ‘I’m sorry too.’ Keith both felt and saw the moment when his words reached Lance. The clouds in his mind cleared, giving way to a brilliant medley of colours, and his eyes brightened as though the colours of his mind shone in them as well. Keith then felt Lance’s mind accept his, embracing him fully.

‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry —’ Keith heard Lance say in his mind, and he needed to hold him, touch him.

He held out his hand towards Lance. Lance took it.

Their bond ignited, surging with a renewed strength. Keith closed his eyes with a shuddering breath as he felt the energy pulsate and flood through him. Something both new and familiar formed between them. He opened his eyes to look at Lance and knew he’d felt it too. Lance squeezed his hand, interlacing their fingers.

‘Lance —’

Lance dropped his gaze to their clasped hands, looking down with a small smile and fond expression. Keith’s heart felt unbearably full. Lance trailed his fingertips softly over Keith’s knuckles and fingernails, as though in awe of the tiny imperfections and broken skin there. His hands were so warm.

‘I’ve missed you. I’ve missed you so much.’

Lance’s mind, previously void of thoughts, let the words slip out and drift through Keith’s mind, setting off a cascade of trembling emotions that Keith hadn’t dared let himself feel before. Suddenly, the dream kiss didn’t matter to him anymore. Keith leant in closer, pressing their bodies flush against each other, basking in the collective warmth of Lance’s shoulder against his and the mingling of their minds. Lance was cradling Keith’s hand in both of his, closing his eyes and holding it up to his face as though it was something precious. His face was so close; Keith could feel his breath dancing across his skin.

‘I wanted it.’

The dream kiss didn’t matter anymore—

‘I wanted it so much, Lance—’
—but Keith wanted to tell Lance how much it had meant to him anyway. In words. Out loud. Right here in this room.

‘—and I’d do it again in a heartbeat. Right here, right now.’

They looked up at each other. Lance still held on to his hand. Keith’s eyes drifted down to Lance’s mouth and he thought about kissing him. Thought about holding his face and pulling him closer, bridging the gap. He saw Lance’s eyes widen. Had he sensed the ideas that were passing through Keith’s head? Keith found himself hoping. Their minds swirled together as one in a violet haze. Keith took a steadying breath.

“Lance I —”

He cut himself off as he heard a noise from outside the room. Lance’s eyes swivelled to the door and back to Keith’s again, biting his lip. His mind gently withdrew from Keith’s, despite Keith trying to hold on stubbornly.

‘Later,’ Keith heard Lance’s voice say in his head, and his heart skipped in his chest. ‘After this mission. We can — we can talk and stuff then.’

Lance dropped his gaze, squeezing Keith’s hand again once more, before sliding his hand away. Keith missed the feeling immediately. Even when the door opened and the rest of the team entered, Keith couldn’t tear his eyes away from the shy smile on Lance’s face and the small blush high on his cheekbones. Keith shuffled away from him reluctantly, but kept his knee pressed against Lance’s. Lance’s mind glowed.

“Oh good, you’re both here,” Allura said as she caught sight of them. She met Keith’s gaze with a brief smile and a nod. Her eyes flickered towards Lance, but didn’t comment on their proximity. The rest of the team appeared to follow her example, though Keith noticed Hunk was trying desperately to get Lance’s attention. His eyes were burning a hole into the back of Lance’s head as Lance pointedly looked away from him, his face and ears turning a deeper shade of red. Keith began to snicker, but his laugh died in his throat when he met Pidge’s eyes from across the room. She didn’t look angry, but the coolness in her expression settled like a rock in Keith’s stomach.

‘I have to talk to her.’

Lance turned to look at him, his embarrassment forgotten it seemed, as his mind reached out to Keith’s in concern.

‘What’s up?’ Lance’s voice echoed in Keith’s head. ‘Your mood just went to shit.’ Keith sighed and sent back a touch of reassurance, concentrating hard on projecting his thoughts. It didn’t feel as difficult as it had been before though.

‘I’m fine.’

‘You said you had to ‘talk to her’. Who? Allura? Pidge?’

‘You heard that?’

‘Yeah. Did you not mean for me to?’

‘Not really.’

‘Wow, I guess you’re finally getting better at this!’
Keith turned to look at him and felt himself blushing at the genuine grin on Lance’s face.

“Woah okay, guys that’s weird,” Hunk’s voice interrupted, making them both jump. “Like, I can’t hear you or anything, but I can totally tell that you’re talking to each other in your heads right now and it’s freaking me out!” Lance choked and glared at Hunk, apparently forgetting that he was trying to ignore him. Keith held back a laugh at the horrified look on his face.

“W-what do you mean you can tell?! You completely made that up!”

“Dude, you were looking at each other all weird just now. Making faces.”

“What faces ?!”

“Hunk, Lance —” Allura’s voice cut through the bickering sharper than Keith’s Bayard, making everyone in the vicinity flinch. “We’re having a mission briefing now. You can chat later.”

“Got it.”

“Sorry, Allura.”

She gave them a curt nod and turned to Coran who cleared his throat.

“So we’ve received a distress call from a planet not too far away from where we made battle with the Galra last time,” he said, bringing up a holographic diagram of the planet in question. “It appears that the Galra are attempting to colonise their planet and they’re requesting Voltron’s aid.” Keith felt Lance straighten up in interest beside him, his mind matching Keith’s for excitement.

“We understand of course that this is highly suspicious,” said Allura as she frowned at the hologram, “considering the recent attempts by the Galra to lure and entrap us. However, as we all know, it is against the paladin code to ignore such a cry for help. It would be much worse to ignore a genuine plea than to follow through with a plan of attack, despite the risks it entails.”

“It won’t be like the last time,” Shiro said as Hunk began to open his mouth to interject. “We’ve learnt our lesson from what happened with Rolo and Nyma.” Keith chuckled as he felt Lance’s mind flush with embarrassment. He leant over towards him, foregoing the option of telepathy to whisper in his ear instead, relishing the closeness.

“Don’t worry,” he breathed, “I’ll be sure to rescue you again if you end up handcuffed to a tree like last time.”

“Shut it,” Lance hissed back, a blush climbing up his neck and into his hair. Keith wished he could kiss it.

“So, Lance, Keith. What do you say?” Coran’s voice dragged Keith back to reality. They both turned around to look at the others, finding their eyes on them, waiting.


“If you had been listening,” she said through gritted teeth. "We were talking about you two.”

“What about us?” Keith said, still put out that she appeared to be avoiding his eyes.

“Hunk and I,” she began, “and Allura, think that your bond will be useful to us in forming a battle strategy against the Galra’s signal jammer.” She paused, glancing over at Shiro, who Keith now noticed had been unusually quiet during the meeting so far. He had a small frown on his face, but
said nothing. Pidge carried on. “Will you use it?” Keith and Lance looked at each other. Lance shrugged at him.

‘I don’t see why we can’t lend our badass mind-melding skills to our poor, helpless teammates again, do you?’ Lance’s voice said in Keith’s mind. Keith grinned at him.

“Yeah, sure. Why not?” Keith said, unable to look away from Lance’s returning grin.

Later on, when Keith had suited up and started to make his way towards the hangars, he heard voices echoing down from the corridor ahead of him. Not usually one to eavesdrop, he turned around to find an alternative route, but then he heard his name amongst the heated exchange of words. Curious, he turned back around and walked quietly towards the source of the voices, listening.

“—don’t think it’s a good idea,” Keith heard Shiro say. He crept closer to the side of the wall. “This bond has a tight hold on them both, and from what Allura has explained to me, it can be unstable.”

“They’ve made up now, Shiro!” came Pidge’s irritated response. “You saw how they were acting in front of us all at the meeting. There’s nothing to worry about! Their bond has the potential to really help us with —”

“I think Keith’s feelings need to be considered.”

“What about them? He was fine! He’s looked better than he has for ages —”

“Pidge, his feelings for Lance —”

“How are you so sure that Lance doesn’t feel the same about him?”

“That’s not what I’m worried about. What I mean is —”

“What you mean is you don’t trust me,” Keith interrupted, unable to stand back silent any longer. Pidge and Shiro whirled around to look at him. “You don’t think I can handle how the bond makes me feel. That I won’t be able to keep my feelings in check on the battlefield.” Shiro opened his mouth and shut it again in a tight line. “I’m right aren’t I?”

“Keith, I know you and trust you one hundred percent,” Shiro said with utmost sincerity. “What I don’t trust and still don’t fully understand, is the way this bond affects both you and Lance.” Keith frowned at him.

“Well why don’t you trust me and Lance to know what we’re doing?” he said darkly. Not waiting for an answer, he grabbed hold of Pidge’s arm and stormed away from Shiro, taking the long way around towards the hangars.

“Keith! Let go of me!” Pidge yelled, yanking her arm from his grip and refusing to move any further. “Why are you dragging me off with you?”

“Sorry,” he said gruffly. Pidge huffed.

“It’s fine. My armour protected me from your death grip.”
“Not that. I meant about not telling you.”

“About your telepathic bond that would have been in no way of interest to me on both a personal level and in regards to helping out the team in general?” Keith recoiled at the malice in her tone.

“…yeah that,” he said after an awkward pause. Pidge sighed heavily and adjusted her glasses that had become askew during their getaway from Shiro.

“I’m still mad at you,” she said, as they began to walk again. “I can’t believe I had to find out by walking in on Lance telling Hunk. I had to threaten to take back my headphones from him until he told me the full story,” Keith snorted at that.

“That’s fair,” he said, and her mouth twitched in a small smile.

“Why didn’t you tell any of us sooner?” she said as they rounded the corner at the end of the corridor. “We could have helped you.”

“I — I was worried,” Keith began, trying not to crumple under her scrutiny. “I thought it might put pressure on the team, put us in danger,” Pidge rolled her eyes.

“You sound like Shiro now.”

“—and then it just got harder to tell you as time went on. You know how it is.” She glared at him.

“Actually, no. I don’t know ‘how it is’ to become telepathically bonded to a teammate, fall in love with said teammate and then choose not to tell any other teammates about any of it for almost an entire month.”

“I told you the second part—”

“Whatever. I’d pretty much worked that out already.”

“—and I’m not in love.”

“Hmmm, but you just admitted to it.”

“Urgh.”

“It’s fine. It happens to the best of us.”

She gave him a wicked grin and Keith was about to retort, when she sped off ahead of him down the last stretch of corridor that led to the control room door. He scowled and followed after her, trying to will away his blush.

Keith supposed he should have been prepared for this, but it didn’t make it any less embarrassing. He took solace in the fact that he wasn’t on his own in his embarrassment, as he stared ahead at Lance in front of him. His face was redder than Keith had ever seen it.

“G-guys really,” Lance stuttered out, looking around wildly at the curious faces of the rest of the team. “You don’t have to watch this you know? It’s not that interesting or anything.”
“How is it not interesting for us to see how you activate a telepathic bond?” Pidge said. Lance threw up his arms in exasperation at her before crossing them firmly across his chest.

“It’s already activated! It never goes away!”

“You know what I mean! You said you can enhance it. Make it stronger? Show us how!”

“What for?!”

“Science!”

“As if!”

“I agree with Pidge!”

“Hunk! Why are you on her side?!”

“She’s right! It would be useful for us to know. It might help us understand more about how it all works and then develop our own counter attack to the Galra's signal jammers.”

“Go read some books then! That’s what me and Keith had to do.”

“Lance,” Keith interrupted, trying to sound level-headed despite the heat he could feel in his face. “Let’s just get it over with. We’re wasting time.”

“They'll just keep bugging us otherwise,’ he directed telepathically towards Lance. He felt the panic and humiliation in Lance’s head fade a little.

“Keith’s right,” piped up Allura. “Make it quick, because we’ll be ready to disembark for the planet’s surface soon.” Lance groaned.

“Fine,” he said, and Keith’s heart leapt in his chest as Lance then stepped closer towards him. He’d expected Lance to just grab onto his hand to enhance the bond, but instead Lance raised his gloved hands towards Keith’s face, placing them gently on the sides of his head. Keith was acutely aware of Shiro’s concerned stare on the back of his head and Hunk’s mouth falling open slightly in shock as he stared over Lance’s left shoulder.

Lance didn’t move.

“Err,” said Pidge from somewhere off to Keith’s right. “Is this it or… ?”

“Nope!” Lance said brusquely, removing his hands from Keith’s reddening face. “We’re not doing this in front of you all.” Keith yelped as Lance grabbed his hand and began pulling him out the room. “We’ll be right back.”

The door shut behind them with a metallic whoosh, leaving them along in the corridor with their mutual discomfort. Keith coughed.

“Well that was —”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s not —”

“Not talk about that ever again,” Lance finished for them both. They stared at each other for a few ticks. Lance released his hand that Keith had forgotten he’d been holding. His flush deepened.
“Now where were we?” said Lance, his voice so soft Keith had to repress a shiver. Lance’s smiled a little as he stepped towards him again, and Keith wondered what emotion he must have projected towards him. Lance placed his hands back on either side of Keith’s head and Keith couldn’t help sighing a little as he felt Lance’s fingertips bury themselves into his hair. As Lance leant forward, his eyes hooded, Keith thought for one beautiful, terrifying moment that he was going to kiss him — for real this time. Instead, his forehead came to rest tenderly against Keith’s and the world became a dazzling mess of light, colour and sounds around them.

‘Keith,’ he heard Lance say in his mind, but Keith couldn’t respond, too overwhelmed by the new rush of energy that swam around them. He could feel Blue and Red’s presences’ engulf him once more, inflaming his ‘Lion Senses’ tenfold. The faint traces of their teammates energies began to lap at the edges of his mind, as they had done before the last time they had done this. Lance’s scent soothed him, focused him, Lance’s fingers curling protectively into the hair at the base of Keith’s neck.

When they broke apart, breathing heavily, Keith felt Lance’s hand on his face again. He resisted the temptation to lean further into the warmth.

“Are you okay?” Lance said, his eyes searching Keith’s face. Keith’s skin felt electrified under his touch as Lance swept his thumb absent-mindedly over the skin of his cheek.

“F-fine,” Keith said, reaching up to remove Lance’s hand. “Just hot.”

“Oh! Right, yeah your powers. Sorry.”

“No — no it’s okay. It’s hot, but it’s not as bad as before. It’s… different.” Lance furrowed his brow.

“It’s weaker? Did I do the forehead thing wrong? Have you lost your powers?”

“Lance, calm down. Even you couldn’t mess up something as simple as touching foreheads —”

“Hey!”

“—and no. I still have them. They just feel different. Easier to control. How about yours?”

“I —”

“Guys!” Lance and Keith leapt apart as the control room door opened again to reveal Pidge’s ticked off face. “We need to leave, so whatever weird bond-thing you’re doing, hurry it up!” Keith grimaced as he felt the flicker of her annoyance pass through him. It was unsettling to feel another teammate’s emotion, aside from Lance’s, outside of forming Voltron. Lance shooed her out the way and bustled through the door.

“Fine, fine we’re ready now okay?!” Lance babbled. “Let’s go! I’m pumped! Let’s do this! Go team!” Keith smiled as he caught the flash of red on the back of Lance’s neck before it was concealed by him hurriedly shoving on his helmet.

Something wasn’t right.
Keith felt the emotions in Lance’s mind return his sentiments. They had all landed their lions on the planet’s dusty, desert surface without resistance. Not a sign of the Galra could be seen anywhere. Keith stepped out of Red, his eyes instantly searching for a familiar blue. Lance, Hunk and Pidge had landed their lions a few hundred feet further away from him and Shiro.

“Allura? Coran? Have you heard anything yet from the delegates who contacted us for help?” Shiro said as he stepped out of his lion and stood next to Keith. “Any transmission at all?” Keith watched him curiously, the bond allowing him to feel the swirling unease in Shiro’s head, a stark contrast to his steady words and calm exterior.

‘He gets just as rattled as we do despite the strong front he puts on, huh?’ Keith heard Lance say in his mind. Keith frowned. ‘I don’t like it.’

‘Well it’s not always going to be fun and games listening in on other people’s emotions now is it? We would know.’ Keith smiled at the impish grin he could hear laced within Lance’s words, and felt his concern ease a little.

“Still nothing,” came Coran’s response over the comms. “We’ll keep trying. Let’s just hope that we didn’t arrive too late.”

“I don’t like this,” Shiro said to Keith as they got into their speeders and made to catch up with the others who were already speeding towards the nearest settlement. “This could be another hostage situation, or —”

“Could be something worse,” Keith finished for him. Lance’s mind reached out towards him with a gentle nudge — warm like the squeeze of his hand on his own. He returned the touch in kind, heart giddy. “Are we sure this is the right place?”

“According to Coran, this settlement is the most likely base of operations for the Galra if they were planning a hostile takeover.”

“Right.”

Their speech was stilted, the tension between them from their argument earlier still lingering. Keith tried to focus on the path ahead.

“Keith,” Shiro said, speaking on the comms channel only Keith could hear. “I’m sorry about our disagreement before.” Keith looked over at him from his speeder and nodded in response. “But I still stand by what I said.”

“So do I.”

“You want to use the bond to help. I get that. I just worry about the effect it might have you on you during combat.”

“Well don’t.”

“Keith—”

“You don’t need to worry.” Keith gripped the steering rods of his speeder tightly. “This is why I didn’t want to tell you.” Shiro didn’t respond, but Keith sensed a faint twinge of hurt from him that made him regret the harshness of his words. He brushed off Lance’s questioning thoughts.
‘What’s up?’

‘Nothing. Just Shiro worrying about the damn bond like I knew he would.’

Keith and Shiro continued travelling in silence until they reached the entrance of the large settlement. Shiro cleared his throat.

“Can you sense anything?” Shiro said. “With your, err, bond powers?” Keith parked up his speeder and looked around for the others. They must have parked theirs further in. He closed his eyes and focused his mind on his ‘Lion Senses’. He could see Lance’s heat signature standing out bright up ahead, Pidge and Hunk close beside him. Good. Lance’s scent filled his nose too, pleasant and hot on the roof of his mouth. He licked his lips, trying to taste.

Regaining focus, Keith scanned the area for signs of the planet's natives. He could smell them, and their presences’ were lit up brightly in front of him. They were clumped together and eerily still. Keith furrowed his brow.

“They’re here,” he said slowly, stepping forward into the settlement, looking around at the deserted streets and buildings. “But they’re hiding.” He inhaled deeply. There was no scent indicating that the Galra were anywhere nearby either. Keith clenched his jaw, feeling his teammates’ matching disquiet.

‘This is freaking me out,’ surfaced Lance’s voice again. He then appeared around the corner of a building up ahead with Hunk and Pidge. Shiro and Keith rushed up to meet them.

“Find anything?” Shiro said.

“Nothing,” Hunk said wringing his hands around his Bayard. “I really don’t like this at all guys.”

Keith glanced over at Lance, who was standing very still, his head cocked slightly to the side.

“What can you hear, Lance?” Keith said, and the others turned to look over at him curiously as well. “You’re listening to them with your power right?” Lance screwed up his forehead in concentration.

“They’re talking,” he said. “Well, more like whispering, but it’s all gibberish. I can pick it up, but my helmet’s translator can’t.” Shiro’s look darkened and he tapped at his helmet again.

“Princess, have you still not heard anything?”

“We’ve just received a transmission,” Allura said, “But it’s encoded. We’ll let you know what it says once we’ve deciphered it. Anything to report?”

“It’s deserted,” Pidge said, “and it’s creeping us out, but what was that about an encoded message?”

“We’ll handle it, Pidge,” Allura said firmly, but her fondness was audible. “Concentrate on figuring out the situation there and report back.”

“Understood,” Shiro said, and turned to face them all. Keith didn’t like the sudden feeling of firm authority that he sensed from Shiro's mind. “Normally I’d suggest that we stick together in case of a Galra ambush, which I’m almost certain is what they must be planning, but with the locals being most likely held hostage like this, I think we should split up into groups.”

“Why?” Keith said, turning sharply to look him. “We’d be at a disadvantage if we can’t fight all together.”
“If their plan is to capture us, it would be better not to be all in the same place at once,” he said. “We can also cover more ground and find out quicker what is going on here.” Keith narrowed his eyes, but didn’t reply. Shiro wasn’t wrong, but he didn’t like where this was going. The others nodded in agreement and Keith felt Lance’s eyes on him.

“Fine,” he said after a while, meeting Shiro’s eyes with a determined gaze. “Lance and I will take the north-east side —”

“I think you and Lance should be in separate groups.”

Keith’s temper flared and his newfound control over his ‘Lion Senses’ wavered. He was suddenly sweltering inside his flight suit, fire flickering at his insides and from all around him.

‘Keith?’ Lance said, his voice ringing out in Keith’s head with concern, but he ignored him.

“Shiro,” Keith said in a low growl. “What are you—?”

“If you want to use your bond in a way that can help the team, we need you to be in separate groups.” Shiro met his eyes unflinchingly. “The Galra won’t hesitate to use their signal jammer again in battle and disable our comms. Your ability to communicate telepathically is our way around that.” Keith glared at him. Shiro was right. Of course he was right. This was the perfect opportunity to use the bond as he’d intended, but he knew that wasn’t Shiro’s only reason. ‘Stop trying to protect me and trust me dammit!’

‘Keith,’ Lance said again. ‘What’s up? This is what we wanted right? To use our bond to help the team. Yeah it would have been awesome to partner up again, but this is fine right?’ Keith sighed.

‘Yeah I get it. But that’s not why he’s doing it I know it!’

‘Keith —’

‘He doesn’t trust me to be able to handle the bond. He’s trying to keep watch over me and keep us apart.’

‘But... why?’

‘He thinks I’m going to be... distracted during battle,’ Keith said, not looking at Lance and fighting hard to curb his embarrassment. His cheeks were warm.

“Shiro’s right dude,” Hunk’s said, interrupting their internal conversation much to Keith’s relief. “If either of us get into trouble and the Galra are using their jammer, you and Lance will be our only way of communicating when we split up.” Keith rubbed his eyes and breathed deeply, trying to get his ‘Lion Senses’ back under control. Lance’s mind reached out to him once more, and he felt the stifling heat begin to ease.

“Fine,” he said finally, looking back at Shiro again. “I’ll go with you.”

“I’ll go with you guys too,” Pidge piped up. The expression on her face looked carefully neutral, but Keith recognised the same prickling annoyance within her as was in himself.

‘She’s still mad at Shiro.’

Her mind was blazing with a fierce loyalty that filled Keith with a surge of affection. Lance probed his mind again.
‘Dude, what the heck happened between you guys?!”

‘I’ll tell you later.’

“Good,” said Shiro, seemingly immune to the now strained atmosphere. “Us three will take the north-east side, and Hunk, you and Lance take the south-west.”

“On it!”

“We’ll travel by speeder unless it’s unsuitable to do so,” Shiro continued, “and everyone remember to relay updates regularly via the comms. We want to disturb the locals as little as possible, but if none of them are coming out, we’ll just have to investigate ourselves. Knock down doors if you have to. They could be imprisoned in their own homes. In that case, they’ll need to be freed fast and evacuated to a safe location before they get caught in the crossfire. The Galra will know that we’re here by now for sure. We need to be ready.”

Keith watched Hunk and Lance go, holding onto the glow of Lance’s mind as they sped away. His heart clenched in trepidation. Lance would be fine, Keith told himself. Lance could take of himself. He knew that. But still—

‘Keep your mind open.’ He couldn’t help the thought that slipped from his mind to Lance’s. ‘Stay with me.’

‘Where would I go?’ Lance said with a warm brush of his mind against his, and Keith grinned. He heard a snort beside him and saw Pidge looking at him, her eyebrows raised.

“What did he say to make you pull that kind of expression?” Keith glowered at her.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

They drove their speeders across the desolate, desert city in a bleak silence. It was all the same every way they looked. The quiet was haunting and the heat signatures from the natives still glowed in Keith’s vision in an ominous mass as they sped by. He took comfort in Lance’s mindless chatter.

‘Nothing here either. Unless you count this weird sand-sculpture carving thing that’s sorta shaped like a person. A person that’s eight feet tall with six limbs and what looks like antennae. Oh wait there’s something —! Wait, no it’s just more sand. My bad. Easy mistake to make though when that’s ALL THERE SEEMS TO BE AROUND HERE!”

‘They’re definitely here, Lance. I can see them.’

‘And I can hear them still. It’s creepy as hell hearing them whispering in my ear like this and not being able to understand them.’ Keith felt Lance’s mind ripple with a fresh unease. ‘Though… It’s weird because, even though I can’t understand what they’re saying, they don’t sound… scared.’ Keith felt a chill run through him.

‘There’s definitely something not right about this.’

‘Yeah. Screw this! It’s time to break down some doors!’

‘Right behind you.’

“Shiro,” Keith began, slowing down on his speeder to fall into place beside him, but didn’t get another word out before a sickening horror reverberated through him.
He skidded to a halt, almost knocking into Pidge’s speeder as he did so, his hands shaking. Shiro clambered out of his own speeder and sprinted towards him, eyes wide.

“Keith what —?”

“Lance!” Keith yelled into his headset. “Hunk! What happened? Answer us!” Keith heard Pidge and Shiro’s voices next to him, Pidge calling into her own headset.

“They’re not there!” she said, her face paling. “Keith can you —?” But before she could finish, Lance’s panicked thoughts breached his mind with a disturbing, incoherent urgency.

‘Oh god, oh shit, shit, SHIT! Keith we need to get — FUCK!’ Keith brought a hand to his mouth as the intense pain he felt sent an agonising wave of nausea through him. He gagged and tried to steady himself as he became faint, his vision blurring. Arms on both sides came out to steady him and he looked down into Pidge’s face and knew that he didn’t have to explain anything.

“Lance is injured?” she said, her eyes fearful, clutching tightly onto his arm. He nodded at her weakly and tried to breathe. He felt Shiro’s arm around his shoulder, holding him up.

“We need to — I need to —” Keith rasped, Lance’s pain still pulsing through him. “... need to find them. Find Lance. Right now.”

“Keith, wait!” Shiro yelled after him as Keith pushed them both aside and stumbled towards his speeder. “We should get back to the lions and request backup —”

But Keith was off before he let Shiro finish his sentence. Pain screamed through his mind, but he shoved it away, frantically tracking Lance’s presence, his heat, his scent—

‘Where are you? Lance. Please answer me, please —”

He heard noises. The sounds of battle. Hunk’s Bayard rang out ahead. Keith blazed forward. There was a dust cloud ahead and Keith hurtled towards it. Rubble from a collapsed building came into his line of view and he swerved to a halt, drawing his Bayard and leaping off his speeder in one fluid motion.

It didn’t take long to find him. Lance’s heat forged a path for Keith in the haze of dust and sand. Keith’s throat seized up as he took in the sight of Lance’s collapsed form, slumped against a crumbling wall.

‘I should have been with him!’

Lance’s Bayard was deactivated and lay limp in Lance’s hand which was covered in blood. Keith felt desperately for Lance’s energy and clung on. Lance responded feebly, his mind swimming with an awful combination of affection, fear and pain. Keith felt sick again.

“Keith,” Lance said with a soft smile and Keith wanted to shake him from the look he was giving him. “You’re here.”

“Why wouldn’t I be here idiot?!” Keith said, his voice raw. “What the hell happened? Where’s Hunk?” He crouched down beside him and looked down at Lance’s arms, his blood running cold. “Your arms…” Lance scrunched up his face.

