Love on the Battlefield

by VulpesVulpes713

Summary

Features the Voltron crew with demigod parentage. Lance, Hunk and Pidge all go to the same camp, with Allura and Coran as councilors. Everything is just dandy until two new strangers *wink wink* disrupt the flow of camp.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
**Lance is a drama king, but we already knew that.**

Chapter Summary

Lance has always had a flair for the dramatic, but what else do you expect from a child of Aphrodite?

Chapter Notes

EDIT:
Went in and added spaces between the paragraphs because goddamn that was a mess before.

Sorry about that guys :)
Should be more enjoyable of a read now.

It had been years since Lance had experienced such a traumatic event.

The entirety of camp was in shock. His cabin mates were in disbelief. They tried to comfort him but Lance was in turmoil.

Or he had been anyways.

He was past the first three stages of grief, having experienced shock, pain and anger consecutively over the course of the morning. He was currently batting the depression aspect of things, and wanted nothing more than to grieve in solitude, away from prying eyes.

Nonetheless, people stopped and stared as he made his way to the dining hall.

Lance pulled the hood of his sweater up and lowered his head, so his face was concealed in shadow. He grabbed a plate of food, made his offering to the gods, and found a corner table to sit at. He felt the bench lower as his best friend sat down next to him.

“Dude what is going on?” Hunk leaned forward so his hushed whisper could be heard only by Lance.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” He turned away so Hunk couldn’t see his face.

“You’re freaking everybody out! Normally you’re the loudest guy in here. So you better spill it-” He broke off as Pidge slammed her plate onto the table in front of them. She was female today, and was wearing her hair up in a bandana.
“What’s up?”
Lance remained quiet as he glanced up at Pidge. She didn’t seem to notice his mood or the fact that Hunk was staring at him unblinking, concern twisting his features. She didn’t even seem to care about their answer, seeing as she was busy tinkering with something with one hand and shoveling eggs into her mouth with the other. Hunk nudged his shoulder, and when Lance peeked over at him from under his hood he saw that Hunk was using his secret weapon: puppy eyes. Lance tried to look away but Hunk was quicker, and jutted out his bottom lip, making it quiver ever so slightly. Lance couldn’t resist. He sighed loudly and turned to face the pouting boy.

“Alright fine. You want to know what wrong? My life has been thrown upside down! I’m ruined!” He flung his hands up as he spoke, making Pidge drop her gizmo on the table. Several pieces flew off in precarious directions.

“Hey! Watch it!”
“Did you not hear? My life is ruined!” Hunk placed a hand on Lance’s shoulder.
“What happened!?”

Lance sighed again, and reached up to pull the hood off his head. He then brushed aside his hair to reveal a small red dot on his forehead. Hunk looked confused.

“Uh…What am I looking at exactly?”
“This! This…this thing on my face!” Hunk squinted his eyes to get a better look.
“Is that…a pimple?”

Lance threw his hood back up and covered his arms over his head and groaned loudly.

“Yes. Please announce it to the whole world would you?” Lance’s voice was muffled but drenched in sarcasm.

“That’s what you’re moping about? A fricken pimple!?” Hunk’s voice echoed through the hall, making several people nearby go silent. Lance could feel their stares as he glared up at Hunk, but Pidge’s laughter broke through the tension. She wiped a tear from her eye as she tried to collect herself.

“Yeah please just laugh at my agony.” Lance went back to hiding his face under his arms, his head resting on the table. Pidge was able to compose herself and began to collect the pieces of her instrument that had dropped.

“You are so melodramatic.”
“Am not. This is the worst.” Lance’s head bobbed as he spoke. Hunk was appalled. He was still staring at Lance open mouthed. He finally closed it and smacked Lance on the arm, making him jump up in surprise.

“What was that for!?”
“You made me worry for no reason! I didn’t even grab breakfast because I was so concerned! I have a fragile heart you know! A fragile heart and an empty stomach!”
“I’m in a crisis! I deserve your worry!”
“Not over a pimple!”
“Shhhh!” Lance glanced around the room but no one seemed to care anymore. The dining hall was beginning to fill up as more and more campers made their way for breakfast. Pidge snorted.

“It’s not even that big. Just put some cream on it and it’ll go away in no time. It’s not like you haven’t had acne before.” Lance gave her a look.

“You don’t seem to grasp the direness of the situation here Pidge.” She rolled her eyes.
“Then by all means, enlighten us.” She leaned forward in false fascination.
“No way. I do not want to hear this. I’m getting breakfast.” Hunk rose and left, leaving a disgruntled Lance and bemused Pidge.

Lance scanned the room once more before turning back towards the girl.

“You know Sabrina?” Pidge nodded, recalling the stunning daughter of Aphrodite and half-sister of Lance. She was the polar opposite of Lance in terms of appearance, with long blond hair and pale, almost translucent skin.

Though different in looks, the two had the same suave ways and were both dangerously charismatic. Children of Aphrodite tended to have those traits, but with Lance and Sabrina it was tenfold.
Pidge knew that the half-siblings were incredibly competitive, and were constantly arguing over this and that. Pidge had never paid the bickering much attention, always being more preoccupied with her inventions. She was a child of Hephaestus, meaning inanimate objects were more her fancy. But it was hard to ignore the antics these two got up to in order to prove the other wrong.

“She and I were having a competition. To see who could have the clearest skin.” Pidge groaned and turned her attention back towards her meal, now cold. She knew where this was heading. Lance continued: “I was winning for the longest time! Had my skin care routine down pat, and then this morning, there it was. Ugly, red pimple polluting my beautiful pores!” Pidge was hardly listening anymore but Lance didn’t notice.

“How can I, a son of Aphrodite, be burdened with such flaws? I’m a disgrace! I’ve brought dishonour to my family!” Lance threw his arms up and tilted his head upwards, as if directing his words to the heavens, which he was. “I’m so sorry mother! I’ve failed you!”

Hunk returned then, a bagel in his mouth and two large plates of food in either hand. He dropped one in front of Lance, noticing the untouched plate of food already there, but Hunk felt obligated to make sure the boy had some form of nourishment before continuing his day. Typical child of Demeter. He saw Pidge’s bored expression and chuckled.

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“Definitely made the right choice with that one.” He patted Lance on the back. “There there Lance, your life isn’t over—”
“He made a bet with Sabrina.” Pidge jutted in. Hunk’s jaw dropped.
“Sabrina?” He saw the look of turmoil on Lance’s face. “Yikes…Well, I wish you all the best. Maybe she’ll be lenient?” Hunk knew she wouldn’t be, but Lance needed comforting. Everyone knew a competition between these two resulted in some pretty nasty consequences.

Last time this had happened, they had made a bet to see who could go the longest without flirting. Lance had won that one, and made Sabrina ask out Coran, head of the Hermes house and one of the senior camp councillors. Hunk shuddered at the memory. Long story short she ended up having to spend the remainder of the day being lectured on relationships and acceptable age gaps between couples by Coran and Allura, the head councillor at their camp. Lance didn’t stop talking about it for weeks afterwards. So…no. He didn’t think Sabrina was going to be lenient this time.

“I’m so screwed!” Lance groaned.
“If you hadn’t made such a big deal out of the whole situation you probably could have covered it up and feigned ignorance.” Pidge was clearing up her plate, ready to go back to tinkering in her cabin.
“Um excuse you Pidge. I don’t know if you know this but I am a man of my word! A bet is a bet.” As miserable as he looked, Pidge had to admire his merit. A lot could be said about Lance, but no one could deny his loyalty and honour when it came to the things he most valued. He was the reason she was even at the dining hall, eating in public instead of hiding away in her room to work on her devices.

Pidge was gender fluid, and when she had first come to camp a few years back, she had been claimed as a child of Hephaestus, but had been male at the time. Her cabin mates, half-siblings she corrected, had welcomed her with open arms and introduced her to everyone. Things had been fine for the first day or two, but when she felt like being female, her cabin was less welcoming. They didn’t understand her reasoning, and had turned their backs on her, even when she identified as male again.

Lance had found her crying in the woods and had comforted her, saying that if they couldn’t see past her exterior then they were as blind as Teiresias, without the powers of clairvoyance. She had chuckled at that, and Lance had told her that gender was overrated anyway. He himself was bisexual, and had felt the struggles first hand at being different from the carbon copy.

When Pidge had gone back to the cabin her half-siblings had been more accepting of her, and welcomed her in, asking her questions about her most recent tinkering’s and if she was male or female that day, so they could use the appropriate pronouns. She had been perplexed until Allura had informed her that Lance had paid them all a visit, and was being scolded for using his gifts against fellow campers. Pidge had asked what he had done but Allura wouldn’t elaborate.

Needless to say she had considered Lance to be a close friend after that, and would often join him and Hunk for meals and training.
Despite all this however, Lance was still on the losing end of a bet, and no amount of integrity was going to save him from the wrath of Sabrina.

“Yeah, well. Let me know what she decides. I’ve got this helmet attachment I’ve been working on that can record steady HD video and audio from up to three kilometers away and I want to test it
“Oh I’m sure it works just great.” She smiled at his sarcastic remark and headed off.

“Oh crap! There she is!” Lance had been watching Pidge leave when he saw her. The sun glinted off her head of blond hair as she swung it over her shoulder. No one’s hair is that shiny. He ducked his head and scooted closer to Hunk on the bench, trying to avoid the inevitable.

“Laaannceee… I know you’re in here.” Her voice drifted across the dining hall, making people’s heads turn at the sing-song tone. “I believe you owe me something? Time to pay up!” People were turning to look back at him and Hunk, and she followed their gazes.