“I may have broken something again.”
“Shit, we’ve got to — shit,” Keith ran his hands shakily over Lance’s. “We need to get you back to the ship — ah!” A cry of pain slipped out as he spoke and Lance sat up instantly, groaning as he leant on his injured left arm accidentally.

“Keith? What’s wrong? Are you —?”

“No, it’s — it’s you. I can feel what you feel remember?”

“What?!”

“My arms really fucking hurt like yours too — shit!”

“You never told me this!”

“It never… came up,” Keith struggled to get the words out. He could feel Lance’s strength waning, along with the strength of their enhanced bond. He gripped on tightly to Lance’s knee. Lance’s eyes went wide with realisation.

“You felt me break my damn leg!”

“I dealt with it.” Ignoring Lance’s squawks of protest, Keith looked around hysterically. “And where is Hunk?!” Lance groaned again, taking steadying breaths.

“He took off after them.”

“After who?”

“The damn creatures on this planet that decided to attack us!” Keith blanched.

“W-what?”

“We need to warn —”

The comms then crackled to life again. Allura’s panicked voice rang out.

“Hello? Hello?! Paladins can you hear me? You need to get out of there now! We believe this planet it hostile. Attempts to contact the planet’s delegates have been rejected and the coded message we received was meant as a distraction in order to prevent the Castle from being able to provide back-up. They’re allied with the Galra you need to —”

The comms went dead once more and Keith and Lance stared at each other. Keith saw his own fear reflected back at him. Lance shuffled closer to Keith, wincing with each movement, and leant his head heavily on his shoulder. Keith leant back into him, breathing in his scent.

And then he smelt it. The hairs on the back of his neck tingled and stood on end. Lance’s mind wrapped around his own, full of dread and concern.

“What is it?” he said, looking up at Keith with panicked eyes.

“The Galra. They’re here,” said Keith. “We’ve got to get you out of here. Now!”

He jumped up, hoisting Lance up as gently as he could, and pulled him back against the wall with him. The dust was settling. They wouldn’t have much cover soon. Hunk’s Bayard was still sounding in the distance and Keith thought he saw the lilac flash of Shiro’s arm. They were too outnumbered on the ground. They needed to get to the lions and get Lance back to the ship. He strained to reach out with his mind towards Red and Blue’s presences’, but he couldn’t feel them.
The strength of their bond was too weak now to reach them at this distance. ‘Dammit! We’ll have to get to them ourselves!’

“I’m going to get you back to Blue,” Keith said, hoisting Lance further across his shoulder and grimacing at the pain he felt shoot through Lance as he did so. “But we need to go and tell the others to pull back first. They don’t know the danger they’re in.” He tried to tug Lance forward, but Lance resisted.

“But Keith,” he said, voice strained. “There’s too many of them! As soon as you run out, you’ll be a target! A bright red target with a bright blue useless target hanging off him.”

“You’re not useless.”

“Keith, my arms aren’t working!”

“You’ve still got your ‘Lion Vision’ right?”

“Barely.”

“Cover for me.”

“What?”

“You can give me the heads up if you see anything right?” Lance gave him a shaky smile.

“Alright, gotcha. Let’s do this!”

Keith engaged his shield and they sprinted forward into the fray. Keith gaped as he laid eyes on the planet’s lifeforms for the first time. It was at least twice his height with a disturbing amount of eyes, feelers and legs. He slashed it down without a second thought, grunting with the effort of keeping Lance steady and from how hard and often he had to swing his Bayard just to cut through the thick skin of the thing.

“I hate bugs,” he said, pulling a face. Lance laughed and winced simultaneously as Keith lurched forwards again.

“You’re scared of bugs?” he said with a weak attempt at a smirk.

“Not normal sized ones.” Lance laughed again, but it was hollow and breathless, making Keith’s heart go haywire.

‘Stop worrying,’ came Lance’s voice in his head. ‘You promised you’d rescue me again right?’

‘That was meant to be a joke!’

Lance’s mind spiked with pain again and Keith tried hard to drown it out in his own mind, his arms shaking. He closed in on the others ahead of him. They were surrounded by the creatures and barely holding them off. Keith looked up at the sky towards the Castle and could already see the Galra forces advancing on the ship. His ‘Lion Senses’ were overwhelming. Despite the strength of their bond ebbing, the heat and smell of the alien creatures around them in such a concentrated area left him gasping and mind hazy.

“Keith, watch out!”

Whirling around at Shiro’s voice, Keith ducked, dragging Lance down with him, just in time to avoid the lunge of one of the creatures. Shiro cut it down with a slash of his arm.
“Thanks!” Keith yelled over the deafening noise around them. Shiro nodded and gestured towards Lance.

“We need to get Lance back to the Castle,” he said. “Hunk is also injured and won’t be able to hold them off for too much longer. You’re the fastest. You should get out of here with Red and provide us with backup from the air. We’ll protect Lance.” Keith shook his head.

“We all need to get out of here now! It’s not just the natives. The Galra are here too.” Shiro’s eyes widened. “You’ll be too outnumbered to protect him without me here. I’m not leaving!” Shiro looked at him angrily.

“Then what’s your plan?” he shouted. “Because you saw what just happened with that creature. You didn’t see it coming for you at all! I remember that behaviour from when we sparred. You’re losing control of your senses aren’t you?”

“I’m fine! I can get Lance to Blue.”

“—and now you’re letting your emotions get the better of you,” Shiro said, dragging both him and Lance into an empty building out sight. “Even on your speeder you’ll be an easy target if you’re right about the incoming Galra forces. I can’t let you go out there by yourself.”

“I’m here,” said Lance weakly, and Shiro looked at him in surprise. He put a hand on Lance’s shoulder gently.

“I can let either of you go out there without backup,” he said, his voice softer than it had been before.

“We’ll take Pidge with us!” Keith blurted out. “We’ll get Lance back to Blue while you and Hunk hold them off.” Shiro narrowed his eyes at him.

“Keith, that’s not—”

“I can smell them,” Keith interrupted. “Their forces are advancing from the north. If I leave now with Lance on my speeder we’ll be able to make it.”

“Not necessarily.”

“With Pidge helping us and you and Hunk holding them back—”

“There’s no guarantee.”

“We’ve got to do something, Shiro!”

A loud boom resounded through the building and they heard both Pidge and Hunk cry out. Shiro turned to look at him urgently.

“Okay, fine. We’ll give it a shot. You and Lance run out there, grab the nearest speeder you can and head off with Pidge. I’ll explain the plan to Hunk. Hopefully with his Bayard we’ll be able to do some damage. Now get out of here!”

“Yes, Sir!”

Keith grabbed Lance around the waist and sprinted out the door, slashing down the giant bug-like creatures as he went. He looked around helplessly for signs of Pidge.

“She’s there!” Lance said, groaning as he lifted his left hand to point over Keith’s shoulder and
then let it fall back down heavily with a small gasp of pain. Keith glared at him.

“Don’t point if it hurts, idiot!” He took off in the direction Lance pointed. “Your ‘Lion Vision’ still works then?”

“Only just,” Lance said. “She’s dead ahead, but you’ve got at least ten of ‘em surrounding her.”

“Got it.”

Once he was in range for his normal, human eyes to see, Keith brandished his Bayard and yelled out.

“Pidge!” She turned to look at him, cutting down an enemy as she did.

“What are you doing?!” she yelled at him as they turned in sync to bring down another. “Get Lance out of here! Hunk says he’s broken at least one of his arms if not both!”

“We need you to help us get to Blue,” shouted Keith. “Shiro’s orders.” Pidge squinted at him. “The Galra forces are advancing on us. Hunk and Shiro will hold them off for as long as possible while we get the hell out.” Pidge held his gaze for a split second before nodding.

“Okay,” she said, and raced towards her speeder, dodging enemy attacks as she went. Keith spotted Lance’s speeder close by and sprinted towards it, holding on tight to Lance’s waist. They squeezed into the small space, taking off their helmets to create more headroom, and sped off, Pidge flanking behind them.

“Blue looks good on you,” Lance said groggily from behind him, pressed up tightly against him and resting his chin awkwardly on Keith’s shoulder.

“Don’t distract the driver,” Keith said, flushing and Lance laughed, his breath tickling Keith’s cheek.

Just when Keith could start to feel the edges of Blue’s energy mingle with his own, he caught the scent again. Galra troops coming in from the east. ‘Shit!’

“What’s wrong?” said Lance. Keith slowed to come into line with Pidge’s speeder and waved to try and get her attention.

“We’re about to be attacked,” he said, voice grim. Maybe Shiro had been right. ‘Dammit, I need to get him to safety I can’t leave him here to fight, shit —’

“Keith,” Lance’s voice was soft and his mind radiant. “I’ll be fine. We’ll be fine,” Keith could feel Lance’s mouth moving against his cheek as he spoke. “We’re a good team right? We’re partners! We can do this. Don’t worry about me.” He chuckled. “I’ve come back from worse.” Keith’s mouth twitched at that, but he said nothing. He tried again to get Pidge’s attention. She looked over and yelled out towards him.

“What’s wrong?”

“The Galra are closing in on us faster than we thought,” Keith responded. Pidge bit her lip.

“Damn. What can we do?” Keith tried to think, his mind still clouded with Lance’s pain and his overwhelming urge to be near him, keep him safe.

“Could you hold them off for us? Buy us some time while I get Lance out of here?”
“Keith!” Lance shrieked in his ear. “I just told you not to worry about me! What are you doing?!”

“Not listening.”

“Shiro’s going to kill you!”

“I’ll do it,” Pidge said, voice firm. “Now get going! See you back on the ship.”

“Thanks, Pidge.”

She shot him a grin and sped off. Keith pushed Lance’s speeder to its highest speed and raced towards Blue’s light. Lance yelled and clung onto him tight with his least injured arm, wincing nonetheless.

“I can’t believe you,” he mumbled into Keith’s hair. “Why do you make me — why do I — why?!”

Keith sniffed the air again, tracking the movements of the troops and Pidge. She was holding off a few, but there were too many of them. Some had managed to slip by her.

‘Shit, shit, shit.’

They were moving fast too, travelling on their own speeder-like contraptions. He brought up the rear-view camera on the speeder console and could spot them in the distance not too far away.

They were almost at Blue.

Keith held onto her calming presence and heard her deep warming purrs surround them. She knew what was expected of her. Her towering form came into view and her jaw opened wide. The Galra were at their heels. Laser fire began to rain down on them and Keith tried to dodge.

‘Just a few more feet.’

The troops were flanking them, at least twenty or so with more probably on the way. Keith put his left hand down as far as it would go, swinging Lance’s speeder sharply to the side, taking out two of them as he went. They came to a shuddering halt in front of Blue’s mouth.

Keith leapt out of the speeder, activated his shield and Bayard, and dragged Lance out by his waist, shielding him from incoming laser fire as he went. They ran up Blue’s walkway and Keith pushed Lance forward out of the way, seconds before turning to thrust his Bayard into a Galra troop’s arm. He kicked it off Blue’s walkway and charged forward, preventing more from advancing. Glancing over his shoulder, he clenched his jaw in a snarl as he saw Lance activating his Bayard and running back down towards him.

“Go!” Keith screamed at him. “Get out of here! I’ll take care of these assholes and get to Red. Just go!” Lance’s mind seethed in anger and despair.

“Y-you idiot! Don’t you fucking dare!” Keith gritted his teeth as Lance raised his injured arm to shoot at a troop that tried to sneak up behind Keith, his pain shooting up Keith’s own arm.

“Get going, Lance!” Keith yelled, cutting down soldier after soldier, panting heavily. “I’ll be right behind you.” His mind was screaming at him in anguish and his heart hurt. He thought of Lance, thought of the look on his face when he’d found him slumped up against that wall, the way his mouth had brushed up against the skin of his cheek in the speeder, thought about the kiss—

“You asshole! I’m not leaving without you!” Lance yelled back. He tried to push forward, but
Keith pushed him back forcefully, stepping off Blue’s walkway.

“I wanted it!” Keith shouted at him. He felt Lance’s mind churning with confusion.

“What?” he said, frozen in place. Keith cut down another trooper and turned to look at him.

“I wanted to kiss you in that dream,” Lance gaped at him. “I need you to know that,” Lance’s mind seemed to have frozen in place as well. “And I would do it again too.”

He turned back around, in time to skewer two Galra troopers at once, flinging them back into the ever advancing mass. Lance finally found his voice again, his mind reeling with shock and awe.

“K-Keith! You —!”

Keith ran up to him and shoved him backwards, hard. Lance stared up at him from the floor and Keith felt the intensity of his horror, anger and heartache like it was his own. He then stepped off Blue’s walkway for the final time.

‘Get him out of here,’ Keith said, and Blue’s responding growls enveloped him as he watched her gleaming jaws clamp shut — the last thing he saw before he was swallowed up in a heaving mass of ominous, lilac light.
Chapter End Notes

A/N: Coming at you again with the cliff-hangers like the little shit that I am.

please, please don't kill me

Comments are always highly appreciated! ^-^ And I am open to asks/chats on tumblr! <3

ETA: OMG GUYS!! Please check out this lovely Entangled fanart drawn by tumblr user bowiesnippleantennae!! <333

Artwork (from me!) coming soon! <3 Artwork added! See here on my tumblr

Tumblr | Twitter
Quantum Leap

Chapter Notes

A/N: In the end, I probably could have split this into two chapters, but I wanted to stop torturing everyone with sad cliffhangers lol. Please enjoy this 15k monster that I never intended to be 15k orz

Credit to my bf who beta'd this despite having exams to revise for! <3

TW: Mild violence and torture scenes. M-rating for sexual content also comes into play again for this one...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance couldn’t remember getting back to the Castle. He couldn’t remember Blue flying him out, couldn’t remember Red following close behind them, and couldn’t remember how he’d ended up curled in on himself on the floor of the control room with a damp congealment of sand, sweat, blood and tears on his face. His throat felt raw, like he’d been crying for hours. Maybe he had. Coran’s comforting hand on his shoulder barely registered with him, and Allura’s voice landed garbled on his ears as she tried in vain to communicate with the rest of the team still on the dusty planet’s surface. He was vaguely aware of his mouth moving in a stream of gurgling words that were wet with tears as Coran nodded at him wordlessly, rubbing gentle circles into his back.

“I couldn’t — he wouldn’t — he wouldn’t let me! He just — let Blue take me. Let her leave him behind. And they — oh god! They got to him and I couldn’t stop it I —”

A loud bang made them all jump. Allura’s steadfast words over the comms faltered as the three of them turned to the centre of the room to see that Shiro had ascended out of his hangar door. He’d thrown his helmet to the floor with all the power of his Galra arm, his eyes blazing with a white-hot fury that made Lance, for the first time, feel afraid of him. His helmet came to rest with a clatter at Allura’s feet. She took a step back.

“They’ve taken him!” he yelled, marching forward towards Allura. “When I got to Black she told me. He wasn’t in Red or Blue. The Galra have him! I said something like this would happen if you sent them out there with something as unpredictable as that bond! They weren’t ready! Keith wasn’t ready!” She turned to him with a swift glance. Her next words were firm, but Lance could see a tremble in her hands on the control panel.

“We can’t discuss this now with the Castle under fire, the comms cutting out and two paladins still not having left the atmosphere —”

“Three paladins!”

“Shiro, I’m sorry but —”

“We have to go after him now before they leave with him!”

“It’s too late, Shiro!” Allura’s voice was wavering as her eyes darted between him and the new
wave of Galra ships that were being sent their way. “They already left with him.” Shiro’s eyes widened.

“What?!”

“And we need you back out there to fight off this next wave. The Castle’s power is draining fast —”

“What do you mean they’ve already left?!”

“We couldn’t communicate with him or track his movements via his suit due to the interference,” said Coran, still rubbing soothing circles into Lance’s shoulder. “But Lance says that he can no longer detect him through their bond.”

“Lance… ?”

Shiro finally turned to look at him, as though only just realising he was there.

“I can’t feel him,” Lance whispered. “I can’t feel him, Shiro. He’s gone. I can’t — I can’t feel —”

It was true. Lance could feel Keith’s absence like someone had gouged a hole right through his chest. It wasn’t the same as when he was just out of range. He’d been ripped away from him, taken, missing—

_Gone._

Shiro took a few steps towards him, a pained look of worry on his face. He reached out a hand, grasping at the air briefly, before changing his mind and rounding on Allura again.

“I don’t understand! Why didn’t Red follow him? Go after him? She could’ve —”

“Because he told her not to,” Lance interrupted. He gave up trying to stop the flow of tears and let them seep unpleasantly into his mouth. “I heard him. He — he told her that protecting the Lions of Voltron was more important. He didn’t want her to get captured too.”

“Because _Keith_ understands the importance of not letting the Universe’s greatest weapon fall into Zarkon’s hands,” followed up Allura heatedly, meeting Shiro’s eyes with a look that was just as intense as her words. Shiro appeared to wilt briefly, before collecting himself again. He closed his eyes and took a long, deep breath. Full of admiration for Shiro’s now suddenly calm demeanour, Lance watched as he knelt at Allura’s feet to pick up his fallen helmet and put it back on.

“You’re right,” he said stiffly, giving her a curt nod before turning back towards his hangar door. “I’ll get back out there now and provide backup.” Allura returned his gesture with a strained smile.

“Get Pidge and Hunk out of there.”

“Understood.”

“We’ll get him back, Shiro,” she said, and Lance’s heart twinged painfully at how akin the fiery determination in her eyes was to that of Keith’s. “Once we’re all back safe, we’ll wormhole out of here and then form a plan.”

“Agreed.” Shiro’s gaze became steely once again however as he began to descend. “But I want a mission debriefing. We have _not_ finished this discussion.”

And then he was gone, leaving a silence heavy with guilt in his wake.
Lance had seen Pidge angry on many occasions, but never like this. Her fury rolled off her in waves so distinctly red, Lance could taste, as well as see it in his mind’s eye. Orange-red tingled on his tongue, a prickly sting—

“Red pepper,” he mumbled to himself without thinking, and Hunk, who had taken over Coran’s duty of supporting him on the floor, looked at him oddly.

“Lance?” he said, shifting closer to him, carefully so as to not move his own sprained arm too much. Lance shuddered. His ‘Lion Senses’ were going haywire. Bright sounds and hues assualted him on all sides and clashed hideously with the assortment of colours that his mind also conjured up on instinct as is absorbed the world around him. His ‘weird colour thing’, as Keith has so affectionately named it, was all of a sudden much weirder and much more colourful than Lance ever remembered it being.

“I can taste how angry she is,” Lance said, again without putting much thought into how bizarre this must sound. Hunk raised his eyebrows, but Lance couldn’t dwell long on his friend’s reaction, before his senses were overloaded once more. The pain from his arms coursed icy-blue up his spine, flooding his mouth with the acrid taste of disinfectant and the urge to retch. Shiro’s voice, purple-grey in his ears, was being marred with the glaring white of his fury that Lance saw battling wildly with Pidge’s own pepper-red as she shouted at him, angry tears filling her eyes. Their voices pounded away at his eardrums with such force that Lance felt as though they would burst.

Allura’s usually melodic, periwinkle blue, was drowned out by the deluge of inky black that engulfed her words with her own brand of resentment that appeared to seethe with guilt and sadness. It felt sticky and wet, as though he had swallowed tar.

Lance tried to cling on desperately to the ever-reliable warmth of Hunk’s golden yellow, but even it seemed to have been dulled by a beige layer of worry when Lance looked over at him. It tasted stale, his mouth feeling dry and filled with dust. He tried to swallow.

“You need a healing pod,” Hunk said softly. “You’re in shock and I’m guessing also in a lot of pain from your arms. Not to mention —” Hunk paused, and Lance could see his mind attempting to work out the best way to breach the subject. “You know?” The sympathy in his eyes was agonising. Lance pressed his mouth into a tight line, feeling his lips begin to tremble with suppressed emotion again.

‘Keith.’

Lance felt Hunk’s hand brush back the blood-matted hair on his forehead as he pressed his stinging eyes shut with his hands. Even with his eyes shut however, he could still see the moment happening again in front of his eyes — Keith’s terrifyingly calm expression as he’d pushed Lance away and accepted his fate, Blue’s jaws sealing him off from view.

An unbearable hurt squirmed in the pit of Lance’s stomach and he doubled over again. It was grey, devoid of life or any colour at all — an empty ash cloud clogging his lungs.

“You shouldn’t have listened to him!” Shiro was shouting at Pidge. “He wasn’t stable! He wasn’t in control of himself!”

“It was the right thing to do!” she shouted back. “They never would have made it if I hadn’t pulled
back to hold them off!”

“They didn’t make it!”

“Lance did! So did the lions. Keith made sure of it! And we can — we can get him back! He’ll be okay. He —”

“He’s captured! And now that they have their tech developed and working, they aren’t going to go easy on him. His plan was reckless and it endangered all of you—”

“I was fine! I made it back—”

“Only because Hunk got to you and the other lions in time—”

“I —”

“Keith wasn’t in his right mind, Pidge. The bond wasn’t making him think rationally it was—”

“That’s not true!”

“He let it get to him. He didn’t have control. It was dangerous to send them into battle with it activated like that!”

“It’s not dangerous! It can help us fight. Without it we wouldn’t have been able to communicate or know that the Galra were coming when they did!”

“None of that matters if Keith isn’t able to control how it makes him feel!”

“He would have gone after Lance anyway, Shiro! You know that! The bond has nothing to do with how Keith feels. He —”

“Paladins!” Allura’s voice rose high and sharp, cutting between the heated exchange. “This isn’t helping. Perhaps we were too rash with our decision to try and exploit the bond’s potential in battle.” She looked pointedly at Shiro. “But there is also nothing to suggest that Keith’s feelings and actions would be in anyway unchanged if his bond with Lance hadn’t been activated.”

Shiro’s anger appeared to ebb a little at that, but Pidge still looked infuriated, refusing to look at him.

“What’s important now,” continued Allura, “is that we get Hunk and Lance healed and begin working on our counter attack and rescue mission.” Shiro nodded, trying to get his breathing under control.

“You’re right, Allura. We’re sorry,” he turned to Pidge. “We need to be a team now. For Keith.” Lance watched with wide eyes as she brushed off Shiro’s attempt to place a hand on her arm in an act of truce.

“You should have trusted him,” she said. Her voice was low and steady, but her eyes betrayed the intense effort she was making to keep herself collected. “Then he wouldn’t have been so focused on proving you wrong.”

They all watched in horrified silence as she then turned and stormed off towards the door.

“I’ll get him back,” she said. “Finish my device for hacking their jammer. See how they like it! Come on, Hunk!”
It was at that point Coran apparently saw fit to intervene. He put a gentle, but firm hand down on Hunk’s shoulder as he made to get up, and then thrust out his other in front of Shiro as he attempted to follow after Pidge.

“Pidge,” Coran called out to her, and she turned back to look at him. “Hunk can’t work on your device right now. He may not be as badly injured as Lance here, but he still needs to go to the med bay. As anxious as we all are to get Keith back, we all need to keep a cool head. Your help is also needed here. The encoded message we received was a trap containing a virus that disabled a lot of our systems during the ambush, and although Allura and I managed to stop its progress, we’ll need someone with your expertise to help us run a thorough check on the Castle’s systems.” He looked down at her with a fond smile. “Can you do that for us?”

Lance watched, with a welcome warmth of affection in his chest, as Pidge’s anger dissipated under Coran’s look. ‘He has that effect on you.’ The red pepper on his tongue faded into something more sweet.

“Okay,” she said quietly, and made instead to sit in front of a monitor with Allura, a small, resigned sort of smile on her face, but a smile nonetheless Lance observed. Coran then turned to Shiro, who was still watching Pidge with a wounded look in his eyes.

“Shiro, would you take Lance to the healing pods whilst I go and fix up Hunk’s arm?” he said. Lance opened his mouth to protest.

“Coran I don’t need —!” But Coran held up a hand, cutting him off.

“You may not be as injured as last time, but a healing pod is still the fastest way to get you back to full strength and ready for battle,” he said firmly, and Lance’s protests petered out on his lips. He looked down solemnly, feeling worse than useless. How was he going to help with a rescue plan when he was stuck inside a 10,000-year-old ice coffin? He thought back to Keith’s final words to him, and anguish wrenched in his gut, his mind aching with loss once more. They must have sensed his distress, for both Shiro and Coran were now beside him, pulling him gently to his feet. Shiro’s arm around his waist was secure and comforting.

“I’ll get him in there, Coran,” Shiro said, and then turned to look at Lance. “Is this okay? Can you walk?” Lance looked back at him and felt the stinging sensation in his eyes return, as he saw the matching hurt that he felt himself, echoed in Shiro’s expression and words. He nodded stiffly, not trusting himself to speak. His throat felt swollen. Coran’s hand was back on his shoulder.

“You’ll be okay,” he said. “Your injuries shouldn’t take as long to heal as last time. The equivalent of an Earth day at most!” Lance gave him a weak smile in response.

“Thanks, Coran.”

For the first time, Lance found himself embracing the suffocating cold of the cryo pod. The frigid air froze his insides, and he finally felt relief from his hurting mind as his consciousness slipped away from him into the darkness.

Coran had been wrong.
As before, Lance’s mind stirred before his physical self could even contemplate moving. After the initial panic of feeling trapped inside in his own body, his mind began to soothe him with the familiar voices of his teammates. They filtered through his mind like colourful blots of ink falling into a water glass. Washing over him and blending together, they gave him the strange sensation of being encased in a beautiful watercolour painting.

“…got to be today,” Lance managed to decipher after great concentration. “Coran was certain about it this time.”

Soft blue. Periwinkle. Like the early morning sky.

‘Allura.’

“That’s what he said yesterday —”

Golden-yellow. The risen sun shone brightly against the periwinkle.

“—and we all know how that turned out.”

“His vitals all look good though. I think Coran might be right this time.”

Burnt orange. Desert sands. Cool from the night, but becoming warmer in the sunlight.

“Stand back everyone. His arms moved. I think he’s waking up. I’ll make sure to catch him.”

Purple-grey. The great snow-capped mountains far off in distance. Strong, steady and reliable. The sun made the mountain peaks sparkle.

“Make sure you do! I’d rather not have him in there for a fourth time if he falls and breaks something else.”

Bright green leaves. They spread out high in a wondrously cool canopy above his head. Protective, calming — attached to a sturdy trunk with deep roots. A tree in the desert oasis.

But something was missing. Something he needed.

Lance felt parched.

Next thing he knew, he was encased in Shiro’s arms, sucking in a great lungful of air and gasping at the contrast in temperature as the considerably hotter air of the chamber hit his frozen lungs.

“Thirsty,” he managed to croak, sticking out his tongue and pulling a face at the unpleasant dryness of his mouth. It was only when Hunk passed him a water pouch and he started to drink that his mind started to feel again.

‘He’s still gone.’

An emptiness settled once more in his stomach. The water didn’t taste so quenching anymore. Lance passed the pouch back to Hunk with a slight tremble of his fingers and pinched the bridge of his nose and he felt his head beginning to ache.

‘He’s gone, he’s gone, he’s —’
“How long was I out for?” Lance said, saying anything he could to distract from the heat behind his eyes. Why was his head hurting like he’d pulled an all-nighter cramming for exams? He’d just come out a healing pod! It didn’t make any sense. To say that the resounding silence from his team made him uneasy was an understatement. He looked over to Hunk, and Hunk bit his lip.