“Hunk can’t help you Lance. A bet is a bet. Did you really think you could win a battle of clear skin against me?Honestly.” She tossed her hair over her shoulder again, making him squint at the sudden glare of light.

“I’m so screwed…” Lance repeated quietly. Hunk nodded in agreement.

She crooked her finger at him, beckoning him forward. Several people closer to her fell forward in reply. Being a daughter of Aphrodite had that reaction.

“Dammit. Minus well get this over with then.” Lance stood up and pushed back his hood once again. He shrugged dramatically.

“You win this time Brina. The mighty Lance will accept his punishment with open arms.” Sabrina had scowled slightly at the nickname, but it had only lasted a moment before being quickly replaced by a sinister grin.

“Oh, believe me Lancey, you’ll have no choice but to accept with open arms.” Lance gulped, and even Hunk paled slightly. “Now, shall we begin?”

She was interrupted by a shrill screech that echoed across the campgrounds. It sounded vaguely human, but was loud enough to cause some of the campers to cover their ears.

“What in the-” Sabrina was interrupted once again as Allura ran into the dining hall, Coran close at her heels. Sabrina looked ready to throw up and made a quick retreat back to the cabin of Aphrodite.

“Wow, saved by the bell!” Lance looked ecstatic, and the relief was evident in his features as well.

“More like saved by the ominous holler of death. What was that?” Hunk was standing now, along with most of the other teenagers in the dining hall. All attention was on Allura as she her presence
was made known; commanding silence from every one of the campers. Allura was a daughter of
Athena, so she knew how to control the atmosphere a room. Lance was amazed as the panic that
was beginning to show its ugly face quickly subsided into calm as Allura cleared her throat.

“Campers, there has been a breach—” another cry sounded, this one sounding closer than before, and
even Allura looked mildly concerned.

“We need fighters to gather their weapons and armour immediately and meet by the main cabin on
the westward side. Anyone unwilling to fight may return to their respective cabins. However, if
three short blasts of Coran’s horn are sounded, then we request your backup by any means
necessary.”

Several campers blanched at the news, while others bustled into motion, gathering up weapons and
making their way to the meeting point Allura had informed them of. Camp breaches were rare, and
this was the first time Lance or Hunk had experienced one. Lance clapped Hunk on the shoulder.

“Well buddy, ready to kick some butt?” Hunk looked more ready to evacuate the contents of his
stomach than kick butt, but nodded all the same.

“I’ll meet you in a few minutes.” And with that Hunk was off to gather his equipment and inform
Pidge of the news.

Lance made his way out of the dining hall and towards his cabin. He broke into a jog as he saw
smoke rising on the horizon, presumably where the noises had originated. This was beginning to
look like the upward turn of his grief, and Lance smiled wickedly to himself as he thought about
the upcoming fight. Action around here was so rare, between the games they played and the
training they endured, none of the campers ever got the chance to actually fight. Unless they were
chosen for a quest, but that barely happened now-a-days.

Lance reached the cabin and headed for his room, where he kept his stash of weapons. He grabbed
a few knives and the piece-de-resistance: his bow that Pidge had designed for him. It was
lightweight and incredibly powerful, and allowed Lance to fight alongside his comrades.

He knew that children of Aphrodite were stigmatized as prissy and weak, but he was the last
person to leave his cabin as he charged for the meeting area. His siblings would fight today. They
would not cower or weep.

They would defend their camp and make their goddess mother proud.

And they would look fabulous doing it.

Besides, he had his secret weapon in case anything went south, so what could go wrong?
Yeah, lets go towards the creepy sound. Perfect.

Chapter Summary

The camp prepares to investigate the strange commotion, and Hunk is less than thrilled.

Chapter Notes

EDIT:
Back at it again with the no spaces between paragraphs!!!

Wow I am so sorry that you guys had to read this blocky mass of text.
Like..holy crap it is so painful thank you for sticking with this fic even after that!

Hunk had been able to find Pidge with relative ease, and filled her in on the events that had transpired as she gathered up her equipment.

“Typical. I leave and all the fun stuff happens.” She was struggling to lift the bag she had filled with gadgets, so Hunk picked it up for her. He groaned under the weight of it.

“Gee Pidge what are you carting around in this thing?” She shrugged as they made for the main cabin. Hunk could smell smoke in the air, and as he looked around the premises he spotted columns of it polluting the sky in the direction the noises had come from. Right on cue, another shrill blast filled their ears.

“Yikes what is making that sound?” Pidge had covered her ears at the sound, but Hunk, burdened with his heavy load, had got the full effect.
“Not sure, but the sooner it shuts up the better.”

They were rounding the corner of the Athena cabin, and could see the crowd that had gathered on the westward side of the head lodge.