“I was, ah, a little bit off in my original estimation.” Coran said, hesitation in his words. Dread began to surge through Lance’s mind. “But don’t panic!” Coran continued hastily, “I was only out by 86,678 ticks!” Lance frowned at him.

“What is how long in Earth days exactly?”

“Approximately one and a half,” Pidge helpfully supplied. “You were in there for almost three Earth days.” Lance spluttered and whirled around to face Coran again.

“Three days for a broken arm?!”

“Well, technically a broken arm and wrist —”

“That’s still too long! Your space pods are broken!”

“They are in full working order! I checked them myself after the last time.”

“Well you should check them again!” Lance knew it was pointless and unfair unleashing his emotions out on Coran like this, but he couldn’t stop himself. “I should have been awake! Here to help you guys with a plan.” He groaned. His head was burning and his ears started to ring as his enhanced hearing began to make itself known. “We need to get him back! I can’t be lying around here useless doing nothing! You should have just woke me up early or — or — I don’t know! Something! Anything! He’s already been gone too long we can’t just —”

His reached out with his mind instinctively, desperately searching for the energy he wanted, needed — the fiery presence that made him feel so much. But it wasn’t there. He pushed his mind out further than he’d ever tried to before. Red’s and Blue’s energies brushed up against his — compassionate, sorrowful and hurting like he was — but it wasn’t enough. An arm around his shoulders brought him back with a sickening lurch.

“Lance,” Hunk’s voice eased the whirlwind of his thoughts a little. “It’s okay. We’ve been working on a plan to get Keith back.” Lance nodded wetly into Hunk’s shoulder, wiping hurriedly at his now slightly damp eyes. “Pidge and I have been building something that you might be able to help us with.” Lance looked up at that, curious, feeling a bit more hopeful.

“I can help?” Pidge smiled at him.

“Come on. We’ll show you.”

Lance stared, slack-jawed at the impressively disturbing assortment of electrical and mechanical space junk that now made up Green’s hangar. He trod forward with nervous steps, taking care not to trip over any cables.

“Did your lion throw up in here or something?” Lance tried to quip as he normally would, but his voice came out sounding hollow. “Because if a giant robot lion could puke its guts out, this is
exactly what it would look like. What *is* all this junk?” Pidge glared at him, but Lance saw her mouth twitch.

“It’s not *junk*. It’s our experiment. We’ve been working on this since you guys first took out their signal jammer. Hunk put the remains of it back together and I’ve been trying to reverse engineer it to figure out how it operates.” She grimaced. “But I hit a roadblock. There’s not enough information available about how these mystical bonds with our lions’ work. Without knowing that, I can’t work out how to stop the Galra interfering with them. But now that we know about your telepathic bond with Keith, we might be able to use it to make a breakthrough.”

Lance’s heart ached at the mention of Keith’s name again, but he tried to push the feeling down. This was important. This could *help* him. When Pidge had tried to ask him before about running experiments on him and Keith, he’d point blank refused. He regretted that now.

‘*Maybe he would have still been here if I hadn’t.*’

He tried to ignore the lingering thought and met Pidge’s gaze with determination.

“What do you need me to do?”

As Hunk placed the strange mild-melding contraption on Lance’s head (which he vaguely recognised as a Pidge-modified version of what they’d used in their paladin training sessions) he began to feel trepidation.

“Relax, Lance,” Pidge said as she hooked up the headset to her laptop. “I’ll just be analysing the signals your brain sends out when you attempt to, ah, what was it?”

“Reach out?” Lance offered. Pidge nodded.

“Yeah, that. I want you to first concentrate on your bond with Blue and reaching out to her,” Lance raised an eyebrow at her.

“Why Blue?”

“So then we can compare the data we get to what we’ve already measured from everyone else.” She paused at Lance’s quizzical expression. “I’ve already ran this test on Shiro, Hunk and myself.”

“How do *I* help then?”

“Because you and Keith are different. So far the only communications that haven’t been affected are your bonds with your lions, and your bond with each other. If we can work out what’s different about the way you communicate with both Blue and Keith compared to how the rest of us communicate with our lions and each other via the comms, then I might be able to stop the Galra’s jammer from working.” Lance smirked at that.

“You *might* be able to?” She pouted.

“I *will* be able to.”

“That’s more like it.” Lance grinned, feeling a little more like himself for a brief moment. “Alright, let’s do this!” His smile wavered a little however when he caught sight of the now awkward look
“I’ll also need you to, well, attempt to reach out to Keith as well.” Lance’s breath caught in his throat. “Can you do that?” Lance swallowed.

“I — I don’t think — he’s too far. I won’t be able—” Hunk’s hand was on his back.

“We don’t expect you to be able to reach him from here,” he said softly. "But if you could… imitate how you would usually communicate with him, it would really help. If it’s too much for you, you don’t have to do it though. Right, Pidge?” Lance turned to look at her and she nodded, eyes glassy.

“I can do it,” Lance said firmly, readjusting the device on top of his head, his hands only trembling a little. He closed his eyes and felt for Blue, needing the comfort of her energy now more than ever. She curled around him, the luminescent blue of her presence glowed brightly, enveloping him with light. A choked sob escaped him as he felt her seek out the hurt he was trying to suppress. She clamped her jaws down on it gently, like a mother with her cub, and pulled it up to the surface of his mind, laying it out bare before him.

‘It’s okay,’ she appeared to say, her deep purrs reverberating through his chest. ‘Don’t hide it away. Don’t fight it. It’s okay to feel.’

“Lance?”

Hunk’s hands were on his shoulders, squeezing them gently. Lance opened his eyes. His face felt wet again. He wiped at it furiously.

“Did you get what you needed?”

“Y-yeah we got it,” Hunk said, “but are you okay? We don’t have to —”

“I’m fine.”

“We don’t have to carry on, Lance.”

“I said I’m fine.” Lance straightened the device on his head again. “He’d do the same for me,” he mumbled to himself, quiet enough he hoped that Hunk and Pidge didn’t hear.

He let his mind drift…

And he thought of Keith.

Keith’s hands were never cold. The fingernails on his right hand were always bitten worse than his left, and both of them had cuticles equally as torn. Lance’s hand twitched as he remembered the warmth of Keith’s fingers around his. He reached out further, chasing the memory. Blue’s energy encircled him once more and her words floated through his head again.

‘It’s okay to feel.’

So Lance did.

When Keith laughed properly, it was probably the dorkiest and best laugh Lance had ever heard in his life. Keith collected weird trinkets, had an insatiable addiction to Hunk’s baked goods, engaged in long conversations with his lion out loud and was definitely scared of bugs despite telling Lance the contrary. He didn’t joke often, but when Keith did, his sense of humour ranged from
wonderfully dry to borderline ridiculous.

Lance laughed wetly, but held on, pushing his mind out, out, out—

Keith couldn’t hold a tune, but Lance had heard him hum under his breath on multiple occasions when he’d thought no one could hear him. But Lance had. And that thought made Lance feel oddly giddy.

Her energy pulsing through him, Blue embraced him, keeping him steady as his mind spread out, threatening to becoming a runaway torrent as he reached out further and further.

‘Let me feel you again.’

To his surprise, he then felt the unmistakable burn of Red’s presence begin to simmer within him, right down to his very bones. She was hurting like he was — enraged, grieving, hungry for revenge on those who had taken her paladin away from her. Surrounding Lance with an achingly familiar, crimson energy, she urged him onwards. Lance’s hands shook.

The hair at the back of Keith’s neck had been deceivingly soft when Lance had held him. Keith never brushed it, but it somehow looked good anyway.

Lance hated that.

His throat was burning.

When Keith slept, his mind became the orange-pink of a sunset and Lance’s pillow had smelt like him for at least three days after Keith had laid his head down on it.

Lance knew he was crying now, but he couldn’t stop himself. Hunk gripped onto his hands and he grasped them back tightly.

Keith’s scarf around Lance’s wrist felt like a lifeline that kept him from drifting out into the unforgiving cold of deep space—

Lance let go of one of Hunk’s hands to scrabble blindly for the red fabric. He felt Pidge’s small hands on his shoulders, but he couldn’t hear what she was saying.

Now that he’d reached the very deepest recesses of his mind, the parts that he had always been too afraid to confront, Lance couldn’t decide what was the most mesmerising: the first time he’d seen Keith fly the simulator back at the Garrison, or the way Keith’s face lit up when he let himself smile fully.

Lance’s whole body trembled from the force of his sobs.

Keith’s energy was completely the wrong colour—

I wanted it.

—but that didn’t matter.

I wanted to kiss you in that dream.

Because he was Keith—

I need you to know that.
—and Lance wouldn’t trade that beautiful fire for anything.

*I would do it again too.*

He tore the contraption off his head.

Hunk held him close as he heaved wet apologies into his shoulder.

“I’m sorry, Hunk. I’m so sorry I —”

“Lance, it’s okay. We shouldn’t have asked you to —”

“N-no, not that. At the Garrison. Y-you were right. You were right all along, and I got angry at you when I shouldn’t have. You were only trying to help and — and I — *shit!*” Hunk’s mouth opened in shock and Pidge turned to Hunk in confusion.

“What’s he talking about?”

“I liked him,” Lance blurted out before Hunk could speak. “I liked Keith, Pidge, and I was too stupid to — I didn’t — but he didn’t even look at me! It just made me so mad I couldn’t —”

Emotion overcame him again as he saw Pidge’s eyes widen with realisation.

“You’ve liked him? All this time?” Lance covered his face with his hands.

“I didn’t mean to! I didn’t *want* to!” He took a long shuddering breath. “I didn’t think I *did,*” he whispered. Hunk smiled wryly.

“I tried to tell you back then,” he said quietly. “But you wouldn’t listen.”

“I know I know… Shit. I was an idiot. Hunk I’m sorry I —”

“Dude, I was out of line. We both were. It’s okay.”

“It was going fine! I was getting over it! Even after he turned up again to rescue Shiro. It was the *stupid bond* that messed everything up!” He brought his shaking hands down to his mouth, feeling nauseous. “Shit. I’m in love with him.” His heart clenched. “I’m in love with him and I never told him.” Pidge gaped at him, horrified.

“You haven’t *told him*!?”

“Because the idiot went and got himself captured before I could!” Lance spat out, his voice broken and hoarse. “And we don’t know what the Galra will do to him or if we’ll ever get him back.”

A sombre silence fell, broken only by Lance’s sniffs as he collapsed heavily against Hunk again, pressing his tear-stained face into his chest. Hunk brought his arms around him in a tight hug. Not long after Pidge joined them. Lance felt her arms holding him loosely, gently around his shoulders as she settled into his lap. Her face was damp against his neck.

None of them could say anything.
He had tried counting the time at first, but Keith’s concentration hadn’t lasted long before the pain became too overwhelming and the numbers died on his tongue. The highest count that he’d reached so far had only been about 45 seconds, before he was doubled over once more from the intensity of it.

Panting from the effort, Keith tried again to pull himself further up against the wall of his cell. He wasn’t sure what was worse: the excruciating sting of his broken arm, or the agonising loss of, not just Red again, but Lance too. Their absence made his brain feel as though it was being slowly siphoned of everything other than a grey foreboding and a hollow ache.

Hearing footsteps, he turned, heart racing to squint through the blackness towards the prison cell door. Or where it ought to be. It was too dark for him to tell. His eyes were sore, but he kept them open, waiting, every muscle in his body tense. Keith held his breath—

— and let it out carefully. Breathing out too sharply hurt. He then grimaced and let out an involuntary groan as his stomach growled and writhed unpleasantly. Food was the least of his worries right now, but the sensation confirmed what he’d been suspecting. He’d been here for at least over a day if not longer. During that time, no one had visited his cell once since his capture.

Keith winced as his arm flared with the painful reminder of how a Galra soldier had all but torn it apart in his efforts to wrestle Keith’s Bayard from his grip. His mind seethed with rage at the memory. He moved his bruised jaw experimentally from side to side, tasting again the familiar, metallic tang of blood in his mouth as he pressed his fingertips into the bruising. The punch he’d got in afterwards had been worth the one he’d received in return. Sort of.

The strange bowl of liquid in the corner of his cell shone mysteriously at him again. He licked his lips but ignored it. No matter how thirsty he was, he wasn’t going to trust any food or drink the Galra offered him. It smelt sweet. He inhaled the scent deeply. It was rich and dizzying.

It reminded him of Lance.

A dry, sardonic bark of laughter left him and resonated around the empty cell. He threw his back against the wall as his mind once again tried to claw its way out, beyond its limits, in a frenzied haze of need — the need for the irreplaceable feeling of sapphire-blue energy entangled with his own.

‘Lance.’

His chest heaved in a phantom cry, but no noise left him and his eyes remained dry and spent.

*I’m sorry.*

The look on Lance’s face as Keith had spoken his last words to him was emblazoned on his retinas.

*I’m so sorry.*

He tried in vain to reel his mind back in, but his brain was tired, so tired.

*What’s going to happen to me?*

He had to get back. Get back to them. To *him*.

A dark violet presence, so dark it was almost black, then oozed into his distressed open mind,
leaving him with a deep-seated terror. His mind froze in its tracks and cowered as it retreated fast enough to give him motion sickness.

‘What the hell?!’

His body was screaming at him to get away, but he couldn’t move. He couldn’t even breathe. The energy was so dense he could feel it crushing the air out his lungs. Keith pressed back as hard against the wall as he could, willing it to swallow him up, absorb him—

The presence advanced closer and Keith’s chest spiked with pain as he tried to inhale.

What could it be? Who could it be? His panicked mind scrabbled for answers. He’d never felt another person’s energy like this before. Not without Lance. Not without the help of their bond. He felt it reach out towards him and he recoiled, closing his eyes and pushing his face into the cold wall.

It was outside the door of his cell.

Keith stared at it, unblinking, eyes stinging. Then he heard the electronic unlocking mechanism sound in his ears and his mind reignited.

‘Get out, get out, get out, get out, get out, get out –!’

The door opened and his body surged forward before he could even think. He was thrown back immediately with an intense burst of dark energy, lifting him up off his feet and slamming him back down with full force onto the floor. Keith felt the bones in his left leg splinter like they were mere matchsticks and opened his mouth to cry out, but the pain paralyzed him, choking his lungs.

“And now you won’t be trying that again, will you?”

The voice induced a shiver within him and he opened his eyes to see the Galra druid, Haggar, looking back him with her disturbing yellow eyes.

Shrinking back against the wall, Keith watched as Haggar stepped further into the room. She picked up the shimmering bowl of liquid and the strange glow reflected off her sharp teeth. He shivered again as she turned towards him, her cruel smile glinting ominously. Before he could react, she’d grabbed hold of his face with a surprising strength and forced his mouth open with her pointed fingers. He struggled, tasting fresh blood again as her nails scraped against the inside of his mouth. The taste was swept away however with a new intoxicating sweetness, as she then began to pour the luminescent liquid into his mouth. He gagged as he tried hard not to swallow. She kept pouring, undeterred.

‘It’s not poison you foolish child.’ Her voice in his mind startled him into swallowing. ‘It’s to keep you alive while I… experiment. So drink up.’

To his shame, Keith found himself obeying, not because he believed her words, but because the liquid was like nectar. He drank it greedily, letting it run sweet and soothing down his sore, parched throat. As she pulled away the now empty bowl, he had to hold back a humiliating whine of displeasure, leaning forward to chase the last droplet with his tongue.

“You’re different from your fellow Voltron paladins,” she said, out loud this time. “I can feel it. Your mind has the most power, the most potential.” Keith’s heart thudded and he stared at her wide-eyed in alarm.

‘What?’
“You and that boy that attempts to pilot the blue lion,” she continued and anger flared up inside him on Lance’s behalf. *Attempts?*! She smiled menacingly at him. “You formed a bond with him, didn’t you?”

Keith said nothing, his fear forgotten as he mustered all his energy into glaring at her, flames licking at his insides. She laughed.

“You can’t hide anything from me,” she said. “Your mind is strong, but your defenses are weak.” Pain, like he’d never felt it before, then seared through his mind and he screamed, her energy surrounding him, squeezing him. “But with enough training, you will be useful to us.”

Keith gasped as the pain withdrew suddenly. Panic then coursed through him as the implication of her words sunk in. She smiled at him again and he felt sick.

“Now, let’s see how far this mind of yours can *stretch*.”

Lance exhaled slowly and opened his eyes. Allura’s mice blinked up at him from where they sat perched on his knee. He sighed deeply and dropped his face into his hands.

“It’s no good,” he said, voice muffled in his palms. “He’s too far away! I’ll never be able to reach out that far.” Lance’s mind was burning from how far and long he’d been trying to push out his mind over the past few hours. He laid down on the common room couch and tried to visualise the exact shade of Keith’s energy again. The mice curled up on his chest and he reached out to stroke them lightly with his fingertips. The softness of their fur was comforting.

“I need to help find him,” he mumbled down at them. “Or what use am I? What’s the point of this bond otherwise?” He frowned as they squeaked at him.

“Allura has mind powers right?” he mused, staring down at them curiously. “She can connect with you telepathically. Why can’t I? Why can’t Keith? But we can connect with each other and she can connect to you and not us. I don’t understand how any of this works at all!”

And he felt ridiculous confiding in the *mice* about this of all things.

The door to the common room opened and the mice scrambled off him. Lance rolled over to see Allura kneeling down to scoop up the tiny creatures in her hands. She looked up and smiled warmly at him, though with an unmistakable touch of sadness in her eyes.

“Hi Lance.”

“Hey Allura.”

She sat down beside him as he sat up on the couch. She had an uncharacteristic, pinched look of guilt on her face and Lance felt compelled to speak.

“What’s wrong? Has something happened?”

“No,” she said firmly after a short pause, “but I — I want to apologise to you.” Lance’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“For what?”
“For making the final call and allowing you and Keith to use your bond in battle. It was too early and I knew the risks, but I did it anyway because I thought we would be able to use it to our advantage.” Lance’s eyes widened in surprise.

“It wasn’t your fault,” he said quietly. “And Pidge was right about the bond. We all know what Keith’s like.” Ge hated the way his voice trembled a little on saying Keith’s name out loud. “He would have done it anyway.” Allura shook her head.

“That’s not what I meant. I didn’t take into account the discourse that my decision would create within the team. It should have been a unanimous decision. I believe that contributed highly towards Keith’s instability and actions during the fight.” Lance opened and closed his mouth, but found that he couldn’t protest. He looked down to stare at his hands. They were shaking. He clenched his fists and then winced as his head throbbed with the burning pain again. Allura frowned at him.

“Lance? Are you okay?”

“My head,” Lance gasped out, rubbing at his temples. “It’s been hurting ever since Pidge and Hunk did their weird experiment on me.” Allura looked startled.

“That can’t be right,” she muttered and put her cool hand to his forehead. Lance wished for a brief moment then, that things were like they had been before. Life was simpler when he’d had a hopeless crush on a beautiful alien princess and all that was expected of him were terrible pick-up lines and swooning.

“What have you been doing?” she continued. Lance looked away from her, shame-faced.

“Well, I guess I also wanted to try and help out more,” he said tentatively. “So I’ve been trying to reach Keith.”

“Reach him?” Allura looked perplexed. Lance flushed.

“I thought that if I could push my mind out far enough, I would be able to contact him, find him. That’s kind of how it worked last time when we first bonded. During the battle.” He felt his blush deepen as she stared at him and he rubbed the back of his neck at the prickling heat. She raised her eyebrows.

“How long have you been doing this for?” Lance shrugged.

“A few hours? I’m not sure. But sometimes my mind just sort of starts doing it without me meaning to you know?” he was starting to feel embarrassed again. “I — I just — my mind — it needs to be with his. I can’t explain it. But I feel like he’s pulling me, even though I can’t feel him.” He was shaking again. Allura’s hand came down on his forearm, squeezing gently. “I —”

‘I just miss him so much.’

He met Allura’s eyes again, expecting to see the same pitying look that he’d been getting from everyone else over the course of the day. Instead however, he was surprised to see her mouth falling open slightly and an odd light appearing in her eyes.

“You were reaching out to him!” she exclaimed suddenly. Lance looked at her bemused.

“Yeah? That’s what we’ve been talking about for the past—”

“No, no I’m not talking about this time,” she interrupted. “You were doing it during cryo sleep!”
Lance gawked at her.

“What?”

“The missing energy! You were using it unknowingly to reach out to Keith. That’s why you took so much longer to heal than predicted. On both occasions!” Lance brought a hand to his mouth, blushing again.

“Oh man… I need to apologise to Coran,” he mumbled. “So what does this mean? Is that not supposed to happen?” She shook her head frantically.

“Not during cryo sleep. Which means…” The excitement in her expression faded a little. “Your bond might be even more unique than I previously thought.” Lance reached up and scratched his head with a sigh.

“We still know nothing about this stupid thing, huh?” Allura didn’t respond. She was staring slightly off to the side of Lance’s face. He froze.

“What?” he said, unnerved by her expression. She pointed at his wrist.

“Lance,” she said slowly. “Where did you get that scarf?”

Keith fell back to the floor, breathing heavily. Blood from his nose trickled into his mouth. He spat it out and tried to wipe it away, but even his good arm now felt like lead. With great effort, he turned over and raised his head to look up blearily, just in time to see Haggar advancing on him again with another glittering bowl of fluid. He made no move to stop her as she opened up his mouth again to pour the delicious liquid down his throat.

“I’m impressed, paladin,” she sneered as she held the bowl to his lips. “You have performed much better than I expected.” Keith tried to glare at her, but groaned instead as she roughly grabbed a fist full of his hair and pulled his head back, away from the bowl. “Your range however, still leaves a lot to be desired.”

Keith watched her fearfully as she pushed him back and raised her hands, palms up towards him.

“Let’s fix that shall we?”

Keith screwed his eyes shut and braced himself.

“It’s Keith’s?” Allura said disbelievingly. Lance nodded.

“Yeah? What’s the problem?” Hands over her mouth, Allura was shaking her head slowly. Lance’s heart was racing. ‘Why is she acting like this?’

“It can’t be” she said. “Where did he find it?”
“He didn’t. It’s his. I told you! He brought it here with him from Earth.”

“From Earth?!”

“Yes!” Lance was starting to get frustrated now. “It was his and then he gave it to me. He said it used to belong to his parents.” Allura looked at him like he’d just told her he was planning to pilot the blue lion into a black hole. She then grabbed onto his hands, so tightly it made Lance cry out. Her eyes were shining with an emotion that Lance couldn’t quite pin down.

“What has Keith told you about his parents?”

He felt… peculiar.

Keith cracked an eye open and looked up at Haggar who still had her hands outstretched, channelling her magic towards him. He glanced down at his leg and stared at the violet hue of energy that was encircling it. It didn’t hurt anymore.

‘What?’

He reached down to touch it and realised then, that his arms too no longer felt sore. His right arm wasn’t broken now either. Hearing the druid scoff at him, he glanced up at her in confusion.

“I’m not interested in your physical wellbeing,” she said, the malice thick in her voice. “I need my weapons in full working order for my next little test.” Keith’s blood ran cold at her low chuckle and she lowered her hands. He grimaced as he felt her mind once again begin to probe his. Her mental touch left a grimy trail of shadows in his head akin to an oil slick. A small note of surprise passed from her mind to his and he heard her hum in interest.

“I see,” she said. “That’s why your mind is so powerful.” Something in her tone left Keith with a feeling of unease in his stomach. “So tell me red paladin. Why were you so far away from home?”

Keith blinked at her.

“W-what?” he rasped out.

“I – I don’t know,” Lance stuttered. “I don’t know anything about his parents! He’s only brought them up once and that was an accident.”

Lance looked away from Allura’s agitated expression. Should he be telling her this? Something that Keith had told him in private? Her hands were still tight on his own. It sounded urgent. He sighed and ploughed on.

“He said his mom got sick and passed away and that he never knew his dad,” Lance blurted out. “But I don’t understand what this has to do with anything!” He yelped as Allura stood up quickly and grabbed his wrist, dragging him out the room.

“There’s something I want to check. Come with me!”
Her hand slid around his wrist as they ran, brushing against the soft, red fabric.

“Interesting,” Haggar said with a sly grin. “So you didn’t know?” Keith scowled at her.

“Know what?” he spat at her, but her grin only grew wider. ‘What is she talking about?!’

“It’s of no importance,” she said, and Keith’s right hand twitched, longing to grasp onto the familiar weight of his Bayard. “Your bond with that boy has not yet reached its full strength. We’ll need to change that.” Keith felt his heart leap in his chest and he was on his feet in an instant, rage boiling over inside of him as he took in the malicious look on her face.

“Don’t you dare hurt him!” he shouted, unleashing the full force of his anger against the nauseating violet-black of her presence that invaded his mind. His fury burned through him like a fiery eruption. The volcano in his mind that he’d been suppressing ever since the bond had been born, was now spitting and snarling. Hot magma that had seethed and gurgled below the surface, gushed out in great rivulets. He felt her recoil, though only for a moment, before she pushed back against the searing heat of his lava-like bursts of energy with relative ease.

“Just as I said,” she spoke with a snarl, though Keith saw a glitter of curiosity in her eyes. “Not yet at full strength.” Her hand was then around his neck, pushing him back against the wall of his cell and up off the floor. Keith gasped for air as she slowly began to apply pressure to his throat.

“If you… hurt him…” he choked out, his anger extinguishing any fear that he’d previously felt. “I’ll… kill you,” she laughed again scornfully.

“I’m not going to hurt him,” she said, her other hand reaching up to press firmly against his forehead. “I’m going to hurt you.” Keith’s mouth fell open in shock as he absorbed her words and then felt the full intensity of her magic consume him. He quivered as he felt the edges of his mind start to move, expanding outwards at an alarming rate. His eyes rolled back into his head as he became light-headed.

“But before I do,” she continued. “We’ll first need to get in contact with your blue paladin.”

“If my hypothesis is true,” Allura said as Lance watched her scanning rapidly through a series of data logs in the med bay, “then Keith’s natural ability to sense quintessent energy and form bonds makes sense.”

“What?”

“For you however, it’s different.” Allura’s eyes reflected the eerie glow of the computer monitor as she glanced up at him. “You’ve loved him for a long time, haven’t you?” Lance felt himself flush all the way up to the roots of his hair. He opened his mouth, but words failed him, so he settled instead for nodding. She smiled brightly and turned back to the screen.

“I think that’s how you were able to connect to him like you did,” she said. “That and the nature of
“Your quintessence.” Lance raised his eyebrows.

“What was that about my quinte—?” Lance cut himself off as he saw tears starting to fall from her eyes. “Allura? What’s wrong?!” She wiped her tears away hurriedly, and to Lance’s bewilderment, he saw that she was still smiling.

“What, could you — could you perhaps fetch Coran over here for me?”

His mind was like elastic. Stretching, stretching, stretching — feeling like it could snap back at any moment. He was travelling at light-speed, dancing through the cosmos in a brilliant fiery trail, careering through dazzling nebulae and seeing stars being born before his very eyes.

Keith held out his hands to caress the stardust.

A hundred billion galaxies with a hundred billion stars. They shone around him in an endless light. Impossible bright, impossibly large—

*A million Earths can fit in our sun and a billion suns can fit in Betelgeuse—*

Keith smiled.

*Betel-what?*

His mind expanded outwards like a huge, galactic balloon, filling his mind with burning starlight.

*Betelgeuse. The star? So yeah, that’s like…a lot of Earths. A LOT.*

Keith was laughing and once he’d started, he couldn’t stop.

*And there’s a hundred billion galaxies with a hundred billion of these huge-ass stars in them. That’s EVEN MORE Earths.*

The pressure in his head began to build, but it didn’t hurt. A blissful cool overcame him as he passed through the icy blast of a sparkling comet tail, travelling faster and faster—

*It’s calming.*

And then Keith saw it.

*Our Earth is just a tiny speck.*

He reached out his hand towards the blue light—

*A pale, blue dot.*

It really was something. Keith tilted his head back, drowning in moonlight. He closed his eyes—

*Like Carl Sagan said you know?*

—and thought of Lance.
Coran was staring at Allura’s screen with unrestrained astonishment. Lance looked between the pair of them, feeling utterly lost.

“Guys?” he said tentatively. “Can someone please explain what’s going on here?” Neither of them appeared to have heard him however. Allura’s eyes were glassy again.

“How is this possible?” Coran whispered, touching his hand to the screen and tracing out the words with an air of disbelief. “And how did we not spot it before?” Allura laughed, her voice wet with tears.

“Because we had no reason to look for it,” she said simply. Lance craned his neck over the two of them and squinted at the screen, trying to read. But it was all in Altean. He recognised Keith’s name in English however.

“So what’s the deal with Keith?” he said, a little louder this time. “Is something wrong with him? Is he going to be okay?” His heart was in his throat, beating wildly.

“Nothing’s wrong with him,” Allura said in a soft voice. “Nothing is wrong with him at all.” She finally turned to look at him. Her mouth was trembling.

“Keith is of Altean decent,” she breathed, “and I believe that scarf is the one that used to belong to your predecessor: the previous blue paladin.”

Lance tried to tell himself that it was just wishful thinking brought on by the desperation of his and team Voltron’s current predicament, but he was sure that he’d felt it. A familiar presence probing the back of his mind. Barely a wisp at first but getting stronger by the second. He felt its distinct heat, it’s fire, tasting the copper-red burn of it on the tip of his tongue. Something so unruly and dangerous shouldn’t have soothed the pain of his distressed, confused thoughts, but it kept him calm.

He closed his eyes and concentrated hard, blocking out the excited, emotional chattering of Allura and Coran beside him. The presence grew brighter, more tangible and Lance smiled.

For he knew it was Keith.

But then the pain began to reverberate through him and the smile fell off his face to be replaced with a strangled cry. As he fell to the floor, Coran’s and Allura’s arms around him, and felt the bile begin to rise and scorch his throat, all he could think about was getting to Blue and high-tailing it out of there.

Because he could now feel Keith.

He could now feel everything.

And something was very terribly wrong.
Keith couldn’t recognise his own agonised screams in his ears as he came to. He was on the floor, cradling his now freshly broken leg in his hands and panting.

‘Lance... oh god... Lance!’

It was all he had wanted. To be able to feel his presence again around his, but not like this. Never like this. Keith couldn’t hear his thoughts, but he could feel Lance’s terror, his confusion, his reaction to Keith’s pain. He reached out to him through the dense fog of pain and tried to console him.

‘I’m okay. I’ll be okay. Don’t worry about me please. I’ll be fine. I’m always fine. I can take this. Just please, stay calm. And find me. You can find me. You guys will find a way. We’ll find a way —’

—and then his mind was cruelly ripped away from Lance’s as Haggar’s magic pulled him to his feet and enclosed his mind with a dark shroud.

“Fresh pain,” she said with a flash of her teeth, “is the best indicator of bond strength. Your blue paladin felt a little twinge from that yes?” Keith clenched his jaw, for he knew that even if he said nothing, she’d have no trouble discerning that she was correct just from searching his mind.

“Now that we’ve established connection,” she continued, “we should have no trouble at all tracking down your Castle ship and your lions.” Keith’s mind ached in despair and dropped his head to his chest. How could he have let this happen? He flinched as he felt her fingers pinch his chin and force his head back up. Keith forced himself to meet her eyes.

“You will help me track down your Castle ship, or I will hurt you and your blue paladin.” Keith snarled and tried to jerk his head away, but she dug her fingernails in deeper. “Understand?”

She didn’t wait for an answer as she used her magic to throw him backwards again into the wall. As Keith crumpled to the floor, her magic encircling his broken leg once more, far from feeling defeated, he felt a new surge of confidence begin to simmer inside him.

‘I’ll fight you,’ he thought. ‘I won’t let you find them and I won’t let you hurt him.’

He stared her down as she finished healing his leg, meeting her gaze unwaveringly. Channeling all his energy into raising the barriers of his mind, he thought of Lance, thought of the shy smile that he’d had on his face as they’d held hands in the control room, before they’d gone on that fateful mission and everything had gone to hell. Keith wanted to protect that smile at all costs.

The force of her magic hit him and he cried out as he felt his bones break anew and his mental barriers weaken, but he held on, gritting his teeth.

If she said his mind had potential, then potential was what he would show her.

A water pouch was thrust towards him, but Lance could only stare at it, shaking and unable to move. He didn’t know when the next wave of pain would hit him, so he stayed tensed, waiting as the others flitted around him in the control room on high alert. He blinked down at Coran, who was
crouched in front of him and taking hold of Lance’s hand. He carefully pried open Lance’s clenched fist and placed the pouch to his palm, closing Lance’s fingers around it.

“Drink it,” he said firmly, and Lance did.

“Thank you.”

“We’ll get him back,” Coran said and Lance could see his unspoken words in the new fire that had since ignited in his eyes. ‘We won’t let them have him. Allura and I won’t let them. He’s one of us now.’ Lance nodded at him.

“Lance can sense him?” Shiro’s voice filtered into Lance’s consciousness. “From here? But how?!”

“We’re not completely certain why, but we have our suspicions,” replied Allura as she took her place at the helm. “Coran and I will try and explain it all to you later, but right now we need to get out of here. The Galra might already have our location.”

“Right. Got it,” Shiro took his place in his paladin chair. “Everyone prepare for a wormhole jump!”

Lance wobbled slightly as he pushed himself up off the floor. Pidge caught his arm, flashing him a quick, reassuring smile as she helped him to his seat before getting into her own.

After they had worm-holed into another desolate area of space, Lance let his eyes fall shut and his shoulders relax into his chair a little. His heart tightened however at the loss of Keith once more from his mind. The memory of the unbearable pain that he’d felt from Keith prickled in his limbs and a desperate wave of agony passed through him. Keith was being tortured and he was just sitting here!

‘We need to do something! I need to do something!’

Worst of all, he knew Keith was doing it to protect them all ‘...and me.’

He had sensed Keith’s resistance, his attempts at shutting out the all-encompassing blackness that threatened to overpower his mind, and by extension, Lance’s.

‘I won’t let you hurt him,’ the colours of Keith’s furious emotions had seemed to say and Lance’s chest hurt when he tried to take a breath. He let the overlapping voices of his teammates wash over him and he tried to pretend for a moment that things were alright. They were all together after another successful mission, another step closer to taking down the Galra once and for all. Once Lance started paying attention to the words coming out of Shiro’s mouth however, the illusion was shattered.

“His heritage?” he was saying. “I don’t understand. How can he be Altean?”

“We’re not sure,” came Allura’s response. “Genetically it appears that he is mostly human, but one of his ancestors, perhaps a great-grandparent, was an Altean. Who it was, we are still uncertain.”

She looked quickly at Lance and then away again. “But for now what matters is that this is the reason why his mind has the potential to reach out this far. Unfortunately, this wasn’t a potential that he unlocked by himself.”

“That space witch,” Lance found himself saying, and they all turned to look at him with fearful
expressions. “It was her. I could feel it.” His throat contracted as Shiro paled, his mouth pressed into a tight line.

“Haggar,” he said quietly and turned to Allura with urgency. “How do we find him?”

“Shiro,” Pidge’s strained voice spoke up, the first time that she’d spoken to him since their fight. He turned to her, surprised as she placed a gentle hand on his arm. “I think… I think I have an idea.” She hesitated, and Lance saw her searching Shiro’s face. He nodded at her, eyes warm and she carried on. “It involves Lance and it might be risky, so I want your opinion on it first before we try it out.”

Shiro didn’t say anything. Instead he brought her into a tight hug, which she returned gratefully and despite everything, Lance’s spirits felt a little lighter after that.

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“Pidge and Hunk say that their tech is now ready for us to use in battle,” Shiro said as he walked beside Lance on their way to their sleeping quarters. Coran had insisted that they all rest up for a few hours before attempting anything resembling a counter attack on the Galra. “They say that it should put a stop to their signal jammers and perhaps even disable their robot drones if they’ve programmed it correctly.” Lance nodded at him weakly.

“Yeah that would be good,” he replied, only half listening. Shiro smiled at him with understanding. They reached Shiro’s bedroom and Lance paused as Shiro put a hand on his arm to stop him walking away.

“Lance,” he said, not quite meeting his eyes. “I’m sorry for, ah, misunderstanding about your bond with Keith.” Lance looked at him with surprise. “He’s important to me. You all are, but Keith—” He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “He’s my best friend and I was worried for him. But I pushed him too far this time I know it.”

“Shiro…”

Lance wasn’t sure what to say, so he put his hand on top of Shiro’s that was still clutching his arm. Shiro back at him appreciatively.

“What I mean to say,” he continued, ”is that I trust you. I trust you both. I’m trusting you to use your bond as a way to get him back for us.” A sense of pride welled up within Lance as he straightened up and regarded Shiro with determination.


“I know you will.”

---

Straight away, Lance recognised the eerie, empty place he woke up in. His heart thudded hard in his chest as he scanned the endless black void around him. The staccato echo of his own footsteps rang out in his ears as he ran.
“Keith?!”

He had to be here. Please god let him be here.

‘I've got to see you. Please —’

“Keith!”

And there he was. Standing quietly in the darkness across from him. Lance couldn’t breathe.

‘Oh god I’ve missed your face.’

Neither wasted any time in closing the gap between them. Keith’s arms were around him — strong and warm — clinging onto him tightly as though he would disappear at any moment. Lance held him back just as tight, shoulders sagging in relief as all the tension in his body thawed and melted away with the heat of Keith’s scent. It flickered like an orange-red flame in Lance’s mind. He shivered as Keith turned his head into his neck and inhaled deeply, his lips brushing against his skin.

It felt so real.

Lance moved his hand up to cup the back of Keith’s head, pulling him closer and burying his nose into his hair. He felt Keith let out a small sigh and relax more in his arms. Keith was warm—

But something didn’t feel right.

‘This is a dream.’

The reminder was like a punch to the gut. Gently, he pushed Keith back by his shoulders. Lance could feel the warmth of Keith’s skin under his hands. His fingers trembled as he reluctantly pulled them away.

“Keith?”

Keith looked at him. His eyes were blazing with frustration, sadness, affection, but he stayed oddly silent. Lance took his face into his hands and looked at him hard.

“Can you hear me?” Lance said, feeling ridiculous. Keith was right here! Right in front of him! Why would he not be able to hear him? His fingertips absent-mindedly tangled in the soft, loose strands of dark hair that framed Keith’s face. “Can you speak?”

Keith just kept staring back at him. His eyes fluttered shut as Lance swept his thumbs across his cheekbones. Lance swallowed.

‘It’s just a dream. A shared dream. But that doesn’t make it real. It’s not real. It’s not —’

“Where are you?” Lance tried desperately as Keith’s fingers trailed their way up his arm and held Lance’s hand closer to his face. “Tell me where you are and I’ll find you, come and get you.”

Keith turned his face into Lance’s palm, kissing his fingertips softly. Lance’s breath hitched.

“Please, Keith —”

‘Just a dream.’

“—just tell me. Try to tell me where I can find you. Please.”
Lance shuddered as Keith kept kissing his hand, his entire being feeling consumed by an intoxicating, painful, longing.

“Please…” he whispered faintly, but his resolve was breaking under the gentle, but increasingly urgent kisses that Keith was pressing into his burning skin. It lit up his mind with a rose-pink haze of light.

‘Touch me.’

He let Keith move closer towards him. Keith held on to his hand, kissing his palm, his knuckles, his fingertips... Lance shivered.

‘Please.’

Keith’s other hand was hot against the side of his face, caressing the red flush of his skin—

‘Keith.’

His hand slid to the back of Lance’s head and tugged at his hair, pulling him forward. His breath feverish against Lance’s mouth—

Then Keith kissed him — hot and deep. And this time, Lance didn’t wake up. He kissed him back, panting heavily into Keith’s open mouth. His mind was burning blue.

Chest aching with a tortuous concoction of guilty desire, Lance couldn’t stop himself from planting messy, heated kisses across Keith’s face, grasping and pulling at the hair on the back of his head in a fervent attempt to pull him closer. Keith’s other hand, still clutching Lance’s, was warm even through his gloves.

Giving Lance’s fingers a quick squeeze, Keith let go of his hand to grip the back of Lance’s head with both of his hands instead, his kisses becoming rougher. A small whine slipped from Lance’s mouth as Keith kissed him brutally, biting down and sucking on his bottom lip, before dropped his head and panting hard against Lance’s neck. His hands came to rest with a firm grip on Lance’s shoulders.

Trembling, Lance reached blindly with his free hand for the stability of Keith’s solid chest in front of him. Keith’s skin seared through his shirt beneath Lance’s palm and Lance could feel his rapid heartbeat. His own heart gave a jolt.

‘Too real.’

But Keith’s lack of pendant under his shirt said otherwise. The fact ran like ice in Lance’s veins and for a moment, he wanted to pull away.

‘But it’s still him.’

Still Keith.

Lance inhaled sharply as Keith began to trace a path of wet, hot kisses up his neck and along his jawline. Keith was here. He wanted this. He sucked and bit his way towards the delicate skin just below Lance’s earlobe and Lance quivered.

‘He wants me. He wants this. He wanted that kiss. He wants—’

He gave in, succumbing to the tantalising feeling of Keith’s heat, Keith’s scent and Keith’s kisses
on the side of his neck, how his teeth were now grazing the reddening skin in a way that sent electrifying sparks of arousal up Lance’s spine.

Clutching tightly onto Keith’s shirt, Lance tried to breath as his insides turned to liquid under Keith’s attentive mouth. And then Keith pulled back, leaving Lance gasping, wanting, aching—

“Keith?”

Keith leant back in slowly. The tip of his nose and mouth glanced across Lance’s collarbone with the lightest of touches, his breath gentle and warm as he mouthed delicate, not-quite-there kisses along it. It was as though he was suddenly… nervous.

That wasn’t like him.

Lance felt Keith’s heart thudding hard against his own chest. He let go of Keith’s shirt and brought his arm around Keith’s waist, pulling him closer.

‘I want this.’

He kissed the top of his head and threaded his fingers into the dark tresses.

‘I want you.’

With a new surge of energy, Keith was on him again, kissing him hungrily. Lance tilted his head back with a moan, inviting him in. Keith was pressing against him, hips flush against his, pushing him down—

They fell onto something soft and indistinct, and Lance was acutely reminded once again of the falseness, the wrongness of this illusory world. But Keith’s body was moving on top of him — feeling hot, solid and real — kissing and holding his face in his hands. Lance pushed the lingering thoughts down and let Keith’s presence overcome him instead.

Lance groaned loudly into Keith’s mouth as he felt Keith’s fingers trail down his chest, his stomach, pushing his hands underneath the hem of his shirt. Lance felt like he was on fire. Keith’s hands were leaving scorch marks on his skin.

‘Too hot.’

Keith kissed his neck again, long and slow, and pushed up his shirt—

“Keith…”

He ran his hands over Lance’s exposed chest, tearing a high-pitched moan from Lance’s throat as he rolled and ground down his hips. Lance let him remove his clothes and closed his eyes, feeling Keith’s unbelievably soft lips kiss every inch of him. He didn’t remember when Keith had taken off his own clothes, but now he was on him, nothing between them as he kissed him slowly, deeply. Keith brushed the hair back off Lance’s face with a gentleness that made Lance’s heart squeeze in his chest. Pulling back, Keith’s eyes fluttered open to look at him. His gaze was dark and heated, but so full of tenderness that Lance had to look away, his face burning.

‘Kiss me again. Please…’

Keith moved against him again — warm, heavy, comforting — cradling Lance’s face with his hands. He leant forward to brush his nose lightly against Lance’s before kissing him again softly. His dark hair fell into his eyes and Lance’s face, tickling his skin.
‘Soft…’

Lance reached up to brush it out the way, his hand stroking Keith’s cheek. Keith pulled back again, straddling him and breathing heavily. Lance wondered for a second what he had done wrong, but then he saw the expression on Keith’s face and he understood. He recognised the torn look of desperate longing that battled with the anguish of the fact that this wasn’t real. This wasn’t the same. They were light years apart and yet—

‘God… I need to hold you. I want to hold you so much.’

“Keith,” Lance sat up and embraced him, feeling Keith’s quick breaths shaking through him as he did. “I’ll find you. I’ll bring you back.” He ran his hands up over the so very soft skin of Keith’s back and shoulders. “I’ll find you I promise.” His hands came to rest at the back of Keith’s neck again, fingers twisting in his hair as he held his face close. “I need you. I need you, Keith. Please —”

He trembled as he felt Keith’s hands on his own back, sliding down to the bare skin of his hips. He began to rock slowly in Lance’s lap. Keith kissed Lance’s neck again — soft and beautiful — and although he wasn’t speaking, Lance somehow knew that it was meant to be a ‘thank you’ and a ‘sorry’ all in one, and perhaps an ‘I need you too.’

Keith moved again with renewed vigour, kisses becoming hotter as he moved down Lance’s body. Breathing fast and heavy, Lance fell back down and spread his legs apart, inviting him closer. His fingers that were still tangled in Keith’s hair shoked and loosened their grip as Keith kissed his chest, fingernails grazing his skin. Mouth hot and wet against him, Lance whimpered as Keith sucked hard on his nipples, his tongue teasing the nubs. Keith’s hair glided over his skin like silk. He moved lower.

“F – fuck, Keith.”

It was so hot, liquid fire curling low in his stomach.

“Please.”

He couldn’t help the string of desperate pleas that left his mouth as Keith began kissing his stomach, just below his navel. Lance could feel his laboured breathing against his skin. Heart hammering, he opened his legs further to allow for the broadness of Keith’s shoulders. Keith’s hands swept over his thighs as he kissed down his torso, mouthing his way along down the crease between the top of his thigh and his hip.

Lance whined, bending and raising his legs more in response to the burning touch. He was so hard.

‘Please touch me, please—’

He opened his mouth in a silent gasp as he felt Keith take his cock into his mouth. Keith held it firmly by the base as his other hand squeezed and kneaded the back of Lance’s thigh.

‘So hot, so hot, oh god —!’

The air was stifling. He tugged hard on the roots of Keith’s hair as his head bobbed between his legs, his mouth moving in smooth, confident strokes across his length. Lance closed his eyes with a soft moan, getting lost in the sensation before the urge to look down at Keith again became too great.

Keith’s eyes were closed, eyelashes long and dark against the starkness of his pale skin. His
flushed, red lips moving steadily up and down. As he paused for breath, Lance felt his hot breath
dance across his skin and trembled. Keith’s fingers rubbed small circles into the sensitive skin at
the tops of his thighs, moving slowly in a searing trail further down between Lance’s spread legs.

The rush of cool air on his cock made him shiver as Keith released it and Lance gave a quiet
whimper, but it was smothered in an instant by the sensation of Keith’s mouth moving down,
down, down—

It was too hot to breathe.

Keith lifted his head to kiss the side of Lance’s knee, leaving delicate kisses down and along his
inner thigh — soft, slow and wet. Keith was breathing heavily, getting lower and lower. Lance
brought his hands to his mouth to stifle a loud, shuddering moan.

Keith’s tongue was inside him, working him open with an aching slowness as his fingers rubbed
and kneaded the muscle of Lance’s upper thighs and ass. His tongue teased circles around his
entrance before pushing back in. Lance could only breathe in short, wanting pants as Keith pressed
open-mouthed kisses against his hole between languid licks — a soft, steady pressure that gave
promises of more.

And Lance wanted more.

He brought his legs up further, closing his eyes with a soft moan as Keith’s fingers joined his
tongue in rubbing and massaging around his entrance, pushing —

Lance felt blindly for the softness of Keith’s hair again, burying his fingers deep into the strands
and tugging. He felt Keith groan against him, the only sound that he’d heard from him so far. It
made Lance’s cock pulse against his stomach.

“K-Keith —”

Keith began to kiss his way back up Lance’s chest and sucked on his neck again, his fingers sliding
down to replace where his tongue has been — pressing, rubbing, slick —

As Keith’s fingers moved inside him, massaging his tightening prostate in slow, deliberate circles,
Lance’s mind overflowed with a dazzling multitude of colours.

‘Hot, hot, hot —’

His hair curled at the base of his neck and sweat clung to his eyelashes. He dug his fingers hard
into the skin on Keith’s shoulders, leaving crescent moons there.

Keith still wasn’t speaking, but Lance could feel what his kisses and touches meant as though
Keith were speaking softly in his head.

‘I want you. I need you. Let me show you how much. Please —’

Lance throat burned with emotion, his voice raw as he cried out.

“Me too — oh god , Keith. Me too — please —” Lance choked out, his words punctuated by sharp
gasps that Keith drew out of him with his fingers, curling them inside him.

‘I’m going to find you and bring you back. Bring you home — never let you go again.’

He heard Keith groan, his breath damp against the side of Lance’s neck.
‘Then I’ll — I’ll touch you for real. Kiss you for real. Feel you—’

Keith pulled back, looking flushed, his breathing ragged. Lance saw Keith’s eyes roaming over his body with barely concealed awe as he made to line himself up with Lance’s entrance, biting his lip. As Keith pushed into him, filling him, the ease at which he did so prompted Lance again to recall the harrowing reality of their dream state. But it was only for a moment, for then Keith started to move and Lance forgot how to think. He gasped at the feeling — a fullness so hot it made him breathless.

‘So hot, so hot, oh god, so hot, please —!’

Keith held the back of his knees in a gentle but firm grip as he thrust into him. His hands soothed with a quiet touch against Lance’s skin as he turned to kiss the side of Lance’s knee again. Lance keened and pulled him closer, wrapped his legs around Keith’s waist as he rocked to meet his thrusts. Keith bent to kiss his chest again, moving his hips in a slow, steady rhythm.

Lance was so hot, so hot —

And then he cried out as Keith hit an angle that sent a penetrating coldness coursing through him, tingling his insides.

‘Oh god —’

Keith’s hands slid up to Lance’s waist and pulled him upwards, holding him with a surprising gentleness as he thrust harder into him. Lance’s heart soared in his chest as Keith’s eyes met his, gaze more unguarded that Lance had ever seen it. His eyebrows were furrowed in a way that reflected Lance’s own conflicting emotions of adoration and dismay.

‘Keith…’

He then smiled at him with such affection, that Lance’s breath left him. Keith leant in, eyes falling shut as he kissed him gently on the cheek — once, twice, and again — the tip of his nose tracing the folds of Lance’s ear in a delicate whisper. Hearing the silent words of Keith’s confession within his small gesture, Lance held Keith’s head close to his own, his eyes stinging.

“Me too,” he spoke softly into Keith’s hair, kissing the top of his head and burrowing his face into the black waves. “Me too.”

As his climax spread through him with an ice-cold intensity, tasting blue on his tongue, Lance felt Keith’s build as well within his trembling gasps—

‘This isn’t real.’

—but it was a hollow pleasure.

‘This isn’t the same. I need him. The real him. I need —’

The dreamscape faded around him and he awoke with the feeling of drying tears on his face and a coolness between his legs. A fieriness in his heart burnt like a dying ember, the only thing that kept the suffocating cold of Keith’s absence from engulfing him whole.
The pain wasn’t so bad anymore.

Keith lay face-down on the floor of his cell, blinking blood out of his eyes. He must have fallen asleep again. With all his limbs left broken by Haggar, he didn’t attempt to move into a more comfortable position.

‘I protected them.’

Keith smiled maniacally as he recalled the twisted look of fury and reluctant admiration on Haggar’s face as he’d thrown up barrier after barrier against her attacks, each one getting stronger than the last.

And then they’d lost sight of them in the wormhole.

Her resulting screams of outrage had simultaneously made him laugh hysterically, and all the hairs on his body stand on end in terror.

Not one bone in his limbs had been left unbroken after that. She had eventually departed however, saying that she had more important business to attend to, though not without promises of returning. His mind stayed on red alert for the tell-tale signs of her darkness seeping into his head.

Slowly, cautiously, Keith let his mind stretch out beyond the stars. His mind and whole body ached—

But as long he had Lance — as long as Lance was safe, as long as he was protected, as long as Keith could feel him—

Keith would be okay.

He’d be okay.

The star map really was mesmerising.

Lance stared up at the holographic display and sighed. He hadn’t been able to fall back to sleep after the dream, and now for some reason he had found himself drawn to the control room. He played around carelessly with the control panel.

Space was big.

Way too big.

How was he going to find Keith in all this mess?
Blue’s and Red’s presences encircled him, as he traced out imaginary constellations above his head and envisioned pulling stars out of the sky, arranging them to his own design. A star-studded path that led to Keith.

Her warm purrs consoling him, Blue wrapped around his mind with a quiet suggestion. He frowned.

“I tried that,” he said to her. “I tried reaching out but it was no good.” She growled a little, nudging the edges of his mind. His heart beat a little faster.

“Let him… reach out to me?” His eyes widened in realisation. “He has increased range now.” He took a few steps back and turned around slowly on the spot, taking in the full expanse of the star map shining around him. “I just need to… let him in.”

‘Just like the first time.’

He closed his eyes and inhaled.

‘If we can connect through dreams, we must be able to connect like this.’

Opening up his mind as far as he could, Lance lost himself in the ocean-blue that was his own energy, letting himself feel the full extent of his feelings for Keith, even the parts that hurt. Heart pounding and eyes still firmly shut, Lance felt his feet move without him consciously thinking about it. Something was guiding him, pulling him—

Red and Blue pushed him along and his feet felt light like he was walking on nothing.

‘Come on, Keith. Find me. I know you can. Show me where you are.’

He visualised Keith’s distinct fire burning bright in his mind, contrasting wonderfully with the precious colour for Keith that Lance held close.

‘Show me.’

And then he felt it. The warm touch to his mind that he missed so very much. His feet stopped dead. When Lance opened his eyes and stared ahead at the vast array of unfamiliar cosmic light, it wasn’t like looking at an unsolvable puzzle anymore. Rather, it appeared as though Keith himself was drawing out a blazing red star trail in front of him, carving a path in the cosmos that he hadn’t realised existed before now.

‘I’m right here,’ Keith seemed to say, and Lance stretched out a shaking hand to trace out the path with his fingertip. ‘Now come and find me you idiot.’

Lance tripped over his feet in his haste to run out the door.

“You’re absolutely sure about this?” Shiro said, sounding breathless as he pulled on his armour in front of him. Lance nodded frantically, stepping to the side as Pidge tried to squeeze herself through the door to Shiro’s room.

“I’m sure,” she said with a wide grin. “Lance’s idea was basically what I had in mind, though with less equipment than my method involved.” She pulled on her helmet and bolted out the room.
“Now let’s go!” she called back to them. “Hunk and I have a special gift to deliver to the Galra.”

As they ran down the corridor together, Lance paused for a second as they passed by his room, a sudden inspiration striking him.

“I’ll catch up to you guys!” he said, waving them on. “I just need to grab something.”

He doubled back to his room, quickly unlocking the door and scanning the room frantically for a familiar black shine.