“Woah, must be serious…” Hunk scanned the crowd, taking a census of who was there. He saw the entirety of the Ares cabin, shouting and sporting full battle gear, several kids from the Artemis and Hermes cabins, and the Apollo kids with their bows and spears.

A stunning group of teenagers caught his eye and he recognized them to be Aphrodite kids, though what they would contribute to the fight he had no idea. Lance wasn’t among them however, and as the crowd thickened he began to lose hope of finding him before Allura delivered her instructions.
Pidge was looking around as well, but her gaze was more focused on finding areas to set up her equipment.

“We need to get up high in order for my helmet piece to work properly.” Hunk looked down at her and frowned.

“Doesn’t that kind of defeat the purpose? Shouldn’t you be able to use it on the ground?” She gave him a look that would have made his stomach curl, but his attention was on other matters, like the potential battle. “Yes. Eventually. But this is a prototype. And the calibration needs to be perfected. I didn’t exactly get a lot of time this morning-”

Hunk interrupted: “Okay, okay, don’t bite my head off.”

Pidge rolled her eyes.

“Anyways, we need to get up on top of the roof. I hope Allura-” She was interrupted once again, but this time by a group of teens who were waving and rushing towards where Hunk and Pidge stood. These were Pidge’s half-siblings, from the Hephaestus cabin.

“Yo Pidge!” A guy with short black hair and grease stained pants gave her a pat on the shoulder. “You ready to fight dude?”

Pidge smiled slightly, her eyes creasing behind her glasses.

“Ready to fight like a girl and kick some butt.” She emphasised the word girl as she spoke, and the black haired boy nodded.

“Ah, gotcha.” He smiled; “Alrighty so what’s the plan and where do you want us? Allura said we have permission to set up wherever we deem fit.” Pidge looked surprised at that information.

“Wow she’s either lost her mind or this situation is a lot more urgent than we know. Ok…I’ve been working on this new helmet piece-” Pidge grabbed her bag from Hunk and filled the rest of her team in, but Hunk was too preoccupied to listen. He was searching for Lance again, knowing full well that wherever he ended up there was sure to be trouble.

Whenever there were games of capture the flag or last man standing, Lance would join up with the Apollo kids, since he preferred to use the bow and arrow over a sword, but he wasn’t with the group.

Hunk himself was fond of the hammer, but wasn’t the biggest fan of the war games. He had thought them pointless until recently; like, seven minutes ago recently.

Now he was glad for the training. Despite that, Lance was still missing, and as Pidge went off with the rest of the Hephaestus cabin to set up her equipment, Hunk wandered further into the crowd.
Why was Lance so goddamn hard to find? Usually he stood out in a crowd, being loud, lanky, and, yes, he could admit it, incredibly good looking. Like unfairly so. But Hunk wasn’t the jealous type, and Lance was his best friend.

Ever since Hunk had come to camp, Lance had been at his side, right from the get go. He had attached himself to the boy for some reason, and when Hunk had asked Lance why he had wanted to be friends with him, Lance had shrugged, saying it just felt natural. Maybe it was a gift from his godly parent.

When Hunk’s parentage had been declared in front of the camp, he hadn’t been surprised. He had known from a young age that Demeter was his mother, his father having told him as soon as he was old enough to understand. Compared to the other demigods, Hunk had lived a relatively safe life, and had really only come to camp to keep his father safe from the ever increasing visits from monsters.

Hunk, like the other children of the Gods, carried a scent that marked them as different, one that monsters of all sorts could detect. However, Hunk’s particular aroma never brought him much danger, not that he was complaining, it just meant that his gifts weren’t as memorable or noteworthy compared to the others.

Like Lance’s.

Or even Pidge.

But Hunk didn’t really care. It just meant he was able to focus on the things he wanted to do, like cooking, and eating, and making things.

Hunk felt a tap on his shoulder that brought him back from his thoughts. He turned and saw Shay standing beside him, her longsword strapped to her back. She was a child of Athena, with short cropped black hair and tan skin. Hunk could feel his face redden at the sight of her, but managed to keep his voice normal as he greeted her.

“Oh! Hey Shay, what’s up?” She smiled up at him.

“You mean besides the potential threat to camp, looming battle and unrecognizable screams?” She shrugged, “Not much.”

Hunk’s blush deepened as he adjusted his vest.

“I, uh...um” Shay laughed, a light bubbly sound, and Hunk’s chest fluttered.

“I’m just teasing.” She turned to scan the crowd. “I’m a bit nervous to be honest. Haven’t exactly been in a real fight yet.” She looked back to him. “You planning on punching your way through?”

Hunk was momentarily confused, until he realized what she was talking about. He had forgotten to grab his hammer. Shay chuckled as he slapped his forehead.
“I’m an idiot!”
“Don’t worry big guy I got you covered.” She pulled something off her belt and handed it to him.