_Obsidian_.

It gleamed up at him from the corner of his bed.

_A stone of truth, protection, integrity, honesty and healing._

Lance grinned and snatched it up, stowing it safely beneath Keith’s scarf tied under his space suit.

_Particularly effective as a shield against psychic attacks._

“I noticed back on that planet that they never sent any of their robot drones to attack us,” Hunk was saying over the comms as they all made their descent towards their hangars. “Only Galra soldiers. So I figured, “Why was that?””, and the only thing that made sense was that they wouldn’t work.”

“And he was right!” Pidge exclaimed. “The signal that they send out to jam us, also messes with their electronics, essentially rendering them useless! Luckily I already had a lot of data about how their drones operate, so after we ran those tests on you, Lance, we were able to simulate exactly how our new device could affect them.” She cackled loudly over the comms and Lance grinned to himself as he took his place in Blue’s cockpit.

“So by that, I’m guessing it was effective?”

“Very effective!”

“Good to know!”

“Paladins,” Allura’s voice rang out over the comms. “We’ll be making the wormhole jump towards the coordinates that Lance pointed out to us on the map, in precisely 30 ticks. Are you all in position?”

“Yes, Princess,” Shiro said, and Lance was pleased to hear that the strain that had been present in his voice over the past day or so, had lessened a little. “Ready on your command.”

“Excellent! Then let’s go and reclaim our paladin!”

Lance was sure that he would feel some semblance of fear as they hurtled out of the other side of
the wormhole into an unknown area of space, but he felt nothing but exhilaration as they chased the fiery road that Keith had laid out for him in front of his eyes. So when they were met with the imposing sight of hundreds of Galra warships not a tick later, Lance thought nothing of charging forward with Blue, not hesitating even for a second to follow the brilliant crimson light that grew steadily brighter and brighter ahead of him.

‘Keith! I’m here! I can see you. I’m coming —’

His energy hummed around him.

‘Keith.’

He lost track of the number of Galra ships that he took out as he tore through their ranks with a callousness that he’d never been quite capable of before.

‘Lance?’

Lance almost lost his grip on Blue from the force of the emotions that then hit him, unable to discern whether they were his, Keith’s or both.

But he didn’t care.

‘Keith!’ he called out to him as his real voice choked on sobs. ‘Oh god you’re okay. Stay there I’m coming!’

He sought out his light and plunged forward. Blue roars vibrated in his chest and Red joined her as they blasted their way onto the Galra vessel without mercy. Heart in his mouth, Lance leapt out of Blue’s open jaws and dashed through the residual frosty mist of his ice laser, following Keith’s trail of light down the corridors. Pidge and Hunk had been right. There were no robot drones in sight. He pushed on, eventually coming face to face with two Galra prison guards. He drew his Bayard and shot them down without a second thought. Keith’s frenzied laughter echoed in his mind.

‘This all feels… strangely familiar.’

Lance growled as he shot down another soldier, advancing on the cell room door at the end of the corridor from which Keith’s energy was blazing.

‘Don’t joke about this!’ He wiped angry tears away from his eyes as he ran.

‘Sorry.’

‘And it’s not the same as last time!’ Lance unleashed a round of laser fire at the door’s locking mechanism.

‘And why is that?’

Lance kicked open the door.

“Because this time I’m going to kiss you, asshole!”

He stood in the doorway, breathing heavily as he took in the sight of Keith standing in the middle of the room, bloodied and pale, with a look of complete shock on his face.

“Oh,” Keith said.
They may have been in the middle of a warzone, with a hundred or more Galra soldiers and an evil space witch about to descend upon them at any second, but for a brief moment, neither of them cared as Lance tossed aside his Bayard and they both surged forward. When their minds reconnected and Lance crushed his lips against Keith’s properly for the first time, all Lance could think about was how much better this was than anything a mystical bond dream could ever conjure.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: *sits on my lonesome in the Altean!Keith corner*

Thanks so, so much for all the feedback and support everyone (especially to those that follow me on twitter/tumblr and witnessed my freak-outs over writing this chapter)!

ETA: STILL working on the comic art for this chapter lmao help me but in the meantime, PLEASE check out this gorgeous fanart that the wonderful wolfpainters did for this chapter!! ;o; <3 AND ALSO the lovely art by saintmagic on his tumblr here!!

ETA2: For new readers, or old readers who still re-read this fic (ily all) here is PART 1 the long awaited art for this chapter!

Comments are always highly appreciated! ^.^ And I am open to asks/chats on tumblr! <3

Tumblr | Twitter
Pure State

Chapter by mackerelmademedoit

Chapter Notes

A/N: So sorry for the delay with this chapter! There were many reasons why and I won't bore you with them. I hope you all enjoy this extra long and final installment of Entangled!

Credit to my bf for being my beta and whose exasperation level is directly proportional to the length of my chapters.

M-rating comes into play this chapter: Mild violence, sexual content and language! Smut scene is easy to skip if you want as it's obvious when it's coming lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After spending almost 10,000 years alone in a desert on a strange and rather unremarkable planet, Blue hadn’t expected to feel anything akin to the warm glow of her paladin’s quintessence ever again.

But she had been wrong.

He wasn’t hers, she had known that much, but there was something about him. His energy had a familiar scent. Purring, and reaching out towards him, she had allowed his presence to encircle her own. He was lost, alone and searching. She’d held on to him, pulling him closer.

‘Come here to me. Maybe you will you find what you are looking for.’

She hadn’t known then of course what this curious being sought, or whether she would be able to help at all, but after her pilot had hidden her here and left searching for answers of his own, she’d found herself craving the presence of another life form then more than anything. And for a life form whose energy smoldered and curled in such a tantalising way — reminiscent of her Red comrade and pilots who has long since perished — she had been willing to take a risk.

He hadn’t come to her that day.

She had let her mind follow him however as he’d remained lingering at the edges of her consciousness over the years. As he’d matured, she’d felt the strength of his energy grow and the nature of his quintessence become more distinct. It was unmistakably different from her own, but she’d felt drawn to it regardless. It was comforting, after so many years of isolation. And then, as their quintessences had mingled, entangled, she could taste it.

A borrowed blue.

How peculiar.
Things had then become more peculiar for her still when one day, another presence had made itself known to her, it's energy crossing paths with the boy in a brilliant clash of red and blue.

Then she had sensed it. Sensed him —

—and her dormant mind had ignited in a dazzling blue once more.

It was then that she knew what this being’s purpose was.

'Bring him to me. Let him find me. Bring me my paladin.'

And he had.

Considering their current situation and every tumultuous event that had transpired up until this moment, the feeling of serenity that overcame Keith as Lance’s lips met his was somewhat unexpected. For the first time, he felt like he knew with the utmost certainty what this bond truly was. What it meant. He knew what he felt for Lance and what Lance felt for him in return.

Something that had for the longest time felt indistinct, undefined, suddenly became tangible, slotting into place as though it had been there all along, he just hadn’t had the presence of mind to see it.

Stability.

Their runaway nuclear reaction of a bond was no more. Now it glowed around them in a new violet light, a giant cosmic clock whose cogs finally fit together — moving in sync.

And he could feel Lance. Really feel him. Lance’s presence wasn’t just around him — colliding, absorbing, mingling. It was him, as much a part of Keith now as his own flesh and blood. It wasn’t just Lance either. He felt connected to everything, everyone. Shiro, Hunk, Pidge — Voltron.

This was what it really meant to be a paladin. He knew that now. His brain sparked with an electrifying thrill of new connections. Then, as he felt the rumbling chorus of all five lions’ roars deep within his chest, his heart soared with an overwhelming affection for his team, their lions, his lion and Lance —

His Lance.

‘His. Mine. Yours.’

Keith pulled back, away from Lance’s lips to look at him, taking in the brief sight of the peaceful look on Lance’s face. Eyes closed and lips still slightly pursed, Lance’s mind was a radiant rose-pink around him. Then his eyes fluttered open, and he gave Keith a shy half-smile.

‘Wow.’

Keith flushed at the breathless thought that passed from Lance’s mind to his own. He opened his mouth to respond, but paused as Lance then frowned and screwed his nose up in confusion.

“What?” Keith decided to say instead.

“You taste,” Lance licked his lips, “sweet.” Keith stepped back, startled as Lance then suddenly
leant towards him again in an attempt to recapture Keith’s lips in his own. Albeit with reluctance, Keith pushed back on Lance’s breastplate with his uninjured hand, grimacing at the familiar feelings of desperation and longing that radiated off Lance — the urges that Keith had felt himself upon tasting the sweet nectar that Haggar had forced down his throat.

“Lance, stop,” he said as Lance kept pushing against his hand. “We don’t have time for this.” Lance’s breath huffed against his cheek, making him shiver. “And that sweet stuff was a weird drug they gave me,” Lance paused at that. Keith felt a small burst of alarm cut through the fog of Lance’s nectar-high.

“They drugged you?!”

“It’s okay. It doesn’t do any harm. I think. It only seems to —”

A loud boom shook the walls around them, cutting him off and bringing him crashing back down to the grim reality of their situation. Keith’s heart raced at the ominous lack of Haggar’s dark energy that usually bled into his consciousness. She was hiding herself. He gripped Lance’s arm tight.

“We’ve got to get out of here quickly before she gets back,” he said, barely holding back a wince as the high he’d got from the kiss faded and brought the pain of his injuries back into full focus once more. “She’ll know you’ve come to get me and — Lance, focus!” Lance had started leaning in again, unbeknownst to himself judging by his reaction to Keith’s outburst.

“S-sorry!” he stuttered out, face red as Keith felt his mind become a flurry of bashful thoughts and emotions. “I just need —”

‘Need to kiss you again. Taste you —”

Keith buried his flaming face into Lance’s shoulder. “Lance, please!”

“I’m sorry! It’s the drug talking — I mean, yeah — obviously I want to kiss you again, but that last part was — it was — it came out wrong!” Lance looked away from him, running a hand through his hair.

‘I really missed you.’

Keith smiled and leant into Lance’s hand that was still cradling the side of his head. He inched forward to press a small kiss onto Lance’s flushed cheek.

‘I missed you too.’

Lance turned back to him with a soft smile and mind sparkling with a white-gold giddiness. It didn’t last long though before they both winced simultaneously when Keith backed away again onto his injured leg.

“Your leg,” Lance said weakly, staring down at the leg in question with a queasy expression. “It’s broken.” He absently brought his hand away from Keith’s face to rub at his own arm. “And your right arm too. I can feel it.” Keith tried to twist his face into something resembling reassurance but knew he’d been unsuccessful when Lance’s mind only grew more frantic around his own.

“I’ll manage,” he said with a grimace. “At least she partway healed me before you got here.” Lance’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“Healed you?”
“Fresh pain is the best indicator of bond strength,” Keith said bitterly, parroting Haggar’s sardonic words to him. “Apparently.” Lance’s face paled as realisation dawned on him. Keith then felt a surge of rage engulf Lance’s mind as his face hardened into furious glare that was quite unlike him.

“So she healed you and then —”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Keith interrupted hastily, trying to ignore the frivolous skip of his heart as Lance’s mind curled around his in an almost aggressive protectiveness. He grabbed onto Lance’s shoulder, leaning on it heavily. “I need you to… help me.” Lance’s arm was around him in an instant, supporting him. “We need to find my Bayard. Get out of here. Fight them.”

“You can’t fight, Keith,” Lance said, the concern and sympathy palpable from his voice alone. “You’ve been tortured! I need to get you out and into a healing pod. You can’t —!”

“I said I can manage! The liquid — the drug she gave me — it numbs the pain, strengthens me temporarily. It —”

“Your arm and leg are broken!”

“It doesn’t hurt.”

“Bullshit!”

“Okay, but not as much as it should.” Lance pursed his lips at him, but said and thought nothing. “Right? You can feel what I feel. You know I’m not lying.”

“Fine! We’ll get your stupid Bayard and get you to Red… somehow. But it’s not like you can use your Bayard to help us fight our way out of here with your broken arm.”

“I can fight with either hand.”

“Of course you can…” Keith smiled at the touch of fond amusement he heard in Lance’s voice, despite the obvious exasperation in his words. “Just — let me protect you okay? Let me get you out of here. Keep you safe.” Keith chewed his lip as a blush threatened to bloom across his face again at Lance’s declaration.

“Whatever,” he muttered, pulling on his helmet and slinging his good arm over Lance’s shoulder. “Let’s go.”

Amongst the trepidation that flared in Lance’s mind as they carefully made their way through the broken remains of his cell door and down the corridor, Keith felt a lingering note of smugness. He frowned as he heard Lance’s voice echo in his head.

‘I think,’ Lance said slowly, ‘you quite like me rescuing you like this.’ Keith snorted and rolled his eyes. He couldn’t exactly deny anything now.

‘My Lance in shining armour,’ he said, and he enjoyed the pinkness that spread over Lance’s cheeks.

‘I like that.’

‘The “Lance in shining armour”? Really?’

‘Not that. The “my” part. I like the sound of being yours.’
God, if only they were anywhere but here. Keith felt as though his only good leg was about to give out from underneath him.

He was simultaneously suffocating under and couldn’t get enough of the all-encompassing, aching love that bloomed outwards from his chest and settled in deep with a tingling heat at the base of his spine and the tips of his fingers. He needed to hold him. Hold Lance. Hold him so very close and just stop . Breathe him in—

But there was no time for that.

He let Lance lead him shakily down the corridor instead. The weight of the moment that now seemed to be passing between them made his mind tremble with a much greater fragility than anything Haggar’s magic had subjected it to. As they rounded a corridor, Lance hesitated and pulled back slightly, pressing them both back up against the wall. Keith watched his face curiously as Lance’s mind then closed off to him. It was contorted in a way that made him look as though he was bracing himself for impact after taking an impromptu nose-dive off a cliff.

“What is it?” Keith said and Lance turned to look at him with a determination on his face that made Keith’s heart skip a beat.

“Things are going to get a little hairy again soon enough,” he said, and although his facade was calm, Keith noted that he was speaking faster than usual. “So I’m going to say this now before either of us go and do something stupid again.” Keith tried to glare at him for the obvious jibe, but now all his efforts were focused instead on keeping the air flowing into his lungs. The tone in Lance’s voice was sending him into orbit. “I really like you, Keith. Which I guess is kinda obvious now, what with me — um — kissing you and all that.” Keith’s throat was burning.

“You being able to read my mind also makes this a bit pointless now too I suppose, but—”

“Don’t you dare do the ‘confession before we die’ thing!”

“Hey! How about you don’t be a hypocrite when you did pretty much the exact same thing you self-sacrificing asshole!”

“That was—!”

“—and that’s not what I’m doing anyway.” Lance let go of his waist to grip the back of Keith’s helmet instead. “Because we’re not going to die. We’re getting the hell out of here. Together this time.” The force of his words set Keith’s mind spinning. “So let me finish speaking, okay?” Keith swallowed and nodded. “I think I might be a little bit in love with you.” At that point, Lance’s composure finally seemed to slip. His eyes became wet and his bottom lip trembled. “So… so
don’t — don’t do this. Don’t sacrifice yourself for me again. Please.”

“Lance…”

Keith reached out with his good arm to caress the side of Lance’s face beneath his helmet. The barriers of Lance’s mind were breaking down. Keith let his emotions course through him, consume him—

“I don’t think I could take it a second time.” Keith’s heart clenched as Lance’s voice started to break. “I really couldn’t, Keith.”

“You won’t have to.” Keith brought his hand back down and gripped Lance’s shoulder fiercely. “I promise.” He was angry. So unbelievably angry at himself. How could he have done this? Make Lance feel this way and — shit — Lance could feel his anger right now as well, but Keith didn’t care. He had to… he had to — “Because I don’t want to leave you again.” Lance was staring at him and Keith felt the intensity of his gaze right down to the pit of his stomach. “We’re a team and I —” His words wouldn’t come out as his throat seized up. Everything was on fire — his throat, his face, the room around him, the corners of his eyes — and Lance’s scent was hot on the tip of his tongue where his words should have been.

But he didn’t need to speak.

He pushed them outwards with his mind, the words he yearned to say, pushed them towards Lance in a gentle, desperate cry.

‘I quite like the sound of being yours too.’

Keith took hold of Lance, placing the thought in his mind as carefully as he would his own heart into Lance’s open palm—

Take it.

—closing Lance’s fingers around it.

You can have it. Have all of it.

He could feel Lance take hold of his precious words, bringing them close towards himself.

Because it belongs to you now.

Keith watched Lance’s face, watching and feeling for the moment in which the magnitude of his words hit him. When it did, Keith thought he’d never seen or felt anything from Lance quite so beautiful. Lance’s eyes were wide and so very blue. His lips quivered as he opened his mouth, voice choked with emotions that swam around Keith’s own head in a mesmerising light.

“Wait,” he rasped out. “Are you saying —?” and Keith let out a small bout of hysterical laughter at the disbelief in his voice.

“I’m saying that I love you too, idiot,” Keith said, his voice wet with suppressed tears. He wiped at his face. “You know I do.” Lance blinked dumbly at him for a few ticks, his mind brushing up against Keith’s with a tentative touch, before giving him a warm smile.

“Y-yeah I do.”

Keith had to admit however, that no matter what gifts the bond gave them, hearing the words out
loud was something altogether more thrilling. “Come on. Let’s get out of here before she —”

His breath was then stolen away with a horrifying, black intensity that flooded his senses. He felt Lance quake next to him as the asphyxiating darkness claimed his mind too, terror coursing through him.

“K-Keith?”

“Lance, she’s —!”

But he didn’t get the words out before an agonising pain tore through him and he was suddenly flung, along with Lance, across the corridor.

‘Shit!’

Panicking, he tried to sit up but collapsed back down again with a cry as he accidentally leant on his injured leg. Immediately, Lance was by his side, holding him up.

“I’ve got you.”

Lance’s mind was blazing; a white hot flame. The surge of panic Keith had felt then stilled, because this time, *this* time —

He had Lance.

They let their minds came together with terrific burst of energy and Lance held onto him tight. Reaching out far and together as one, they could feel them — the rest of their team there alongside them, their minds shining like colourful starbursts. All at once Keith could feel them all and he had to suppress a deep, heaving sob of emotion when, for the first time, he felt them reaching back.

*They can feel us now too.*

*Keith —*

Lance had felt it as well. The albeit confused but undeniably warm touch of assurance from their team.

*We’re connected! We’re all connected! Our bond it’s —*

But Lance didn’t have time to finish his thought before Haggar materialised in front of them, leering.

“A valiant effort paladins,” she bit out with a scathing sarcasm. “But this is as far as you’ll go.” Her voice instilled the visceral reaction of making Keith want to retch, the memories of his bones being broken over and over flooding his mind, making him double over in pain. But then Lance’s presence was around him and it felt…

Strong. Angry.

Keith’s heart beat erratically at the change that had now overcome Lance. A fearlessness, that Keith had never sensed from him before, erupted forth from his mind with a staggering force that left Keith feeling breathless. Something within him had changed. No, not changed Keith realised, but *awoken.*

Something he’d been trying to tell Lance was there all along.
I told you to stop having those thoughts about yourself.

Because Lance was here. Lance was protecting him and Keith could feel his power flowing through him, sparking electric blue as he stared Haggar down without so much as a flinch.

You and that boy that attempts to pilot the blue lion, you formed a bond with him, didn’t you?

Keith grinned maniacally at her and was pleased to see a flicker of unease cross her face.

‘You’ve underestimated him, witch.’

Lance’s power was then his. He inhaled his scent and everything was thrown into hyperfocus as a renewed strength overtook him. His ‘Lion Senses’ had taken on an almost tranquil quality as he felt for them.

Complete control.

Previously an unwieldy mess, Keith now felt like he could draw upon his powers as easily as he would call upon his Bayard, fine tune them like an instrument as he so desired. He could see the way Haggar’s immense quintessimal power ignited around them, engulfing the room. He could smell her fury at him for even daring to contemplate escaping her clutches. He could sense Lance’s super vision watching her — laser focused, sharp, and calculating — like a lion stalking its prey. Keith shivered. It was impossible to tell whether the growls he felt reverberating through him were coming from Lance, Blue or both as Lance took on a protective stance beside him, teeth bared in a snarl. Haggar smiled slyly back at him.

“While your bravado is amusing blue paladin, you stand even less of a chance against me than your comrade.” She advanced forward, hands outstretched. “Your mind is weaker than his in his injured state.”

Keith recoiled and heard Lance gasp in pain beside him as he felt her weave a dark shroud of choking smoke around Lance’s head, squeezing down on him.

“Although,” she continued, sounding intrigued, "the nature of your bond appears to have shifted…”

The unpleasant sensation of her mind probing his was back again, but something was different this time. Keith’s heart thudded as he recognised the familiar feeling — the pushing, twisting and writhing — like something was preventing her from penetrating his mind to her fullest extent. It felt like—

Keith turned sharply to look at Lance who still hadn’t taken his eyes off the druid.

—like an invisible barrier.

‘What have they done to it?’

The agitated tone of Haggar’s voice echoing through Keith’s head sent a strange thrill through
him. She hadn’t meant to let that thought slip. Her energy was being diminished, feeling strained. *Weakened.*

What was going on?

Keith could feel Lance fighting. He had always been better at erecting mental walls than Keith but this, this was different. There was a new strength within him and whatever it was, it was strong enough to hold her off.

*They could fight back.*

And if Lance was their shield, then Keith would be their sword.

He pushed out towards her with all the liquid fire his mind possessed. All the pain and humiliation he had suffered at her hands came back to him at once in a molten fury and he let her taste it. Keith felt her recoil and relished the pain he felt sear through her. It left her mind scorched as though branded. Her face distorted in horror.

‘*How is it this strong? Unless they… But how would they know?’*”

As he felt her mind scramble to regain control, Keith saw an opening, a fissure in her defence and he didn’t hesitate as he sunk the now incandescent blade of his mind into hers without mercy. Tearing through the dark landscape of her presence, he heard her cry out in shock and fear when her mind became exposed to him. It was nothing like Lance’s. Nothing like Lance’s at all. Keith gasped for air as he found himself hurtling through a vertigo inducing array of information, more information than he could ever hope to comprehend even if he lived several lifetimes. Sights, sounds, feelings, thoughts and knowledge that spanned over what seemed like infinite millennia assaulted him on all sides. He felt like his brain would burst. ‘*Too much, too much, too much, too —’*”

— and then he saw himself. His lion, his Bayard, stolen and locked away from him—

‘*I know where they’ve taken it.*’

The walls of his cell then materialised, the door opening up before him to reveal his own form, crumpled and broken on the ground — sobbing, begging, pleading—

He felt sick.

And then—

His own face looking back at him in terror and confusion as dark magic encircled him, healing him. A familiar scene that made his heart jolt.

“*I need my weapons in full working order for my next little test.*”

A burst of red energy unfurled before him to reveal a glittering, sapphire core. Then a hum of surprise.

“*I see. That’s why your mind is so powerful.*”

Keith couldn’t breathe.
‘This boy… His lineage is not pure.’

What?

‘So he is not fully human after all. But how?’

He was suffocating.

‘More of our kind survive than I’d suspected. This changes things. And makes him more powerful than I thought. He’ll be dangerous. But we can use that…’

His lungs were on fire.

“So tell me red paladin. Why were you so far away from home?”

He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t—

“Keith!”

Lance yanked him back by their tether. His mind wrapped around his in a protective shield as they both felt Haggar slowly begin to regain control. Keith’s body tensed in anticipation as his mind spun with the revelations of what he’d just seen and heard, breathing heavily.

‘I can’t — that doesn’t — it doesn’t make any sense. I can’t —’

“Keith?”

He was hauled to his feet, shaking. Lance had sensed his distress, but Keith could tell from the confusion he felt from him, that in the fraught and overwhelming onslaught of Haggar’s mind, Lance hadn’t managed to see what Keith had witnessed. Instead, Keith sent back a hasty touch of reassurance.

‘I’m fine. Let’s get out of here. Finish this.’

‘Keith—’

‘I’ll tell you later. We still need to fight she’s —’

“I had suspected that you’d be strong together, but this…” They both whipped around to see Haggar across from them, staggering to her feet as she glared at them intently. “This is…”

‘Unprecedented.’

Keith held back a smile as her disbelieving thoughts betrayed her. They had the upper hand. Lance stood in front of him again and his energy blazed. Keith was enamoured. This was it. This was Lance’s true form, his true self.

‘Beautiful.’

Keith would protect him. Protect him like Lance was protecting him now. Keith stood up straighter.

‘I always knew you had it in you.’
Lance then looked at him and his mind glowed.

‘Let’s take her down.’

When their minds clashed with Haggar’s once more, they pushed back together frantically, but now she was livid. Her anger only seemed to increase the strength of her quintessence, and although her defences were weakened, Keith could feel himself breaking. He gritted his teeth.

‘No, not yet.’

The pain in his broken limbs was becoming more intense.

‘Not now, please.’

The strengthening liquid was starting to wear off.

‘Just hang on a little longer.’

As his focus started to slip, the emotions of his teammates began to bleed into his subconscious again. They were fighting out there for them — fearful and losing hope. They needed him. Needed both of them. Needed Voltron. He cried out as his good leg trembled and collapsed beneath him. Lance grabbed onto his waist as he slumped to the floor.

‘They need us, Lance we’ve got to—

Haggar’s hold on Keith’s mind was punishing, but still Lance fought her off. They had to get out of here now. Get to the lions, get to Red.

‘I need you, Red. I need you.’

He called out to her desperately, reaching out even though he knew she was too far away for her to sense his pleas. But then—

He felt her.

‘What?’

A low growl shook through him and he shuddered, his mind aflame with the achingly familiar scarlet flames.

‘But how?’

Her presence advanced towards him fast in a terrifying blaze and Lance looked towards him, his eyes wide open.

‘But she’s —?’

She was too far away to hear him. She had never —

But he could feel her unmistakably, and so apparently could Lance. Then, with a resounding roar, they both felt Blue abandoning her post, from where she had been defending the vessel against Galra reinforcements on autopilot, to join Red in her hunt. They advanced together in a wild haze of fire and ice, and Lance’s mouth fell open in alarm.

“Keith, quick! Engage your visor and grab onto me before —!”
The ship exploded around them and their yells were lost along with the air onboard the Galra craft as it was sucked into the vacuum of space. They barely had time to engage their visors and jetpacks before Red’s towering form appeared before them, her voice a deadly snarl rolling like thunder within both their heads. Lance shrieked loudly over the comms as he scrabbled to cling onto both Keith’s waist and the fractured remains of the corridor around them. Haggar’s screams, though swallowed by the blackness of space, were ringing out in a deafening cry inside their heads as she too held on to the ship. Keith watched with wide eyes as she dematerialised, not quite managing to dodge a red-hot laser blast from Red as she did so. She staggered as the blast grazed her arm.

“Keith!”

Keith tore his eyes away from the struggling druid to look at Lance, who met his gaze with furious eyes.

“What?”

“You gotta good hold on me?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Hold on tight.”

“Lance what are you —?”

Then Lance let go of his waist to instead reach for his Bayard and Keith clung on desperately to Lance’s neck with his good arm as he lost support.

“Lance!”

“I’m letting go of the ship next so get ready.”

“What are you doing ?!?”

“I’ve gotta take this shot, Keith. While she’s down. Before she dematerialises again and gets away. So I need to let go.”

“Lance, we need to —!”

“We have our jetpacks so we’ll be fine.”

“I won’t be able to hold o—!”

Lance let go and Keith had to cling on tighter as they fell away from the ship and Lance fired his Bayard directly at the druid. The shot missed her chest as she made to dodge, but the blast caught her leg. Her mind gave one last horrendous shriek before falling away from theirs completely. Lance growled and clicked his tongue, taking aim again.

“Lance!” Keith gave a start as Shiro’s voice then crackled through the comms this time. “Can you hear me?”

“I’m a little busy right now, Shiro!”

“Lance, are you okay? Do you have Keith?”

“Shiro!” Keith couldn’t stop his own voice choking up at the worry in his friend’s voice. “I’m here and we’re okay. Shiro, listen I’m sorry I—!”
“Keith, it’s okay. We’ll talk about it later. As long as you’re safe that’s all I care about right now.”

“Shiro—”

“Now that we know you’re okay and you’re in range of Pidge’s jammer, we need to form Voltron as quickly as possible and get out of here.”

“Got it. Lance, let’s—”

“No!”

“Lance, please!”

“She’s getting away, Keith!”

“I know, but we have to go!”

“She tortured you!”

“I KNOW LANCE!”

“We have to go after her before she escapes back to Zarkon’s central command!”

“The team needs us now!”

“But —!”

“Now!”

“It’s what you would do.” Lance turned to him fiercely. “Don’t even try to deny it!” Keith glared at him.

“Which is exactly why I know that the right decision is to leave.” He gasped as the pain in his limbs stung sharply. All at once, he felt Lance’s unruly anger wilt away and his arms were around him again as he resheathed his Bayard.

“K-Keith are you okay? I’m sorry I didn’t—”

“I’ll be fine. Just help me into Red and let me find my Bayard so that we can get out of here. I know where they’ve hidden it.”

“R-right.”

Red’s purrs surrounded him in a comforting warmth as they approached her open jaws and flew inside her. Lance held him gently as he lowered him into his pilot seat.

“Keith?” he said, as Keith gripped on tightly to the left joystick. “As badass as it is that you’re still attempting to pilot with a broken goddamn arm—”

“Thanks.”

“—are you sure this is a good idea?”

“It’s a terrible idea, but what choice do we have?” Keith winced again as he shuffled slightly in his seat. “As long as we form Voltron quickly while this drug is still affecting me, I should be able to push through it.”
“Should?”

“Will. Red will pick up the slack for me.” Red purred back in acknowledgement. “And you’ve got my back too right?” Lance stared at him for a few moments before grinning brightly and swooping down to kiss him messily and deliberately on the surface of his visor. He cackled and leapt away as Keith spluttered in disgust.

“Lance!” he wiped the smear off his visor as Lance laughed louder on his way out of Red’s cockpit.

“Sorry! I’ve just always wanted to do that.”

“What?”

“Nothing!”

Keith bit back a smile as the lights of Lance’s amusement danced and glimmered through his mind. It was infectious. He held on to his presence as Lance drifted out of Red and towards Blue.

‘Yeah I’ve got your back, Keith.’ Lance’s voice in his head was like a soft brush of his lips on the shell of his ear. ‘Of course I do.’

Forcing himself to refocus and not get lost in the golden, fuchsia glow of Lance’s mind around him, Keith took off with Red, letting her guide him through the Galra forces that had begun to reform upon Blue’s absence. Cautiously, still not quite believing, he reached out with his mind towards the rest of the team. They were engaged in their own fierce battles up ahead and rapidly becoming outnumbered.

‘Shiro?’

He felt a responding touch to his mind — soft and hesitant.

“Keith? Was that you?” Keith grinned at hearing Shiro’s curious sounding voice over the comms.

“Yeah. So you felt that?”

“I felt it to,” Hunk chimed in. “What the heck happened to you guys back there?! Since when could we connect to your minds too without Voltron? I don’t know whether to be excited or freaked out, but it’s really — oh no, no, no, no, no, NO -!”

Keith flinched as Hunk’s alarm flooded through him and he watched as the Yellow lion barrel-rolled violently, only just avoiding a large laser blast from an incoming battle cruiser. Pidge was quick to be by his side.

“Hunk!” she yelled out, her frustration flared at the edges of Keith’s mind as she spoke. “As cool as this new bond thing is, we can’t talk about this now!”

“Pidge is right,” Shiro cut in, as his calm determination filled Keith’s mind with a fresh confidence. “We’re all here now. We can form Voltron.”

“My Bayard,” Keith said in a wave of panic. “They still have it. I won’t be able to form our sword without it. I need to go back.”

“I’ll get it.”

Lance’s voice over the comms stopped Keith’s heart cold.
“Lance, you can’t —”

“I can’t let you go back there, Keith.”

“You don’t know where to go!”

“But you can show me right?” Lance’s face appeared on Red’s dashboard with a reassuring smile and warm touch to Keith’s mind.

“I don’t want you going back in alone either,” Keith said softly.

“I won’t be alone though will I?” Lance tapped the side of his helmet. “I’ve got you right here with me.” Keith looked away, his eyes burning. His broken limbs began to throb. “You saw a vision right? So you can guide me.”

“Lance…”

“Hey, come on. It will be just like old times! You, me and the invisible maze.”

“But we failed that! Every time!”

“And I still have flashbacks. But I’m pretty sure we’ve got a better handle on this teamwork thing now, right?” Keith snorted despite himself as Lance wiggled his eyebrows at him.

“Keith, we don’t really have a lot of other options right now,” Shiro interrupted, startling him. “Lance’s plan sounds feasible.”

“Told ya!”

“And I trust you guys.” Keith opened his mouth in surprise as he felt Shiro’s affection and pride for them both overwhelm him, and the space behind his eyes felt hot again. “I trust you both to use your bond effectively for the team.”

“Shiro…”

“Now get going.”

“Yes, Sir!”

“I’m on it!”

And Lance darted off in a streak of electric blue across the battlefield. Keith entwined his mind with his, heart racing as it sped off with Lance’s in the opposite direction to where he now headed with Red. When he reached Black and pulled up beside her, he felt Shiro’s mind brush up against his in reassurance.

“He’ll be alright, Keith,” he said over the comms. “Now let’s hold down the fort until he returns.”

“Got it.”

Many forces were now retreating, Haggar’s personal fleet Keith suspected, but the Castle was still under heavy fire from numerous, large battle cruisers, ones they definitely couldn’t hope to take down without the aid of Voltron. Keith clenched his jaw as pain reverberated once again through his broken limbs. He felt Shiro’s concern in an instant.

“Keith, are you injured?”
“I’m dealing with it.”

“Keith —”

“I’m here,” Lance’s voice blessedly interrupted. “It looks like everyone has abandoned ship here thanks to a certain red, mother hen’s timely arrival.”

“Hey!” said Keith, flushing as Red gave an indignant growl alongside him. “I seem to recall a certain blue mother hen was also present.”

“My girl just wanted in on the fun.” The smirk was plain in Lance’s voice even without the humour glimmering away in his mind. “Your lion’s a bad influence.” Keith rolled his eyes and pulled down forcibly on Red’s left joystick, rolling to take out a few fighters that were on Shiro’s tail. The resulting g-force sent a wave of pain through his broken left leg, making him feel light-headed. He gritted his teeth.

“Just show me where you are,” he said, fighting hard to hold back the pain from Shiro and the others’ probing minds. Lance’s voice was serious again when it filtered through his helmet.

“Coming up on the starboard bow now. At least, I think it is. It’s hard to tell with half the ship being blown apart.” A smokey image of what Lance could see as he boarded the vessel emerged in Keith’s mind, and Keith scanned the scene, looking for a hint as to where they needed to go.

‘And look after yourself,’ Lance said quietly in his head. ‘I felt that.’ Keith bit his lip.

‘Sorry.’

‘No, no that’s not — I just... stay safe for me okay? Hang on a little longer until we can get you home.’

Home.

Keith’s heart warmed at that.

“So which way?”

Lance’s voice brought him back and Keith frowned again as he relinquished control to Red and concentrated fully on seeing through Lance’s eyes. He recognised a corridor from Haggar’s vision.

“Go right.”

“Got it.”

As he directed Lance through the deteriorating remains of the Galra ship, Keih fought to keep his mind lucid. He clung on to Lance’s energy as though his very being would shatter without it. His broken limbs hurt. His everything hurt. And his mind was spread so very, very thin…

“Keith!”

Red jerked violently as she was hit with a laser directly to her side. Keith grasped both joysticks without thinking as she was sent spinning and couldn’t hold back a yell at the red-hot, stinging pain that shot up his arm as a result.

“KEITH!”

His mind was deluged with the intensity of his teammates’ collective fear as he strained to regain
control. Their voices rang out over the comms, but none so loud as the voice that screamed through his throbbing head.

‘Keith! Oh god please be okay. Please answer me, Keith. We’re almost out of here you can’t — you’ve got to be okay. Please be okay. Please. Keith—’

“I’m okay,” he gasped out over the comms. “Red and I are okay.” Between them, they had managed to right themselves and Red’s mind curled around his, full of apologies and soothing purrs. “But she’s been hit bad. If we don’t form Voltron soon we’ll be in trouble.”

“I’ve got you covered, Keith.”

‘I’ve got you, I’ve got you, just — hang in there. I’ll come back to you soon.’

Lance’s presence around him steadied his rapid breathing and Keith inhaled slowly, delving once again into his head. He opened his eyes to see a room in front of him. The room from the vision.

“That’s it!” he said and Lance didn’t have to be told twice as he shot his way into the room and Keith saw him snatch up the red Bayard from floor where it must have fallen in the fray.

“Finders keepers!”

“Shut up and get back here before we get Coran to pilot Blue instead.” Keith couldn’t keep the grin out of his voice however at the elated whoops Lance sent over the comms.

“On my way, partner. Don’t start the party without me!”

Partner.

Keith’s face warmed as a giddiness bubbled up inside him despite the pain that threatened to smother him at any moment. He then heard Shiro chuckle over their private channel.

“Partner, eh?”

“Not the time, Shiro.”

“Paladins!” Allura’s voice over the comms sobered the brief moment of euphoria. “I fear that if we don’t form Voltron within ten dobashes, we could be in some serious trouble. The Castle’s defences won’t last much longer. I’m diverting all shields to the bow in twenty ticks. I’ll need you defending the stern.”

“We’re on it, Princess,” said Shiro. “Lance, get Keith’s Bayard to him and meet us at the Castle.”

“On it, Shiro.”

As the rest of the team covered them from fire, Red opened her mouth wide as Blue advanced at top speed. Keith had never felt so glad to see the giant beast’s large, gleaming jaws as she too opened her mouth to release a jet-pack-powered blue paladin towards him.

“Special delivery for a Mr. Keith Kogane?”

“Lance...”

“What?”

“Making bad jokes at a time like this?”
“If we die out here, I want to go out at least trying to making you smile.” Keith buried his face in his hand.

“I thought you said we weren’t going to die?” Keith stayed hunched over his console as he heard Lance enter Red’s cockpit behind him.

“We’re not,” Lance said firmly and Keith turned to look at him. “But hey!” He gestured at Keith’s face. “Looks like I succeeded anyway.”

“Shut up,” Keith said, not even attempting to keep the fondness out of his voice as he took his Bayard from Lance’s outstretched hand and dragged him down to kiss the cocky grin off his face. “And thank you,” he whispered against Lance’s mouth. Lance’s energy swirled around him in a soft blue light.

“Anytime, partner.”

“I hate to break up this soppy reunion,” came Pidge’s disgruntled voice over the comms, "but get your ass back in the blue lion Lance before I come and drag you there myself!”

“Okay, okay! Jeez, anyone would think we’re in a life or death situation or something.”

“Lance—”

“Sorry, Hunk.”

“Four dobashes!” said Allura and Lance hastened to exit Red’s cockpit. He turned one last time to look at Keith and gave him a shaky smile. It was though all his wisecracks had drained the happiness out of him, leaving behind only worry and exhaustion. Keith reached his mind out towards him with gentle caress.

‘See you on the other side?’ Lance said and Keith nodded at him.

‘I’ll meet you there.’

“I don’t know about you guys,” Hunk said as Keith watched Lance go with a frantic heart, “but I have a really good feeling about forming Voltron. This may sound totally weird, but it feels like… I don’t know. Like something’s changed, you get me?”

“Yeah,” Pidge said softly. “I get it.”

None of them spoke, but they didn’t need to. As Lance took his place in Blue’s cockpit and they flew together as one, they all felt it. All five of their minds came together in brilliant harmony and this time, in a way that it never had before, it felt like a perfect fit. Feeling like this, Keith thought as he closed his eyes and absorbed the warmth of his teammates’ minds around him, it seemed so obvious now what Allura and Coran had meant all that time ago back on Arus when they had wanted them to bond with one another — really bond. They had merely been patchwork paladins before, forced together by circumstance. Now they were truly one — one with their lions and one with each other. Even the pain he was in didn’t seem so bad anymore as Voltron’s imposing form loomed out of the darkness of space and into the fiery light of the battle around them.

At least three battle cruisers stood between them and the Castle. Keith inhaled deeply and his legs shook. He could do this.

‘No,’ the deep rumbling growls of all five lions reminded him, and the light of his team filled his senses. ‘WE can do this.’
But would his sword be enough?

“Ohay team, let’s do this!” Shiro cried out. “Form sword!”

And Keith thrust his Bayard forward with the strength of his team behind him, Lance’s mind shining brightest of all. They surged forward just as Allura shouted “Two dobashes!” over the comms.

“We’ve got this guys,” said Shiro. “You can feel it right?”

“Yeah,” Keith said, his heart thundering in his chest as the energies of his teammates streaked past him, their individual colours vivid in his mind’s eye. They all felt it — the collective consciousness of all five lions urging them on. Urging them to—

“Guys—”

“Yeah, we know.”

“My lion — all our lions —”

“They want us to —”

“Then let’s do it!”

Lance, Pidge and Hunk thrust their Bayards into their consoles along with Keith’s and they all watched in awe as Voltron’s sword extended outwards in a luminous bridge of light. Stretching far beyond it’s usual reach, it seemed to vibrate with an incredible energy that was aglow along the length of the blade.

“Guys,” said Lance, his voice trembling a little, though Keith could feel that it wasn’t out of fear, rather out of a nervous excitement. “Is this… is this what I think it is?”

“I have a feeling you’re going to tell us,” said Pidge as they charged forward.

“I think this is,” he continued, and Keith groaned, trying not to laugh as an adrenaline high hit him at the same time that Lance’s words flowed into his mind, just before he voiced them out loud.

“Lance, don’t say it.”

“The Ultimate Weapon!”

“Aww man, Lance really? Way to ruin a cool moment!”

“But I was right! The merging of our Bayards!”

“Just because your stupid lie sort of became true, doesn’t mean it wasn’t a lie to begin with!”

“One dobash!”

—and they sunk their blade into the oncoming battle cruiser, slicing through it with such ease that it might as well had not been there at all. Keith grinned as Hunk and Lance hollered in jubilation. They pulled out the blade, swung it around and sunk it into the next battle cruiser in one fluid motion.

“Thirty ticks!”
They rounded on the last cruiser, raising their blade high and far behind them as they stormed ahead. Laser fire from Galra fighters ricocheted off them in a harmless trail of starlight and Keith relished the invigorating burn that smoldered deep within him as they plunged their blade into the heart of the Galra vessel, tearing it to pieces just before the Castle’s particle barrier finally collapsed in on itself.

“Yeah!!” Keith smiled weakly at his teammates’ cheers, feeling drained.

They’d done it.

Keith closed his eyes.

‘Keith?’

Lance’s voice was oddly faint in his head. He felt his mind falling away from the others and Keith struggled, trying to hold on to the rapidly fading blue light of Lance’s energy.

‘Lance, I—’

It wasn’t pain, it was a numbness. His head felt light.

‘Keith stay there I’m coming.’

‘Lance, there’s something—’

The vision was faint in his mind, but it echoed around Keith’s mind in a way that he could not ignore.

‘What is it? Keith talk to me.’

‘Something that witch said to me.’ He couldn’t feel his body, his limbs— ‘I saw… heard her in a vision she…’

He was drifting and he felt cold. So cold.

‘I’m here. Keith? Are you okay? Stay with me!’

‘She said I wasn’t… pure…’

Something warm encased him, but it was fleeting, the warmth ebbing away faster than he could register it.

His head was heavy.

The cave had been dark and unpleasant.

“We’re laying low,” her paladin had said to her as he’d hidden her away in there. “I can blend in here with the natives.” He’d pressed his face to the cool exterior of her paw and let his mind curl around hers in a tender embrace. “Don’t you worry about me. When it is safe again, I will come back for you. I promise.”

He hadn’t returned.
That hadn’t stopped her from hoping however. She trusted him. Trusted him with all her heart. There had to be a good reason for him not coming back. Maybe it had been too dangerous, too risky.

Or maybe he had found himself a new purpose?

Growling to herself, she’d tried not to dwell too much on this particular train of thought. She knew her place. She knew her purpose. Voltron. So she had waited patiently. What were a few thousand years to her, an immortal being? They were certainly nothing to the lifespan of her Altean paladin.

He was not invulnerable however, she’d reasoned. She had tried not to dwell on that train of thought too much either.

So she had done the only thing that she could do.

She’d kept her mind open.

The earful Lance had gotten from Shiro after Keith had finally succumbed to his pain and exhaustion and collapsed in his arms hadn’t been half as bad as he’d expected. Shiro had been more concerned about getting Keith into a healing pod as quickly as possible, rather than chewing out Lance for not informing the rest of the team of the extent of the red paladin’s injuries. And rightly so, for Keith had been worse for wear to say the least. Coran had gaped and couldn’t get Keith in the pod fast enough when he’d taken in the sight of the crumpled, broken boy in Lance’s arms, covered in blood, sweat and Lance’s frightened tears.

He had been in there for three quintents. The whole time, Lance made sure to open up his mind to him, just as Keith had done when their roles had been reversed. At first, Keith had been too exhausted to communicate properly, his mind still recovering from the strain he had put it under during battle, but after a while Lance had begun to feel him again. The comfort of Keith’s crimson light had soothed the ache of his worrisome thoughts.

Then they had talked.

It wasn’t easy to communicate telepathically. Even though their bond had strengthened so much since the last time, Keith would get tired easily as the energy he expended from reaching out took it’s toll on him. At these points, Allura would step in to chide Lance for encouraging Keith to use up his energy for “idle chit-chat” instead of healing. Lance had sulked a little at that. It wasn’t his fault! Keith had been the one wanting to talk.

And there was one particular topic of conversation that he’d been reluctant to drop.

Despite Lance’s many attempts at steering the conversation into less heavy areas of discussion, Keith hadn’t stopped bringing up the visions he had seen in Haggar’s mind and the damning thoughts he had heard from her.

‘She called me impure, Lance,’ he’d said, the first night his mind had awoken again. ‘... said I wasn’t — that I wasn’t human!’

‘Keith…’

‘I don’t understand. I don’t get it! What did she see inside my head? It doesn’t make any sense I —’
‘Let’s not talk about this now, yeah? It’s obviously stressing you out.’

‘Of course it’s stressing me out!’

‘Can’t you wait until you’re out of the pod? Something like this...’

‘Why not now? Why aren’t you more surprised about this? Do you know something?’

‘Keith...’

‘Lance!’

‘Seriously, you want to talk about this now? Wouldn’t you rather talk with Allura and Coran about this? You know, someone who might actually have answers for you?’

‘I — I guess. But —’

‘Just trust me okay?’

‘... fine.’

Of course he had brought it up again many times since, but Lance had gotten better at brushing him off. And now...

Lance sat back, tapping his feet rhythmically as he pretended not to be watching Coran and Keith talking in low voices across from him in the med bay. The temptation to activate his lion hearing and eavesdrop was becoming more unbearable as the ticks — well — ticked by, and Keith’s mind steadily became more and more frantic around his own with each word that Coran uttered. Lance tried to hold onto Keith’s energy, hold him consolingly and tell him that everything would be okay, but Keith’s mind was a scarlet whirlwind of conflicting emotions, impossible to cling onto. Lance looked up briefly when he felt Allura take a seat next to him. He managed a weak smile in her direction, but knew he’d been unsuccessful in assuring her of his ‘very much okay over here thanks’ state, when she put a warm hand on his shoulder.

“It will be a lot for him to take in.”

“I know. I’ll... give him space.”

“But I’m sure he’ll come around. Quite quickly in fact.” She smiled fondly over at the pair across from them. “I can tell. I can feel that he’s been searching for answers about himself for a long time.”

“He has?”

“Keith’s quintessence, by its very nature, drives him to seek. It’s a ruthless thing. Leaves him unsatisfied, frustrated, hungry when he can’t find what he’s looking for. If he even knows what he’s looking for at all.”

“Makes sense.”

“It’s what leads him to making his, ah, perhaps more unorthodox decisions on occasion.” She leant her face on her hand, smiling fondly over at the paladin in question. “We’re a little alike in that way.” Lance snorted at that.

“Are you saying that you want to take our Red out for a spin?” Allura giggled.
“As tempting as that idea is, the bond between Keith and his lion is not something so easily recreated.”

“Tell me about it. That lion has serious overprotective parent issues.” He gave her one of his trademark smirks, wiggling his eyebrows at her. “And I hate to break it to you, but red is so not your colour.” Allura laughed loudly at that. “Though of course if it’s just a ride in a lion you’re after, Blue and I are always available.” She gave him a playful shove as he shot her a wink.

“Lance!”

“Hey! I’m just messing!” He stopped laughing to look at her thoughtfully. “Seriously though, your colour is like, all wrong for piloting Red. It would give me migraines just to watch you.” She raised her eyebrows at that.

“My colour?”

“Oh right… yeah. Sorry that probably didn’t make any sense.”

“It’s okay. But now I’m curious.” She rested her chin on her hand again, tilting her head to look at him with an inquisitive gaze. “What do you mean by that?” Lance looked away, rubbing the back of his neck, his cheeks feeling hot.

“It’s, um, a bit weird, and I don’t know if it’s just a human thing or whatever, but I see colours where there shouldn’t be colours. Apparently.” He gave her a quick glance, and when she didn’t say anything, he carried on. “Like, numbers, words and, err, people. Yeah…” As his face turned increasingly redder, she began to frown, as though she was in the midst of putting a puzzle together.

“I see,” she said after a few ticks. “Well I’m not really surprised.” Lance narrowed his eyes at her matter of fact tone.

“Err… okay?” he said slowly. “Is this a normal thing for Alteans then or something?”

“No, that’s not it,” she said with a small smile. “But it actually makes a lot of sense considering your quintessence.” Lance blinked at her, at a loss for what to say. It occurred to him then, that he really didn’t know anything about his supposed quintessence at all. “No two paladins’ quintessences are ever the same, even if both paladins at some point piloted the same lion. But there is always a quality that stays consistent from successor to successor. A quality that allows a compatible bond to form between a lion and its paladin. One thing that has always stayed consistent among the blue paladins, your predecessors, has been their faith in others, whether it is founded or not.” Lance stared at her, trying to make sense of her words.

“So do you mean that my quintessence makes me dumb?” he said, feeling abashed. His heart sunk, his mind drifting back to the Nyma incident again. Allura shook her head quickly.

“Lance,” she sounded exasperated, but Lance was hopeful at hearing the kindness in her voice. “It means that you’re able to look past the surface of what you see and find something deeper — a goodness or a truth where sometimes, there really ought not to be. And whether you find it or not, you still trust that it is there. It’s not always a good thing of course, but it’s certainly not a quality to be ashamed of. In fact, this is what makes yours and Keith’s quintessences so compatible.” Lance flushed.

“O-oh,” he said, staring down at his hands and pointedly looking away from Keith, who was still in the midst of discussion with Coran. “So our energies, like, complement each other or
something?"

“Now that’s a whole different concept,” she said. Lance sighed and rubbed at his temples. This was
giving him a headache. “But it is something that makes your bond a lot stronger and more unique
than I originally thought.” Lance frowned and felt for the obsidian in his pocket, turning it over in
his fingers.

“Is that why we could fight that witch? She was so strong, but Keith and I could hold her off for a
little while.” Allura hummed thoughtfully.

“It’s likely. Though we can’t know for sure unless we carry out more tests,” Lance groaned.

“I figured.” It didn’t look like he and Keith would be escaping Pidge’s and Hunk’s clutches any
time soon. “I thought it might have had something to do with this,” he held up the obsidian, “but I
guess not.” Allura’s eyes shone as she laid eyes on the stone and she smiled brightly at him.

“So he did give it to you!”

“Huh?”

“Ah, it’s nothing.” She still had a twinkle in her eye however. She reached out to touch the stone
with her fingertips. “The supposed powers of obsidian are more of an Altean doynikian —”

“A what now?”

“Oh! Um, the literal translation being ‘an old wives tale’? The actual psychic properties of obsidian
have always been hotly dispu—” She cut herself off, her fingers stopped dead still on the reflective
surface where she had been absent-mindedly trailing them. Lance was sure he’d never seen a more
flummoxed expression on her face. “This… this can’t be right.” Suddenly feeling defensive, Lance
scowled and snatched back the stone.

“What? What’s wrong with it?” he said, cradling it in his hands. It might not have had special
powers like he’d previously thought, but it was still special. A stupid rock was what it might be, but
it was a stupid rock that Keith had given him nonetheless.

“Nothing is wrong with it, it’s just…” Her brow was furrowed as she stared intently at Lance’s
clasped hands. Then she looked up at him abruptly, a suspicious look in her eyes that made him
shrink away.

“W-what?”

“Lance, exactly under what circumstances did Keith give you his scarf?”

“Ahhh.” He looked away from her sheepishly, his face feeling hot again. He glanced up on instinct
to look at Keith and his heart leapt when he saw that Keith was already looking his way, a small,
questioning frown on his face. Lance turned around again quickly, shutting his mind off to him.

“We, um, did some reading about the ways we could strengthen our bond and, ah, there was a
passage on gift exchanging so…” Allura promptly dropped her face into her hands.

“Err, Allura?”

“Only you two…”

“What? What’s wrong? What did we do?”
“Okay,” she said quietly, her face taking on a pink glow. “I’m only explaining this once, so you’re going to have to take responsibility and explain it to Keith, your farcéile.”

“Um, literal translation?”

“Bond husband.”

“Right, thanks — wait, what ?!”

“—and this one I found all the way back on Arus.” Keith said, holding up something that Lance, if they had been back on Earth, would have guessed was a giant, dried out starfish, except it was bright purple, had way too many legs and was vibrating in a mildly disturbing manner on Keith’s out-stretched palms. “The spikes pricked me a couple of times when I picked it up, but I didn’t die, so I guess it wasn’t poisonous —”

“Keith!”

“—and it’s not alive even though it’s moving. Pidge checked. It just has this weird vibrational energy. It stops after a while though when I put it down.”

Lance snorted and went back to running his hands through Keith’s hair. They had been lying on Keith’s bed and going through Keith’s box of alien relics for maybe a varga or so now, and at some point Keith had started leaning into him, sinking lower and lower in Lance’s lap as he talked animatedly about each trinket in his collection. Lance’s legs were starting to ache, but it was worth it to have Keith’s warm weight against him, his hair tickling his nose and his voice rumbling pleasantly through Lance’s chest. He smiled to himself and then saw Keith’s mind light up in interest.

“What?” he said turning around to look at him and Lance raised an eyebrow.

“What yourself!”