“I couldn’t lift your hammer so I grabbed the nearest thing.” It was a short sword, complete with scabbard and belt. Hunk took the weapon from her in gratitude. It was not his optimal weapon, but was better than nothing. Plus, Shay had been thinking of him when she grabbed it, so Hunk felt like the sword was blessed.

“Thank you! You’re a life saver!” Hunk strapped the belt around his waist.

“Yeah well, you owe me one.” She smiled slightly as she said it, a small, barely noticeable blush creeping along her cheeks. Hunk cleared his throat, testing if his voice still worked. Shay was way too perfect, and he wanted to continue their conversation, but right when he was about to speak another hand clapped his backside, and instead of words, a small yelp escaped his lips.

“There you are Hunk! Been looking everywhere!”

Lance had terrible timing.

“What’s up Shay?”

She chuckled and rolled her eyes, having just gone through the same exchange with Hunk.

“’Sup Lance. Anyways, I have to go meet up with my siblings.” She stepped back and waved. “You better not die Hunk. I’m a stickler when it comes to debts!” and with that she was gone, swallowed by the ever growing crowd. Hunk could feel the heat radiating off his face, and Lance was giving him his notorious cocked eyebrow look, which made Hunk feel even more embarrassed.

Lance started to speak but Hunk cut him off: “Not a word from you or else I’ll be the first to congratulate Sabrina on her triumph.”

Lance pulled two fingers over his mouth, like he was zipping his lips, and made a tossing motion, which Hunk took to be the imaginary key.

“Lips are sealed.”

A single horn blast sounded, and everyone snapped to attention. Allura’s voice could be heard at the front the crowd, loud and commanding.

“I’ll make this short and simple. Get into formations A-3 and G-7. I want squadrons four and five to take the East flank, squads one, two and six on the West side, and squadron three to approach from the middle. Get in position and wait for my signal.” She turned to leave, instructions delivered.
“Riveting speech. Really moved me.” Lance grumbled as he and Hunk made their way to their respective areas. Allura was never one to drag out a situation. She knew what needed to be done and how best to do it, and no one questioned her authority. But Hunk had to agree with Lance; she wasn’t the best at inspiring her troops. At least, that’s what Hunk thought. He noticed the Ares kids glowing with pride…or maybe it was bloodlust? That group was always keen for a fight.

“Well, catch you later then bud!” Lance clapped his shoulder as he turned to join up with his squadron, the long-range fighters. Lance was eternally optimistic, usually Hunk appreciated that about him, but today he could have used some more reassurance that they would survive whatever was about to happen.

Oh well.

Hunk found he fought better under intense pressure and nerves anyways, though he really wished he had grabbed his hammer. The short sword felt flimsy at his side as he ran to join his group, squadron four. He didn’t even have a shield!

Hunk decided he would hang out in the back ranks until Allura gave them the signal, just to see what they were up against. He hated to admit it, but he was terrified, and felt entirely underprepared. At least Shay was in his squadron. She caught up with him as their group got into position, and having her at his side made him feel braver.

The smell of smoke grew stronger as the squadron moved through the forest on the Eastern side, and the sounds of yelling grew more distinct as they approached their positions. As they drew closer still, the echoes of steel rang out, echoing eerily through the trees. The camp border was just up ahead, but the sounds of fighting were still far off, which meant that the demigods would have to leave the safety of the enchanted perimeter in order to continue onwards. Allura had yet to give the signal, but the groups fell silent as they took their positions, weapons drawn and held loosely at their sides.

Hunk could just make out the shape of Allura and her squadron as they got into position, and watched as she approached the border, assessing the situation. She appeared to be talking to herself, but Hunk knew that Pidge, with the help of her brothers and sisters, had designed a communication device that was untraceable by monsters, and that the two must be conversing.

*I wonder if her helmet thing works…if she can see what’s up ahead,* Hunk thought as he surveyed the area.

If that was the case, then it would make this entire situation a whole heck of a lot easier. Allura was shaking her head now, and Hunk’s heart dropped. He watched as she returned to her group, whispered a few orders to some of the Hermes kids, and discuss things with Coran with bowed heads and hushed tones.

One of the teens she had spoken with soundlessly came up behind Hunk’s group, startling him. Children of Hermes were generally light-footed and fast, their father being the God of travel and messages, but it always amazed Hunk at how efficient those kids could be.

All his gifts were related to food and growing things, and weren’t all that useful in battle.
“Allura is asking that only experienced campers continue on from here. Going beyond the perimeter is dangerous and we don’t know what we’re up against. Squadron three has encountered some technical difficulties and are working to fix them, but in the mean time we will continue blindly in the same formations.”

That’s Pidge’s group, thought Hunk as he mulled this information over. So the helmet piece wasn’t working. Great.

“Also,” the informant, who Hunk recognized as Toby, continued: “anyone with stronger scents are requested to stay behind to avoid luring in more monsters.” Hunk heard a few mumbles of disapproval at that, but Toby silenced them. “Allura’s orders. Follow them.”

He left as silently as he had come, moving on to the next group to deliver the message. Hunk watched as several of his squadron were forced to return; those who were two inexperienced and those that were too powerful. There weren’t many of the latter in his group, but he knew that those who were would not be pleased with the orders. In fact, he knew one person in particular who was going to be pissed.

Sure enough, Lance could be heard arguing to the left of where Hunk’s group was positioned.

“What do you mean I can’t fight!” Hunk could hear the hiss of several people as they shushed Lance.

Hunk hadn’t been there, but he had heard the stories of how Lance had come to camp. He had been running for his life, near dead and only ten years of age, pursued by three harpies. Coran had found him just in time, about a mile away from the border of the camp, and had managed to kill one of the harpies and drive the other two off.

Lance had been in poor condition; malnourished, dehydrated, and in shock from the ordeal, and had passed out as soon as Coran had found him. The remaining harpies returned the next night, crossing the borders of camp, looking for Lance: smelling him out.

They were defeated, but it had left the campers paranoid of another attack. Everyone was amazed, if a little intimidated, at the power Lance must possess. They figured he was a child of one of the top guns: either Zeus, Poseidon or Hades, and had all been disappointed when the symbol of Aphrodite had appeared above his head that night.

They had called it a mistake, but the Gods were rarely wrong, and as Lance was claimed, they grew less intimidated of him, saying that the harpies must just have been hungry, since there was no way a child of Aphrodite was that powerful.

People forgot about the incident, and Lance settled into life at camp, having no recollection of anything that had happened since he had woken up in camp. He didn’t know where his family was, or if they were even alive, and eventually people stopped asking. He was just a kid with no memories that came into camp under strange circumstances.

Or at least, that’s what he had told Hunk.
Still, better safe than sorry, right? Allura must have specifically asked for Lance not to leave the perimeter, and Hunk knew that that was not going to bode well with the boy. He couldn’t hear any more commotion coming from Lance’s group, and figured Lance must have gone back to camp to mope. Hunk was almost jealous, but he wouldn’t back down from this fight. Not when Shay was still there.

As the other campers left, the remaining squadrons re-grouped, ready for Allura to signal them forward.

Hunk gripped his sword’s handle, still sheathed, and felt the warm leather beneath his fingers. Allura gave them the signal, and they were off.

Hunk hesitated only slightly as he crossed the border, but followed Shay and the rest of his friends. His skin tickled as he passed through it, but the sensation only lasted a second. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up as another screech filled the air, and the ground shook as something tumbled. The campers were unfazed, their training coming into play as their senses heightened. Hunk gulped, wishing that he had their courage. He would have felt better if Lance was with him, or Pidge, since they knew how he hated fighting and always helped him out when he needed it, but they were back at camp, safe.

_So fight for them._

He didn’t know where the words had come from, but the thought repeated itself until Hunk was able to calm his breathing.

Yeah.

He could do that.

He followed his squadron as they made their way towards the noises, keeping an eye on Allura’s group for further instruction. Hunk sent up a silent prayer to the Gods: Please, let this be a giant squirrel or something!

But the Gods didn’t seem to be listening. When the campers approached the valley where the noises and smoke were originating, Hunk let out a small cry. He was thoroughly disappointed at discovering that the source of all the commotion was not, in fact, a giant squirrel.

He cursed himself: _You just had to say giant, didn’t you!_

Chapter End Notes

Still not sure where this is going
Love the feedback though!
From bad to worse

Chapter Summary

Broganes battling giants? Talk about brotherly bonding...

Chapter Notes

EDIT:

WOW OK I SUCK I AM SO SORRY

This is literally making me cringe. I feel so bad that you guys had to read this the way it was.
Bless paragraph spacing.

Keith was having a terrible day.

He had woken up way too early, failed in finding something at least partially edible for him and Shiro to eat, and torn his favourite pair of gloves.

And that was only the first hour.

Shiro was in no condition to be travelling, not with his multiple broken ribs and possible concussion, but Keith had to keep them moving. They were so close. And they would be have been closer if the map hadn’t torn during their last skirmish. Keith blamed himself for that. Though, he blamed himself for most of the thing him and Shiro had been put through.

Shiro should not have been dragged into this. None of this was Shiro’s fault.

Keith hated himself more and more with each new wound his brother received, even though he himself was no better off. They had been on the run for what felt like months, but was really only a few weeks.

In that time, Keith had twisted his ankle three times, cut open his head twice in the same spot, and become so bruised that he wasn’t entirely sure what colour his skin had originally been.

But he was lucky. Shiro had suffered a blow during their last battle with the gorgon, and had been knocked unconscious, which had driven Keith into a rage-fueled battle frenzy, allowing him to defeat the creature. There had been no cause to celebrate.

Danger was always lurking around the next corner, and with Shiro basically out of commission, Keith was on his own.
We are so close! I have to get him to safety! I owe it to him!