“Your mind went your happy colour,” Keith said, and Lance blushed. Keith keeping track of all his emotion colours was unbearably cute. “Were you…” He paused, a redness appearing on his cheekbones. “Were you laughing at me?”

“What?! No! Why would I?”

“Because this is a weird hobby and I’ve been made fun of before because of it.”

“You forget that you’re talking to a fellow ‘weird-rock-collecting’ nerd over here.” Keith chuckled.

“Right.” He shuffled around to place the purple starfish-like object back in his trinket box.

“I’m just,” Lance wet his lips and twisted a lock of Keith’s hair in his fingers, “enjoying listening to you talk about your stuff alright? Is that a crime?”

“Oh.”

Keith turned back around hastily. Lance watched him as he began to fiddle with the pendant around his neck. The sight made Lance flush all over as Allura’s words came flooding back to him again.

*Your farcéile.*
Lance swallowed. He couldn’t put this off forever. Telepathic bond aside, he would slip up sooner or later, and most likely in an humiliating way like blurring it out in front of everyone at the breakfast table, or when they were trying to form Voltron. Despite the embarrassment of the situation, Lance couldn’t help but feel a bit giddy as the prospect of revealing it to Keith. A grin spread across his face as a spark of amusement then set in.

“So,” he began, making sure the smugness was thick in his voice, “did you know that we got Altean mind-married?”

The reaction was immediate. Keith made a strangled noise as though he’d just been kicked in the stomach and curled forwards away from him, coughing so violently that Lance wondered, in a brief moment of panic, if he should fetch someone. Though the idea of explaining exactly why he’d nearly killed Keith via a coughing fit was way too mortifying a prospect. Luckily, Keith began to collect himself again, though his face now resembled his lion.

“W-what?!” he croaked, staring at Lance with panicked eyes. Lance grinned at him and pointed down at Keith’s pendant. He was starting to enjoy himself now.

“Your little idea of exchanging gifts was apparently a ceremony that’s performed between lovers. Allura told me.”

“What?!”

“And it enhanced our bond, making this,” Lance took his obsidian out of his pocket and waved it in front of Keith’s horrified face, “power up or some mumbo jumbo when you gave it me. Helping us fight Haggar.”

“I-I dont’—”

“Did you know?”

“No! Of course I didn’t!”

“You can’t fool me smooth talker.”

“Lance!”

“We hadn’t even kissed yet and you went ahead and married me? Talk about moving fast buddy.”

“Please stop.”

“—and trying to one-up me by proposing first? I mean, jeez Keith, do you have to try and beat me in everything?”

“Lance, that’s not — I wasn’t trying to beat you —!”

Flustered wasn’t a strong enough word to describe the way Keith appeared to Lance now. He was hiding his burning face in his hands and his mind flared in defensiveness. ‘Maybe that last comment was a little too far.’

“Hey now,” he said, pulling Keith’s hands away from his face and smoothing down the crease between his eyebrows with his thumbs. “Relax! I’m just messing with you. You can read my mind doofus. You know when I’m joking.” Keith pressed his lips together, looking sullen.

“Well I’m not reading it right now, am I?”
“But you could if you wanted.”

“I don’t want to read it all the time,” Keith said. There was an odd heat in his gaze, but his voice had become softer. “I shouldn’t have to. I’d like you to have a choice. Both of us. I like having that choice. We have control of it now. Why should we always be inside each others’ heads?” At some point as he was speaking, Keith’s hands had travelled down to Lance’s wrists, but Lance hadn’t noticed, too enraptured by Keith’s words. “I shouldn’t have to be to know what you’re thinking.” His grip was warm and his fingers brushed the red fabric of his scarf. “I should be able to look at you and just… know.”

‘Quiznak, Keith…’

Lance couldn’t decide whether he wanted to hold him, or sit back and marvel at the sunset glow of Keith’s energy around them. In the end, Keith decided for him. Lance let Keith draw him in — with his eyes, with his mind — surround him with a warmth as heartfelt as his words had been. Lance unfurled his own mind, reaching, feeling — and Keith let him, pulling him in with a small tug on their tether and a gentle permission. Lance’s ‘Lion Vision’ then revealed Keith to him in a beautiful light — skin radiant and eyes shining. He could feel Keith’s hands still on his and his pulse through his wrists. With a slow intake of breath, Lance let himself listen to the nervous thrill of Keith’s heartbeat, each beat hitting him with a new rush of affection that left him feeling full to the brim. It spilled out of him in a grin that hurt his cheeks. He held Keith’s face in his hands.

‘You can’t know what I’m thinking all the time, idiot.’

He brushed Keith’s hair off his forehead.

‘—and that’s okay.’

Whether Keith had heard him or not he didn’t know, but Keith smiled at him anyway. Their minds curled around each other with a mutual understanding and Lance knew. This was what it was. Not the bind of a rope, but the hold of a hand.

‘Thank you.’

Then Keith held his arms out towards him and Lance embraced his heat and his scent. Keith squeezed him tight, turning his head to kiss him softly on the cheek.

“For real though,” Lance mumbled into Keith’s hair after a few moments of quiet, “I wouldn’t say no.” He felt Keith tilt his head up to look at him again, noses brushing.

“Say ‘no’ to what?”

“Marrying you. Like, for real. One day.”

“O-oh.”

“I mean…” It was no use, Lance reasoned. They both wore what felt like permanent blushes now. He might as well carry on. “We already, you know…” Lance stared over Keith’s left shoulder. The back of his neck was starting to feel clammy. Broaching the topic of the dream was even harder when Lance was faced with the now very real Keith holding him in his arms, his skin hot to the touch even beneath the fabric of his shirt, and looking at him with an eerily similar heated gaze. Lance shivered.

“Know what?” he said, and Lance couldn’t help but feel a sting of irritation.
“You know!” he said pointedly, looking Keith dead in the eye.

“You have permission to read my mind now Keith goddamnit! Please don’t make me say something like this out loud!” Keith’s mind was closed off however, screwing his face up with a quizzical look.

“Err, I do?”

“In the dream!” Keith raised his eyebrows at him, unimpressed.

“Lance, we’ve kissed loads of times now. How is that dream still a big deal—” Lance groaned, leaning back away from him and pulling at the roots of his own hair in frustration.

“Not that one!” Keith was being deliberately obtuse now just to mess with him. He had to be! Probably to get him back for earlier. Any second now Keith’s expression would break into a familiar smirk and he would start teasing him for being unable to say the word ‘sex’ out loud. Of course. ‘Why are you being so mean to meeee?!’

“... that one?”

“The other one! While you were captured?” When Keith’s face still didn’t change, Lance started to get an awful feeling in his stomach. “Remember?” The feeling then got worse as Keith only looked more confused.

“I… what?” Lance tried to speak but only a strange garbled noise came out.

Keith didn’t remember.

“K- Keith!” he managed to squeak out. He put his hands on Keith’s shoulders, shaking him slightly as though he could somehow transfer the lost memories to him by sheer force alone.

“What?!” Keith was looking angry now. “I don’t understand what you’re talking abo—”

“We had dream sex and you don’t remember it?! Are you kidding me?!” The words were out before he could stop himself. His hands were shaking. Keith stared at him wide-eyed and went pale, and then very red. “I can’t believe this…” Lance buried his face in his hands as Keith gawked at him.

“H-how?” he said weakly. “I don’t understand how…”

“You think I do? I just assumed that you’d reached out or whatever on purpose, you know? You were captured and we were both trying to communicate.” Lance gestured wildly, hoping it would help dispel the nervous energy he felt that was sending his pulse skyrocketing. It didn’t. “I thought you were trying to get me to help you—” He paused, suddenly recalling the Keith in the dream. The strangely quiet, yet intense, Keith. “Then again, you were acting a little…” Keith frowned as he trailed off.

“A little... ?”

“Let’s just say you clearly had other things on your mind.”

If it was possible, Keith looked even redder at that remark and Lance was sure his face wasn’t looking any better. This had gone terribly. So terribly. Although...

Lance licked his lips and he felt something stir in Keith’s mind. He was feeling hot under the collar
for a very different reason now. The air felt humid around them and Lance wondered vaguely if this was what Keith’s ‘Lion Power’ was like. Keith then spoke, but it did nothing to diffuse the tension.

“I was thinking about you.”

Lance couldn’t stop his mouth falling open at Keith’s frankness. Keith looked mortified.

“I mean that, when I was captured I — I thought of you a lot,” he elaborated quickly. “I needed something to hold onto to stop me —” He didn’t finish his sentence, but he didn’t need to. Lance put a hand on his shoulder. “So I thought of you and it helped.”

‘I just wanted to see you. I missed you so much.’

Keith balled his hands into fists, tight-lipped as the runaway thought escaped him and whirled around Lance’s head. His body felt tense under Lance’s touch, but when he pulled Keith into a hug he only seemed to become more agitated. He still let Lance hold him however. As his breathing became slower, but still suspiciously laboured, Lance got intermittent flashes of Keith’s emotions that slipped away from his control. They were hard to grasp, aggressive and flighty, but they left Lance feeling hot as he recognised the distinctive sense of painful longing. His breath hitched as Keith sighed and buried his face into his neck—

Back when they had been fighting and Lance had been alone in his room—

Keith kissed his neck softly.

—and he’d felt that burst of energy that had been so unmistakably Keith’s.

“Um —”

The energy that had made Lance tremble all over—

“—Keith?”

“Do you remember,” Keith said, his voice low, “when I said my lion senses made you stink?” Lance pouted. Seriously?

“Why would you bring this up now?!” Lance whined. Trust Keith to kill the mood like this. However, there was something in Keith’s voice, and the way in which his mind entwined around his, that set Lance’s heart racing.

“I lied.”

“Huh?”

“Mmmm, I lied,” Keith said again, his voice a deep, throaty rumble against him. He then drew the skin of Lance’s neck into his mouth and sucked. Lance gasped and let out a whimper as his teeth grazed the reddening skin.

‘You smell amazing.’

Oh.

Keith then pulled himself further into Lance’s lap with a slow roll of his hips, continuing to suck and bite down gently on his neck.
“Show me,” Keith murmured against his skin, panting. Lance clung onto him, trying to breathe.

“What?” he gasped out and closed his eyes. His senses were overloading, colours dancing behind his eyelids as his and Keith’s minds melded together in a dizzying vortex of light.

“Show me the dream.” Keith brought his head up to look at him, eyes dark and mouth flushed. “Your memories of it.” He sounded breathless. “We can — you can do that, right?”

“Keith!” Keith’s words sent a hot rush of embarrassment coursing through him.

“What?”

“I can’t do that!”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s embarrassing that’s why!”

“But it’s just us. Why would it be?”

“I’m not doing it!”

Keith huffed and dropped his head to Lance’s neck again. He kissed it half-heartedly, and Lance mulled over his words, cheeks still flaming. Before he could stop it, the memory of dream Keith moving on top of him floated to the surface of his mind — hot, heavy, grinding… He swallowed.

‘It was kinda hot though…’

He bit his lip and glanced down quickly at Keith. He hoped he hadn’t heard that. This situation was making it harder for him to control his thought, his mind hazy with a heated desire. Keith stilled and Lance felt his mind flare.

‘Shit.’

Keith was on him again, mind blazing with a newfound heat as he gripped Lance’s shoulders.

“Show me,” he growled and Lance felt it shake through him.

“No! I just said —!”

“No. I mean on me. Right now.”

“Huh?” Keith’s breath was hot on his mouth as he leant in to kiss him deeply, rocking in his lap again.

“Show me now,” he whispered, voice rough. He took hold of Lance’s hand and brought it to his own chest. Lance held his breath as Keith moved his hand upwards, trailing it up to the exposed skin of his collarbone. “Show me what I did to you.”

‘Holy quiznak.’

Keith was burning up beneath his fingertips, chest heaving—

“What — what do you —?” The words caught in Lance’s now dry, hoarse throat. Still holding Lance’s hand to his chest, Keith leant in capture his mouth in another bruising kiss.
'Touch me how I touched you.'

Keith’s words set Lance’s body aflame. He moaned into Keith’s mouth and pulled back, placing his hands either side of Keith’s face.

“Okay,” he breathed, lips brushing Keith’s as he spoke. “Well first you kissed me like this—”

He surged forward, tangling his hands in the back of Keith’s hair and kissed him hard. Keith shuddered beneath him, closing his eyes with a sharp gasp. The memory of dream Keith’s hands in his own hair made Lance shiver. He wound his fingers in the dark tresses and tugged, drawing a whine from Keith that set his mind spinning.

Oh this was so much better than the dream. Keith was real. Keith was here. Lance could see, feel, taste every part of him as he devoured him with open-mouthed kisses. Keith’s presence surrounded him and filled his head with an intoxicating fire of amber-red. He remembered the falseness of dream Keith’s touch and relished the feeling of his very real, solid form, panting heavily into his mouth and skin feeling so, so hot against his own. Lance sucked and bit down into Keith’s bottom lip and Keith moaned loudly.

‘Yeah I liked it when you did that to me too.’

Lance dropped his head, gripping Keith’s shoulders, to mouth wet kisses up his neck—

‘—and then you kissed me here—’

He felt Keith inhale sharply.

‘Here—’

He left a trail of kisses along his jawline—

‘—and here.’

Lance kissed and dragged his teeth across the sensitive skin below Keith’s earlobe. Whimpering, Keith ran his shaking hands up Lance’s back, digging his fingernails deep into his skin. Lance groaned as the sensation sent a prickling heat through him. When he pulled back to look at him, Lance felt stirring in his gut at the sight of what he had reduced Keith to — face flushed and panting heavily, lips and neck red from kisses.

“Lance,” he rasped and the sound of his name from Keith’s mouth sent a fresh wave of arousal through him.

‘Why did you stop?’ Keith’s voice sounded breathless even in his head. Lance smiled and surged forward again.

‘Because that’s what you did to me.’

Catching a brief glimpse of Keith’s dark, heavy-lidded eyes and brows furrowed in confusion, he captured Keith’s lips in his again, kissing him hungrily. He swallowed up Keith’s gasp of surprise and pulled him closer by the hips, squeezing. Keith growled, grinding and rubbing up against him. His skin was on fire. He had to touch him, taste him—

Blood pumping loud in his ears, Lance pushed Keith down onto the bed, crawling on top of him and taking his face into his hands to kiss him, hot and rough. He could taste the heat of his scent on his tongue, tingling like hot pepper as Keith’s mind flared with a yearning need. Lance rolled his
hips down, his moans matching with Keith’s own as his hardness pressed and rubbed against Keith’s in a slow, steady rhythm. Keith’s breaths came out in short, wanton gasps with each thrust and his hands clutched the fabric of Lance’s shirt.

‘Oh god, oh shit, oh shit —’

Lance held back a moan at the desperate flurry of words Keith’s mind let slip. And then he met Keith’s eyes and his heart lodged in his throat. They were the same eyes as were in the dream. Dark and lustful, but so tender it hurt to look.

‘Fuck.’

Keith whined and and pulled him down, close to his chest. Lance pressed his face into Keith’s neck again, inhaling his scent — a mixture of freshly showered skin and beading sweat. Lance growled as the familiar perfume hit his nose. Keith had borrowed his shampoo. He thrust harder against him and pushed his hands up Keith’s shirt, brushing his fingertips against the hardening nubs of Keith’s nipples.

‘Shit! Fuck, Lance — fuck — why can’t I remember this dream — shit, shit — please —’

Keith keened and rolled his hips to grind upwards, wrapping his legs tightly around Lance’s waist and panting hard.

Fuck. Lance thought he’d had the upper hand, but he had been so very wrong. Keith was unravelling him piece by piece. Everything about him — his thoughts, his face, his scent, the heat of his body — undoing him once again with the touch of his hands and the sound of his voice. Lance pressed a messy kiss to his neck. Shit.

‘You’re amazing.’

He tangled his hands in Keith’s hair.

Keith was all around him, energy pulsing through him in pleasurable, addicting waves. Lance drank it in. He kissed Keith’s lips again and pulled off his shirt completely. ‘Shit, shit, shit —’

Everything was Keith.

Lance ripped off his own shirt and leant down. He kissed Keith’s cheek, his forehead, his nose, his mouth -

‘What are you doing to me? How are you doing this to me? So hot, so hot, please, Lance — fuck —’

He grasped Keith’s thighs, grinding their clothed erections together — harder, faster — pressing wet kisses to Keith’s chest. Keith threw his head back into the pillows with a moan.

‘Fuck, Lance. I did this to you? I did — fuck — why can’t I —? God please don’t stop —’

Moving down Keith’s body, Lance traced his tongue over the firm muscles and soft skin of Keith’s stomach. His hands shook at they made to remove Keith’s belt. Keith’s hands hastened to join them, unzipping his pants and pushing them down with a frantic urgency.

‘Please, please, please —’

Lance pulled away to push Keith’s pants onto the floor and barely had chance to draw breath before Keith was dragging him back down again into a heated kiss, bare legs squeezing his sides.
'I want you, I want you — please — shit, I want you so bad. Come on —'

Keith rolled his hips up and Lance hissed at the pressure, the overwhelming heat. He sat up to tear off his own pants and underwear and then dove back in, letting Keith reclaim him. He kissed up the insides of Keith’s trembling thighs and nuzzled into the soft trail of hair below his navel.

Down, down, down—

He felt Keith’s energy pull him in, vibrant and aching with need.

‘Please.’

Keith lifted his legs and let him pull down his boxers. His hands buried themselves in Lance’s hair and pulled. Groaning, Lance laid down a heated trail of open-mouthed kisses to the tops of thighs, moving inwards.

When he took Keith into his mouth, Keith let out a shuddering moan, fingernails scraping the skin of Lance’s scalp at the roots of his hair.

‘Shit, Lance! Shit —’

Lance moved his mouth steadily over Keith’s cock, the memory of dream Keith’s lips on his own length was burning in his mind — the heat, the red of his mouth, the darkness of his hair as it fell into his face and caught on his eyelashes. He heard Keith’s breaths quicken and Lance knew he had seen the memory in Lance’s head as his mind became a whirlwind of surprise and lust.

‘Fuck, Lance.’

‘You were amazing, so amazing, so beautiful and — shit, I —’

He quickened his pace, hollowing out his cheeks as he sucked and then swallowed hard around Keith. Whining, Keith dug his heels into Lance’s lower back.

“F-fuck!”

He opened his legs wider and Lance took more of him into his mouth, squeezing the back of Keith’s thighs. Pausing for breath, he stole a glance up at him. Keith met his gaze with a glassy-eyed look of awe, blush high on his face and neck, and lips red from biting.

“Lance…”

His grip on Lance’s head loosened and he pulled him up towards him, kissing him tenderly. Lance kissed him back, stroking his sides. Keith skin was softer than it had been in the dream and infinitely more beautiful.

‘You know what you did to me next, Keith?’ he said, kissing down Keith’s body again. ‘Let me show you.’

His hand moved down between Keith’s legs, massaging and rubbing. Keith arched his back and moaned faintly between heavy pants as Lance massaged closer and closer to his entrance.

‘Please, Lance —oh god don’t stop don’t —’

Lance brushed his mouth across the crease of Keith’s hips, lost in the sensation of both Keith’s mind and body entwined around him, engulfing him. He kissed his way wetly towards where his fingers were still moving against Keith and slowly, he opened his mouth and pushed his tongue
alongside them. Keith shivered and gasped beneath him.

‘Shit, shit that feels — don’t stop — shit.’

He felt Keith gripping the bed sheets underneath them and his toes curling into the mattress as he kissed, licked and pushed way inside Keith, panting heavily against him as he came up for air. Letting Keith’s breathy moans and whines wash over him in a haze of arousal, he pushed back into him again, taking his time as Keith had done with him, kissing him over and over in adoration, working him open. Keith’s mind had gone quieter now, words replaced instead with a garbled mess of different emotions and nonsensical sounds. His heels dug hard into his shoulders, pressing almost painfully down into his shoulder blades and holding him in place.

‘God, Keith… I need you.’

Keith’s hands were in his hair again, pulling him upwards. Giving him one last lick, Lance looked up at him questioningly and Keith’s eyes went wide when he laid eyes on him.

“Lube,” he whispered, his voice breaking a little as he gestured faintly to the side without taking his eyes off him. Heart leaping in his chest at Keith’s barely-there plea, Lance scrabbled around in the direction Keith had pointed and found lube and what he assumed were the space equivalent of condoms. The thought of Keith preparing for this made Lance lightheaded and fire curl deep within his gut. As he rolled down the condom, had no time to contemplate how Keith could have gotten hold of this stash, before Keith pounced on him again, taking the lube off him and popping the cap off with shaking hands. Lance gasped as Keith grasped hold of him, stroking and coating his cock liberally as he bit hot kisses into his neck.

“L-ly down. I want to —”

Lance obeyed, dragging Keith down with him as he did. He brushed his lips in delicate kisses on Keith’s chest as he took the lube from him and began to circle his fingers again around Keith’s already slick hole, pushing into him slowly. Lance watched Keith’s expression as he did so, his face feeling hot and heart thumping at the look of bliss that took over Keith’s face. His mind burned along with him, faced flushed and mouth open as Lance worked his fingers inside him.

“You’re amazing,’ Lance couldn’t help the thoughts slipping out again. ‘So amazing and you look so —’

He moaned as Keith began stroking his member again, hands slick with lube. Then, slowly, Keith pulled Lance’s fingers out and lined himself up. Lance watched with wide eyes as Keith mounted him. Eyes closed and thighs trembling, Keith started to move on top of him.

‘Fuck…’

Lance grabbed hold of the top of Keith’s thighs, squeezing and kneading—

‘Fuck, fuck —’

Keith rocked in his lap, bracing himself with a searing hand on Lance’s chest as he lifted and rolled his hips, short breathless noises falling from his open mouth. As both their climaxes began to build, Lance felt Keith’s mind spill over into his in red-hot torrent, claiming his own in a phenomenal heat that made him feel feverish. Then suddenly, Keith’s thoughts were around him again.

‘So hot, so hot — oh god — Lance, please I’m—’

Grasping Keith’s hips, he thrust up into him and Keith let out a loud cry that made his insides
become molten. He thrust into him again and then gasped as, all at once, he could feel everything Keith felt — his fullness, the burning cold that overtook him as Lance hit an angle inside him that made him quiver and cry out.

Their minds were glowing, and Keith’s scorched the edges—

‘Lance—’

He was beautiful.

‘Lance—’

Keith opened his eyes and looked down at him.

‘Keith—’

Then Keith smiled—

—and Lance couldn’t breathe.

When Keith’s climax hit him, Lance felt it. It ran through him like a blistering trail of magma that triggered his own orgasm in turn, leaving him shivering. Breathing heavily and still straddling him, Keith sank down towards Lance’s chest, holding himself up on trembling arms. Pushing himself up on his elbows and feeling equally as shaky, Lance craned his neck up and kissed him on the cheek. They looked at each other for a few moments and everything was quiet. Not even their minds stirred. Instead, Lance reached up to stroke Keith’s face and Keith leant into the touch.

“You okay?” Lance murmured, and Keith sat up slowly, holding Lance’s hand to his face.

“Yeah,” he said with a small smile. He then moved off him, a slight tremor to his limbs as he leant over Lance to throw the condom in the trash and rummage for some tissues. Lance couldn’t help but stare at him.

‘Beautiful.’

He reached out with his mind to caress Keith’s and beamed as he felt a responding touch that seemed to say ‘You too.’

When they had cleaned up as best they could and were too tired to move, they curled up beside each other in Keith’s bed, looking at one another. Keith held his hand.

“Stay here tonight?” he said in a quiet voice and Lance nodded.

“I’ll go grab my toothbrush,” Keith grinned at him. “Once my legs start working again that is.”

“Okay,” Keith reached out and pulled him close, kissing the top of his head. Lance smiled into the steady rise and fall of his chest, a mischievous feeling coming over him.

“I’m glad we waited until we were married, darling.” He felt Keith groan loudly against him.

“Lance…”

“It made it so much more special.”

“Don’t ruin it.”
“You’re the best bond husband.”

“Urgh...”

“The best.”

Keith sidestepped, but it was a tick too late. He found himself crashing to the floor and pinned by an uncomfortably familiar staff.

“Allura, lay off!”

“You should have predicted that move.” He glowered up at her from where he lay sprawled on the training room floor. “And no enemy is ever going to “lay off” as you put it.” Keith sighed in relief as she lifted the staff from off his back and helped him up.

“I know that,” Keith grumbled, rubbing his arm, “but I was already down. You didn’t have to press your staff into me so hard!” She looked sheepish at that.

“Ah, sorry,” she said. “I forget the limitations of human strength and endurance.”

“Part human.”

“Well then you should be able to handle a little more force,” she said with a smirk. He scowled at her again. She’d got him there. “If you can pilot a lion with broken limbs, you can manage our sparring sessions.”

“You’re never letting that go are you?”

“Of course not. I still haven’t forgiven you for it either.” Keith sighed.

“Whatever. Shiro’s on his way.” As Keith reached out his mind, he felt Shiro’s presence rounding the corridor of his sleeping quarters. “He’ll be here in about five dobashes,” Allura smiled.

“Impressive. You’re getting more accurate with that.” Keith shrugged.

“Not really. Shiro’s the easiest to sense for me after Lance.”

“Well no surprises there. Your best friend and your farcélle.” Keith flushed.

“Will you stop calling him that?” he said irritably as they took up their fighting stances again.

“That’s who he is, Keith.” She charged at him and he parried the attack with his Bayard, gritting his teeth at the force of her blow. Allura never pulled her punches.

“I know that,” he bit out and rolled to dodge another blow, “but it’s still... embarrassing.”

“Why is it? You love him don’t you?” Keith choked and his attack on her that should have connected, missed dramatically as he misjudged his swing and stumbled, barely avoiding her counterattack in response.

“Stop playing dirty!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”
“Of course I love him,” he mumbled and he took advantage of her brief moment of surprise at his bluntness to stage a new attack. She collected herself just in time to hold him off however. “But the marriage was an accident! Shiro’s almost here.” She huffed and swung low, almost taking him out from under his feet.

“Then let’s wrap this up.” She came at him then so fast, that he had no time blink, let alone raise his Bayard. He was face down on the deck again, panting.

“I think you’re holding back on me,” he mumbled into the floor, and she laughed loudly, helping him to his feet again.

“When I think you’re ready, I’ll actually start trying.” She handed him a water pouch and he took it gratefully. They sat quietly on the floor drinking their pouches as they waited for Shiro to arrive. Allura finished up her pouch and turned to him to speak again.

“Surely you must count it as a happy accident though? Your bond marriage?” Keith looked down at his hands, picking at hs gloves.

“It’s not a bad thing,” he said quietly, trying hard not to blush. Thankfully at that moment, Shiro came through the door.

“Did you already start without me?” he said cheerfully. Allura shook her head.

“I’m giving Keith supplementary lessons,” she said with a smile. “Coran and I have decided that, in order for Keith to unlock any potential Altean abilities he might possess, he must train daily with someone who can challenge him thoroughly.” Shiro raised an unimpressed eyebrow at her, but there was a spark of amusement in his gaze.

“Are you saying that I’m not a challenging enough partner for him?” She smirked.

“A human with a Galra arm is still not a match for an Altean that has been trained in combat for longer than you’ve been alive.” Shiro took up a fighting stance and grinned.

“I see. Let’s test that theory out then, shall we?”

“Have fun getting your ass beat, Shiro.”