These thoughts drove Keith onwards.

Shiro didn’t deserve this. Shiro wasn’t the one attracting the monsters left right and center. Keith was!

After their mother’s death, the attacks had become more frequent, and even with his and Shiro’s fighting abilities, the monsters were much stronger. So they had left, barely able to grieve, searching for this place that Shiro had heard of, where people like Keith would be safe. Where they would be safe.

Keith should have left alone. He shouldn’t have allowed Shiro to come. And yet, here they were. Lost in the middle of god knows where, badly injured, and so beyond exhaustion that sleep didn’t seem like a real thing anymore.

And that was all before they had run into the giants.

Worst.

Day.

Ever.

Compared to others Keith had heard about, these two were not actually giant per se, but they still stood a good three feet taller than Shiro.

All hope of sneaking past the fiends was lost as soon as the wind shifted. Keith’s hair ruffled in the breeze, and he cursed himself. Even without proper hygiene and with weeks old dirty laundry, the boy carried a strong, irresistible scent familiar to all demigods. It was masked slightly by Shiro’s mundane smell, but not enough to keep the giants from turning their thick heads and catching sight of the boys.

Keith reached for the sword at his hip. He had found it among his mother’s possessions way back when, and the weight of the blade gave him some comfort as he and Shiro sunk into a fighting stance.

Keith had watched as the giants nudged each other, picked up their weapons, and smiled wickedly.

They think this is going to be easy.

That thought alone made the blood in Keith’s veins boil. There was no way he would go down easy. Not while Shiro was still alive and with him. Not while their safe haven was still out there. And sure as hell not when he had a sword in his hand.
He had gotten good at using it, and with Shiro’s guidance he had been able to rescue them from more than a few unsatisfactory situations.

Still though, a refusal to die did not guarantee survival.

It just helped to calm the nerves a bit.

Keith took a quick surveillance of the area, noting areas of high ground or natural structures he could hide behind if needed.

And then the giants attacked.

As far as fighting two beings nearly twice your height and strength goes, Keith figured they weren’t actually doing that bad. Shiro had been able to land the first strike, leaving a nasty wound in one giant’s lower calf. The shriek it had let out nearly deafened Keith, but he had used the distraction to his advantage and caught his breath behind a large boulder with Shiro.

“We can’t continue like this,” Shiro panted. He was clasping his side, and Keith felt a surge of guilt as he recalled the broken ribs his older brother suffered. Their moment of reprieve was over before Keith could respond.

The uninjured giant smashed the top half of the rock apart, sending chunks of granite down on them. The two ran for cover, circling around in order to flank their attacker. Keith saw an opportunity to land a similar attack that Shiro had before, but was foiled in the last second by a large branch just barely missing the top of his head. He whirled, seeing the second giant glaring at him with enough hatred to curdle milk. It was grasping the wound in its leg, blood pouring from the wound in spurts.

Shiro really did a number on that guy.

But there was no time for admiration. The giants were focusing in on Shiro, who despite his best efforts, was losing ground and tiring fast.

Keith picked up the nearest object to him, one of the rock chunks from the once boulder, and hurled it at the uninjured giant. It smacked into the back of the creatures head, making it turn and glower down at him.

Yikes….should have thought that one through, he thought as the giant lumbered towards him.

It swung its massive axe downwards, and Keith leaped out of the way, feeling the earth shake beneath him as the axe made its’ impact. He tucked into a roll, returning to his feet and turning to face the beast as it struggled to reclaim its weapon.
Now’s my chance!

Keith ran forward, his sword at the ready, and slashed the giant in the side. It wasn’t as deep as Keith was hoping, but the giant yelled, making Keith’s ears throb once again. He circled back around and landed another strike to the giants’ lower leg, making it fall to its knees. The giant tried to swing at him but Keith was able to dodge, rolling away.

His stamina was fading quickly, and Keith could feel the bruises forming on his body, but in the heat of battle he was able to ignore his body’s complaints and focus on his enemy.

This was it.

He could do this.

The giant’s neck was exposed and Keith leapt forward, using all of his might to swing his sword in an arch and downwards, and with a sickening crunch and one last shriek, the giant fell to the ground. Keith stumbled forward as his momentum continued to carry him forward, but he was able to keep from falling over.

There was no time to celebrate his victory however, as the second giant bellowed out at the loss of its companion, and kicked Shiro, who had been momentarily distracted by what Keith had done.

Shiro was sent flying and crashed against the ground, rolling several times until being stopped abruptly by a stand of trees. There was loud thud, and his body became limp.

“Shiro!!” Keith yelled out, and something inside him snapped. He was overcome with rage, like when he had fought the gorgon; all fatigue forgotten as he charged forward. He didn’t know how he was able to move that fast, or how he was able to dodge the blows from the remaining giant. His focus was entirely on defeating the enemy in front of him.