“You’re next Keith, so don’t get cocky.” Keith laughed as Shiro was flung to the floor in less than two dobashes.

When the three of them had tired themselves out after half a varga or so, and they sat on the floor again with their pouches, the topic of conversation once again drifted towards the bond, much to Keith’s dismay.

“Even if it was, ah, a little uncomfortable for you and Lance to talk about, Keith,” said Shiro awkwardly, “it was valuable information for Hunk and Pidge to have. What’s a little embarrassment compared to the amount of useful data it gave us?”

“I don’t see why Pidge need us to go over every single detail of how we accidentally performed this ceremony,” Keith said, feeling tetchy, "and the obsidian thing wasn’t even my fault!” He glared pointedly at Allura who spat out her water.

“I only suggested that you give it to him as a symbolic way of conveying your feelings!” she said indignantly, going pink. “How was I supposed to know that you’d already married him?!”
“Either way,” Shiro interrupted, his face twitching in what Keith couldn’t quite tell was annoyance or mirth, “any information we can get on how your bond was formed and its function will be of great help to the team.” He clapped Keith on the back and Keith looked at him, surprised at the sudden warmth he felt from Shiro’s mind. “I’m proud of you. Both you and Lance. You’ve really pulled through with this thing.” Keith beamed.

“Thanks, Shiro.”

“And hopefully soon we can figure out how to make the bonds between all of us stronger too,” Shiro continued with a smile. “I’ve been trying with Pidge and Hunk to reach out, but it’s still weak. Nowhere near as strong as it was during battle. We’ve got a ways to go yet.”

“You’ll get there though,” Keith said with determination. “If Lance and I can do it, you guys should have no trouble.”

“Ahl, but you and your farcéile are a special case.” Keith felt his face burn and whirled around to face the giggling princess next to him.

“Allura!”

“I didn’t tell him. You can blame Pidge for that.”

“Well who taught her the Altean for it?” Allura said nothing, sipping on her pouch again. Keith rolled his eyes.

‘Keith?’

Keith smiled at the familiar voice in his head and responded with a warm touch.

‘Morning. Why are you awake so early?’

‘We agreed to let Hunk and Pidge run those test thingys on us today, remember? We’re waiting for you in Green’s hangar. Where are you?’

‘Training deck.’

‘I dunno why I even bothered asking.’

‘Shut up. You should train more often.’

‘I would but I have other things to do. Like hobbies, you know? Unlike some people.’

‘You know I have hobbies.’

‘More than one hobby. And before you say anything, training and binge eating Hunk’s cookies doesn’t count.’

‘I helped him bake that one time.’

‘And we all know how THAT turned out.’

‘Whatever, I’m on my way to the hangar now.’

‘Don’t bother I’m already on my way to you.’

‘Err, why?’
‘Do I need an excuse to escort my bond husband around the Castle? You could also get sucked out an airlock and perish without your Lance in shining armour there to rescue you.’

‘First off, I was the one that rescued you from the airlock that time, and second, don’t you start with the bond husband stuff.’

‘I thought you didn’t mind all that. Wait, are you divorcing me already? It’s been like four months! Give me a chance to make it up to you. I’ll polish your Bayard.’

‘No, Lance. And please say that wasn’t a euphemism.’

‘Depends on who’s asking.’

‘Urgh. Anyway, it’s not that. Shiro found out about the whole ‘farcéile’ thing.’

‘So? It’s just a different name for it. What’s the big deal?’

‘It’s the way he says it.’

‘Keith, buddy, he’s not your friend if he doesn’t make fun of you at least 70% of the time.’

‘So what does that make you Mr. ‘Makes Fun Of Keith 100% of the Time’?’

‘A very SPECIAL friend. One might even say, boyfriend.’

‘Alright, I’ll give you that.’

‘Anyway, cheer up! I’ve got a surprise for you.’

‘What?’

‘You’re not supposed to ask if it’s a surprise, idiot.’

‘I figured you’d tell me anyway.’

‘You figured correctly. Reach out. You should be able to sense us by now.’

‘Us?’

‘That’s the surprise! We’re ALL coming to get you’

‘Why?’

‘Pidge and Hunk didn’t trust me to bring you back with me on my own.’

‘Ah.’

Sure enough, a few dobashes later, the remaining three paladins came bustling through the training room door. Keith couldn’t stop the giddy feeling he still felt upon seeing Lance smiling at him for the first time each day. Lance bounded up to him, his mind bright and blue, and swooped down in front of the three of them still sitting on the floor, to peck him on the lips. He grinned.

“Hey hubby.”

Keith promptly pushed him over. He felt Shiro’s mind twinkle with amusement next to him and scowled.
“Why did you come here?” Lance pouted in mock sadness and scooted up next to him on the floor. He rested his head on Keith’s shoulder and Keith couldn’t even pretend to be annoyed at him. He ruffled Lance’s hair and pressed a small kiss to his forehead.

“To see you obviously,” he said, quietly enough for only Keith to hear him over the loud chatterings of the rest of the team that now infiltrated the room. Keith gave him a teasing smile.

“What, you missed me that much? We slept together in your room last night.”

“But you were gone when I woke up. You know I hate that.”

“I was trying not to wake you up so early. I know you hate that too.”

“True,” he squeezed Keith’s hand and let his mind entangle with his own, “but I like waking up together more.” Keith turned away, his face feeling hot. Lance’s affection was something else. It was hard not to get overwhelmed sometimes.

“Team,” Shiro’s voice call out over the chatter and they all stopped talking to look at him. “As we’re all here, I think we should all take the opportunity to spar together for a varga or two. With all the experiments Pidge and Hunk have been running lately, you have all been neglecting your paladin training—”

“Except for goodie-two-shoes Keith,” piped up Lance from next to him with a smug grin. Keith shoved him, both mentally and physically.

“Except for goodie-two-shoes Keith.”

“Shiro!”

“Anyway,” Shiro continued, ignoring his glare, “my point is, while these experiments are very much necessary to understanding more about our bonds with each other,” he nodded at Hunk and Pidge, “regular sparring practice with each other is also important for strengthening our connections with each other.”

“Precisely!” They all jumped as Coran’s voice rang out over the loudspeaker from the training deck control room. “In the same way that you would strengthen the bonds with your lion, your bonds with your fellow paladins will also benefit from spending more time together.” Allura nodded in agreement and Pidge sighed defeatedly.

“I guess it couldn’t hurt,” she muttered and Hunk placed a sympathetic arm on her shoulder. “I really wanted to try out this new gadget Hunk and I built yesterday.”

“Can’t we just try it out later on?” Keith asked and she shook her head.

“It has to be in the morning, because —” She glanced over at Shiro who was giving her a knowing look. “Right. Training. Sorry.” He smiled at her fondly.

“You can try it out tomorrow,” he said, “and I’ll make sure Keith actually turns up next time.” Keith gave him an exasperated look.

“You’re the one who insisted on our daily morning sparring sessions.” Shiro held his hands up in defeat.

“Let’s just start the training. Okay, everyone get into pairs. Hunk, you come with me.”
“Aw man, really? That’s not a fair fight at all!”

“That’s the idea.”

“I’m with Keith,” Pidge said and Lance squawked indignantly beside her.

“Who says?! Can’t he make his own choice?!”

“Sure I’ll go with you, Pidge.”

“Keith!”

“You can be my sparring partner for this round, Lance.” Lance blanched at Allura’s voice, and he looked over at her to see that she was already brandishing her staff at him. He narrowed his eyes at Pidge who was now failing miserably to keep a straight face.

“I hate you both,” he muttered darkly as he began stomping after Allura to the other side of the training deck. He then whipped around and pointed at Keith. “And the wedding is off!” Keith snorted.

“What wedding?”

“Exactly!”

“Have fun!” Pidge said to him with a leer before turning to Keith. “Don’t go easy on me, yeah?” Keith brandished his sword, grinning at her.

“I think I’d regret it if I did,” he said before charging at her.

Pidge’s Bayard moved in a way that was almost entirely unpredictable, so he wasn’t surprised to find himself, once again, hitting the ground a few times as they sparred.

“You’re really not holding back on me are you?” he said with a grimace as she held out a hand to help him up.

“Consider this your punishment for not telling me about your bond,” she said with a sly smile. “For both you and Lance.” They both turned in tandem as Lance then let out a well-timed shriek and Allura inevitably took him to the ground again for what must have been the tenth time in three dobashe. “And don’t pretend that you haven’t knocked me to the ground about twenty times already. I’ve got the bruises to prove it!” Keith shrugged.

“You said not to go easy on you,” he took up his stance again, “and I thought you’d forgiven me for all that?”

“Still working on it.”

She lunged at him and he recoiled out of reflex, straight into her Bayard whip. He tripped but managed to right himself quickly before she could take him down.

“Are the embarrassing questions you asked Lance and I about our bond during your experiments part of the punishment too?” She parried his blow.

“Maybe a little.” Keith then saw an opening in her form and rushed to exploit it, taking her to the floor in one quick, fluid motion.

“Ow, Keith! Not so rough!”
“Sorry.”

He helped her back to her feet as she grumbled, sweeping at the new scuff mark on her paladin armour that had resulted from his tackle.

“Why does this ‘bond husband’ stuff get you so riled up anyway?” she asked a little while later when they were taking a breather. Keith turned to her and extracted himself from the periwinkle glow of Lance’s energy that he’d been admiring from across the training deck. Lance was still sparring, and actually getting a little better at not been thrown to the ground by Allura, but he’d let Keith linger anyway, sending back soft touches that made Keith’s heart somersault in his chest. He sighed as she looked back at him, a serious demeanor about her now in reaction to his subdued manner. He felt Lance reach out to him with a note of concern, but sent back reassurances. Lance withdrew with a small touch of acceptance and went back to sparring. Keith closed off his mind.

“Do you remember what we talked about back in the cryo chamber? When Lance was injured?” She nodded. “You asked me if I thought he felt the same about me?” She raised her eyebrows, curious.

“Yeah? What’s that got to do with this?”

“I’ve always—” he paused, the words getting stuck in his throat. He’d never talked about this with anyone else before. Not even Shiro. Or Lance. Especially not Lance. She watched him silently, waiting for him to continue. “I’ve always been scared. Ever since we bonded and I first started to… have feelings. Scared that these feelings weren’t real. That they were just a side effect of the bond.” Her mouth fell open in surprise, but she didn’t say anything. “So I didn’t know what to answer when you asked me that. The bond made things confusing. And then we find out about all this ‘bond marriage’ stuff and—” He pressed his lips together in a tight line. His throat was starting to hurt. “What if he’d never had feelings for me until then? Until I went and accidentally mind-married him. I’d feel like I — I’ve tricked him into being in a relationship with me o-or —” He hadn’t realised that his hands had started to shake until Pidge’s clasped around them tightly.

“Keith,” she said, voice sincere. “I can tell you now, from a very scientific point of view, that that is unlikely. Completely impossible actually.” He blinked at her.

“How do you know?”

“I’ve not been running these tests on you both for no reason,” she said with a scowl. “Allura and I read the textbook that you and Lance used for the ceremony. Read it correctly too.” Keith flushed, but found he couldn’t contest that point. “The ceremony is performed between lovers. It doesn’t create them.” She smiled kindly at him. “There is zero probability that the ceremony would have been successful in enhancing your bond and binding your marriage if both of you didn’t already have feelings for each other.” Keith stared at her, and all at once felt as though a dense, dark shroud had been lifted from his vision.

‘He liked me back then too?’

It was impossible to stop the wide smile that broke across his face then, and he knew that his elation must have overwhelmed his mind too, for Lance then reached out to him again in wonder. Keith embraced his light, letting it spread throughout his entire being and he knew that he loved him. Completely and utterly. Lance held him back, confused but content.

“I also know for a fact,” Pidge carried on, and Keith now sensed a faint trace of a amusement dancing around her mind, “that he has liked you for an embarrassingly long amount of time.” Keith felt the air being punched out his lungs as his heart then vacated his chest.
“He — he has?” His mind was reeling. Pidge chuckled.

“Ask him about it sometime,” she said, getting to her feet again. “One more round?” Keith smiled.

“Bring it on.”

The opportunity to question Lance arose much faster than Keith had been anticipating. That same day, not long after dinner, Allura had informed them that they were embarking on a trip into a previously uncharted sector of space. Coran had expressed his suspicions at the small sector, surrounded by perfectly chartered (and unfortunately Galra occupied) space, and put forward the idea of a Voltron-run investigation. A hidden Galra base was a very real possibility.

A possibility that turned out to be completely wrong.

It appeared that this particular area was avoided for a very good reason. Not a life-threatening one, but Keith thought he’d rather have the life-threatening option compared to this. He grimaced as he strained to gouge out the repugnant black sludge from one of the Castle’s giant ion thrusters. This was ridiculous.

“Allura, are you sure there’s no way for you and Coran to remove this - this stuff remotely?” Shiro said, his voice strained over the comms. “I’m afraid of damaging something here.”

“Yeah Coran you must have a button somewhere that says ‘press here in case of attack on your spacecraft by giant, sentient sludge monsters that somehow survive in the vacuum of space’,” said Hunk with a groan.

“If you’d just let me back inside I’m sure I could invent something,” said Pidge grumpily, grunting as she chiselled away at an impressively caked on piece of sludge.

“No can do, number five!” came Coran’s voice over the comms that had, in Keith’s opinion, no right to be sounding as cheerful as it did, considering this was all his fault in the first place. “And besides, this is why we employ paladins!”

“Employ? My space check must have gotten lost in the mail.” said Lance. Keith watched him struggle to extract some sludge on the opposite side of the ion thruster to him. "I thought our role was defending the universe, not spaceship cleaning duty.”

“It’s all part of the job description!”

“I missed that part in the small print.”

Keith laughed quietly at that and Lance turned to grin at him.

“That aside,” Coran glossed over smoothly, “I’m afraid ‘Team Ion Thruster Number Two’ have beaten you and Keith to cleaning their thrusters by quite a far margin.”

“Aw man... Keith! This is all your fault! I knew I should’ve gone on a team with Hunk.”

“That’s what you get for breaking the bro code, dude.”

“So ‘Team Two’ may now return to the ship and head for decontamination.”

“Thanks, Coran.”
“Awesome!”

“‘Team One’, please continue with cleaning post-haste!”

“Suck it losers!”

“You three are all uninvited to our wedding!”

“We’re not having a wedding, Lance.”

“And now you’re uninvited.”

“Uninvited from my own wedding that’s not even happening?”

“Guys, you do realise that this is why you lost right? I think you’re taking the whole ‘bickering like an old married couple’ thing way too seriously.”

“We lost because Keith wanted to start a sludge fight!”

“Hey that was an accident! I didn’t mean to hit you. And you’re the one that started the fight!”

“Whatever you say ex-husband.” Keith rolled his eyes and went back to chiseling. He smiled as Lance’s energy hummed against his. His smile then grew as he felt Lance jetpack up behind him and wrap his arms around his waist. Lance rested his head on his shoulder.

‘I’ll take you back if you dance with me.’

‘What? Now?’

‘Yeah.’

‘When floating in space?’

‘I’ve always wanted a space dance.’

‘You say that like it’s a thing.’

‘It’s totally a thing. Look.’

He reached around and Keith let him take the chisel out of his hands and entwine their fingers together. Then Lance spun him around so that they were facing each other.

‘Coran’s going to kill you for losing that chisel.’

‘It’s fine. Where’s it going to go in empty space without momentum?’

‘You did give it momentum. Look, it’s already heading away from the ship.’

‘Whoops. Well, whatever. Forget about it. Look at me.’

And Keith did, his chest warming at the soft, shy look in Lance’s eyes.

‘Dance with me?’ Keith swallowed and nodded at him

‘Fine. What do I do?’

‘Don’t worry, I’ll lead.’
He let go of one of Keith’s hands to take him by the waist. Unsure of what to do, Keith placed his free hand on Lance’s shoulder and waited. Then Lance activated his jetpack and they took off. As Lance adjusted the thrusters, making the pair of them start to rotate slowly in place, Keith’s chest began to feel light. And it wasn’t because of the zero g either. Lance held him close as they drifted against the backdrop of uncharted starlight around them.

‘I’ve never danced with anyone before.’ Lance pulled back a bit to look at him in surprise.

‘Really?’

‘Yeah. But it’s… nice.’

‘Yeah. Yeah it is.’ Keith squeezed his hand.

‘Am I reinvited to the wedding now?’ Lance smiled and pressed their visors together.

‘I’ll consider it. Come on, let’s head back. Finish cleaning that damn thruster.’

‘Okay, but first we need to rescue my chisel from heading out into deep space.’

‘Ah. Right.’

When they had finally finished cleaning and were allowed back into the Castle, they headed towards the decontamination room. And though it had started out as a simple decontamination, it naturally ended up in a tussle between the two of them when Lance had decided that a dense clump of soapy bubbles would make an excellent projectile. Breathless from laughter, Lance eventually seemed to get tired of wrestling and rolled off him onto the floor beside him.

“So,” Lance said when he had caught his breath. “Now that those sludge monster alien things are taken care of, do you want to go out and explore? Take the lions for a spin before Coran wormholes us away into another disaster?” Keith hummed.

“What’s there to explore?”

“I heard Allura say that there’s a moon nearby with a breathable atmosphere. Want to go?”

“Alright.”

“It’s a date!” Lance winked at him. “A space date.”

“Will you ever stop referring to everything as a ‘space whatever’?”

“Not a chance space husband.”

Keith flicked soap into his face.

When they had disembarked with Red and Blue and safely touched down on the moon’s surface, Keith was starting to feel a bit jittery and he couldn’t think why. They got out their lions and, once establishing that the atmosphere definitely was breathable, they took off their helmets and took in the landscape. It wasn’t much to look at. There were no sentient life forms here, only green rolling hills and sparse foliage, but with the binary star sunset in the distance painting the lush greens with an orange-gold, it was quite lovely. Peaceful, quiet — just how Keith liked it.

And Lance was here.

Lance had been quick to settle down into the long grass, stretching out his limbs and tucking his
arms behind his head with a smile. Keith joined him, rolling onto his side to look at him. His eyes were closed and sunlight gilded his skin in a way that made Keith long to reach out and caress it. Unwilling to disturb the tranquility, he restrained himself, rolling back over onto his back.

“How are you doing?” Lance said suddenly. His eyes were still closed, but Keith felt his mind open up. He followed suit, letting them swirl around each other, creating a sunset of their own.

“I’m okay,” he said, becoming transfixed by the way Lance’s hair floated about his face in the breeze. “Why?”

“This whole Altean thing,” Lance blurted out. “I know it’s been a few weeks now since you found out, but — ah — I never really… I wanted to give you space you know? Didn’t want to bother you about it. Thought I’d wait for you to come to me if you needed me — needed anyone to talk to about it. But… yeah. You seem to be dealing with it okay then. I guess.” His eyes were still closed and his expression was neutral, but Keith had felt his mind swim with an insecurity, a worry. And Lance had let him feel that. Keith cleared his throat.

“Yeah I’ve been dealing with it,” he said in a soft voice, and Lance finally opened his eyes to look at him. “But you know if — if I hadn’t been, I’d have come to you, right?” Lance’s mind glowed.

“Right,” he said and rolled over onto his side to face him, shuffling slightly so that his head rested on Keith’s shoulder. “Coran told me that he’s been helping you with some stuff.” Keith gestured vaguely.

“It’s nothing like that. I just asked him for some, um, book recommendations.” Lance raised an eyebrow.

“About what?”

“Altean history and stuff,” Keith said, feeling a little abashed. “Even if I didn’t know him, I kind of wanted to find out what my ancestor would have experienced. What he might have been like.” Keith shrugged, feeling fidgety under Lance’s sympathetic stare, “Alteans live a long time, so maybe…” He felt Lance’s mind light up in realisation.

“You think your relatives might be still out there? On Earth?”

“On Earth, somewhere else in the galaxy, universe, who knows?” said Keith, his heart feeling light again from the affection that wrapped around him in a blue hue, just as it had done when they’d been dancing through the stars. “I don’t want to rule it out.” Lance nodded earnestly.

“We fought sentient sludge today. After that anything could be possible.” His hand brushed up against his tentatively and Keith took it.

“Is that why you asked me here,” Keith said. “Were you worrying about me?” Lance sighed.

“A little. I saw you and Pidge talking and you looked kinda upset.” Keith inhaled deeply, thinking about Pidge’s words again. He took a chance.

“I was. But then I was alright again.” He looked Lance squarely in the eyes and braced himself. “Can I ask you something?” Lance shot him a quick smile, but his eyes remained serious.

“Sure thing.”

“How long have you liked me?” Lance’s face then went scarlet, the redness even more pronounced in the setting sun, and he began to stammer. ‘Maybe this wasn’t the best idea.’
“I — ah — hmm I’m not — you see it’s kinda… w-why do you ask?” Keith shrugged, trying his best to appear casual, but his heartbeat now sounded obnoxiously loud to his own ears.

“Just curious,” he said. “I started liking you not long after we bonded—”

“R-really?”

“—so I just wondered if maybe it was… the same for you?” Keith felt his own face start to redden now as Lance’s only seemed to flush deeper still. “But you don’t have to tell me. It’s fine. I get it.”

“The Garrison,” Lance said, spitting out the words with the air of someone ripping off a bandaid. His horrified gaze was fixed on Keith’s. “I mean, I — I was — I might have been in a little, teensie bit of denial about it.” A giddy, disbelieving excitement bubbled up from the pit of Keith’s stomach and he felt the corner of his mouth start to twitch in the beginnings of a teasing smile.

“Oh really?”

“Urgh I knew I shouldn’t have said anything! Stop smiling at me like that!”

“Like what?”

“You know what!” Lance brought his hands up to cover his face and inhaled slowly. “You had me the moment I first saw you beat the crap out of the flight sim. Hunk never let me hear the end of it. It was the first real fight we had.” Still covering his face with one hand, he used his other to poke Keith halfheartedly in the chest. “You are responsible for the only fight that I have ever had with my best friend in the whole world. I hope you’re proud of yourself!” Keith couldn’t help it, he burst out laughing and pulled Lance’s hand away from his face and planted kisses all over him, despite his protests and squirming.

“Stop it! This is a serious and emotional moment!” Lance tried to slap him away, but Keith dodged.

“I know, I know sorry I just — I really like you. A lot.” He coughed loudly into his fist as Lance looked at him, an unreadable expression on his face. His mind took on a curious green hue.

“What do you like most about me?” he said, voice barely a whisper above the wind. Keith drew his eyebrows together. How was he supposed to answer this?

‘Everything, Lance. Everything. How could I possibly choose?’ He cleared his throat again.

“I — um…” he racked his brains, eternally thankful that Lance appeared to be closing his mind off to him. “I like…”

The warm hugs he gave? His laugh? His smile? The bad jokes he made? His eyes? The way he looked at him? His dumb jacket and even dumber shoes? How he always seemed to have an answer for everything when Keith did not? The way he flew? Everything Keith could think of was either stupid, clichéd or both. And it wasn’t right. He stared at Lance, and Lance wrinkled his nose at him.

“Your funny nose,” Keith blurted out, and he found himself wishing the atmosphere wasn’t as breathable as it was. Asphyxiating to death was looking like a very attractive option compared to facing Lance right now. Mouth wide open in disbelief, Lance looked like he had stopped breathing himself.

“What?” he squeaked out after a few, painful ticks. His hands flew up immediately to cover up his nose. “K-Keith!” Why would you — why?!"
“S-sorry!” Keith waved his hands, panicking. “I didn’t — I meant it in a good way. It’s —” He tried to wrench Lance’s hands free from his face again, but Lance held firm. “Funny wasn’t the right word. I meant it’s — it’s cute and I like —” Lance narrowed his eyes at him and lowered his hands. “I like it. I like the way it —” He reached out slowly with his index finger and pushed against the tip of Lance’s upturned nose. “It’s… cute.” His last words came out in a croaked whisper, but he knew Lance had heard him, for his energy was glowing about as bright as his face now was.

“Oh,” Lance said finally and he turned away, scratching the back of his neck that was now very red. “T-thanks I guess.” Keith nodded meekly, feeling like if he opened his mouth his lungs might just collapse in on themselves. Both sitting up now, Keith tried to shuffle closer, wanting to feel the warmth of Lance’s form pressed up against him again. Lance relaxed against him with a small sigh and he felt a little better.

“What about me?” Keith said, just as the twin suns began to dip under the horizon. It felt cooler now. He pressed up closer against Lance. “What do you like most about me?” He wasn’t sure why he asked. Keith didn’t really care that much. As long as Lance liked him at all that was all that mattered to him. Lance perked up at his question however, eyes bright as he turned towards him.

“That’s easy! Your colour.”

“My… ?” Keith’s heart then jolted as he realised what Lance was talking about.

“Yeah, it’s — oh!” Lance turned a little pink. “I… I never did tell you. Did I?” Keith shook his head and Lance rubbed at his face.

“Okay, um —” Lance tried to speak again. “Wow, err, this is harder than I — well —” he took a breath. “You’re blue.”

It was a strange moment. Keith hadn’t really been expecting anything in particular. Lance’s colour thing just didn’t make any damn sense to him. He’d given up trying. And all thoughts of finding out what colour he appeared to Lance had fallen to the bottom of his list of priorities as of late. But now that he was faced with it, the answer came as a surprise - a surprise with a burning significance that set his heart alight.

“Blue?” he said softly and Lance nodded, his gaze unfocused.

“Like… a really, really deep blue,” he said, and as he spoke, Keith could see the colour emerging, bleeding out of Lance’s mind and into his. Keith realised then with a clenched heart that it was a colour he had seen from Lance many, many times before. He’d just been too stupid to realise it.

“With hints of violets and pinks,” Lance continued with a wistful tone, "but still really blue. It reminds me of the kind of blue the ocean turns into at twilight. The deepest blue I’ve ever seen.”

To Keith, blue was blue was blue. But now that he saw it, he understood. This blue was different. This blue was special. This blue was his.

“It’s…” Lance bit his lip. “It’s my favourite. My favourite colour. Always has been.”

And Keith could feel it. Feel it so very much. Deep down inside of him. He brought a hand to his chest and clutched his pendant His hands trembled.

“From the first time I saw you, you were blue—”

’I was always Blue.’
His throat hurt.

“You were always blue to me. Still are.” Lance met his eyes and Keith saw the same blue reflected back at him. “That’s weird right? You were probably expecting red or somethi—”

Keith kissed him. Kissed him harder than he’d ever had up until now, and he was flying, careering down, down, down into the depths of the blue he could see in his mind. And Lance kissed him back like he was trying to taste it too — the ocean that surrounded them and flooded both their minds. Keith pulled back to breathe, heart pounding. His lips brushed Lance again as he spoke.

“Blue is fine,” he said, and Lance licked his lips.

“It is?”

“Blue is… fine.” A smile began to spread across Lance’s face. “Blue is great.”

Blue was perfect.
*Cyndi Lauper’s ‘True Colours’ playing in the distance*

And there you have it! I want to say thank you ever so much to everyone who read, commented, kudosed, bookmarked and recced this fic. I treasure every single one (you can probably tell by my incessant need to reply to every comment haha).

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Thanks for sticking with me! As ever, my ask box/chat on tumblr is always open to any questions, and comments are highly welcome!

Tumblr | Twitter

ETA: There is still art to come for both this chapter and the previous! Chapter art by me is here on my tumblr!!

ETA2: Please check out this BEAUTIFUL fanart that tumblr user azure-arts did for this chapter!!

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