He swung left, rolled right, jumped up and twisted mid-air, leaving deep gashes on the giants body.

It’s screams were loud and shrill, but Keith could barely hear them. With one last cut the giant fell, and Keith rolled out of the way to avoid being crushed by its weight.

He panted as the air grew silent, and his knees gave out, all remaining strength gone. His vision was blurry as he looked to where Shiro had fallen, but he was unable to stand, so he crawled over to his brother.

Please be alright please be alright.

The thought repeated itself as he reached Shiro’s side. Keith quickly checked for a pulse, and was relieved beyond words to find one, if faint.

He was only allowed a brief moment of calm however, as loud thumps could be heard coming towards him. From the edge of the clearing emerged three more giants, these ones much larger than the two they had just fought. Keith would have cried if he had the strength.
As it was, he was barely able to keep his head up and watch as the giants discovered their fallen kin. They turned and saw him and Shiro, and Keith knew that was it.

They were done for.

His eyelids grew heavy as he accepted his fate.

At least he was with his brother. At least they were together.

He noticed something leap out of the woods nearest to him, yelling at him and waving its arms.

He felt compelled to listen, but was unable to make his body obey.

Maybe he was imagining it.

He watched through blurry eyes as the figure engaged the three giants, and his last cognizant thought was run you idiot.

And then he passed out.
Giants are not much fun

Chapter Summary

Who knew Lance had such a way with words?

Chapter Notes

EDIT:

(-_-)
You know the drill.
Man I was such a fool for not spacing these before.

Literally amazed that people kept reading this.
Bless.

The woods were eerily silent as Lance made his way through them.

Aside the periodic screeching and thunderous booms of course. But even then, there was no breeze to ruffle the leaves.

He wasn’t even sure he could hear his own footsteps.

It made his skin crawl.

Still, he continued onwards.
He had no intention of going back to camp; Allura had no right to keep him from the fight.

Ok, well, maybe she did, but Lance didn’t want to think about specifics. He wanted to see what the commotion was. He wanted to help Hunk and his fellow campers. He wanted to use his bow and fight evil for real!

And he really wanted to not be lost.

But there he was, separated from the groups, and heading into unknown danger. He knew he should have been more careful about following the others, but he had had to pretend to go back to camp and then circle back to the border in a different area, to make sure they wouldn’t know he had crossed it.

Allura had a weird connection with the thing, like some sixth sense, and if she felt it being crossed after the group had already gone through, then she would have known something was up. So Lance had run as fast as he could in order to cross at the same time. He couldn’t be sure if it had worked,
but no alarms had gone off, and there was no angry Allura chasing after him, so he took that to be a good sign.

Still though, he wished he had Hunk with him.

Lance always hated being alone. Not because he particularly liked being around people constantly, or because he needed constant attention, like most liked to believe.

No.

Lance hated being alone because it frightened him. It made him feel small and vulnerable, like when he had come to camp. Ever since that day he had sought out human company.

At first people had obliged willingly, surrounding him and asking him questions he was unable to answer, try as he might. But after he was claimed they were less considerate. So he had looked for human interaction by getting into trouble. By causing mischief around camp until he was reprimanded and someone was forced to watch him. It wasn’t the most ideal, but at least he wasn’t alone.

Hunk had been the first person to actually call him friend, having sensed what it was Lance was looking for, and Lance felt like he owed a great deal to the boy. Whenever they were together Lance felt safe.

He felt welcome. He felt loved.

Wanted.

Feelings Lance could almost remember, like memories of a family he might have once had.

Lance sometimes felt great sorrow over not being able to recall his past, but it didn’t matter much anymore. He had a new family. He had his half-sisters and brothers, his friends. He had Pidge. And he had Hunk. And that was all he needed.

Another shriek brought Lance out of his thoughts. He was getting closer now, and as he made his way towards the sound he heard a distinctly human voice. It called out a single word, but Lance wasn’t sure what it was. There was a series of yells and thuds and then everything went quiet. Lance felt goosebumps rise on his skin.

He removed the bow from his back and notched an arrow, feeling entirely unprepared and cursing his rash decision making. What was he supposed to do if he ran into the thing making those noises? He was a decent fighter sure, but he had always had his friends with him. Now he was alone.

*No one will know where I am.*

The thought invaded his mind, causing his heartbeat to raise. Why hadn’t he told anyone!
They all think I’m back at camp! Stupid! Stupid!

Lance cursed himself as he settled into a crouch. This was not the time to panic. He had to regroup with the others. He took a few breaths and continued onwards, maintaining the lowered stance in order to avoid detection. 

A sudden breeze ruffled his hair and clothing as he found himself on the edge of a clearing. It carried the pungent scent of blood, and Lance scrunched his nose. He barely had time to scan the area when he heard loud thumps coming from across the way, and saw with horror as three massive giants emerged from the shadows.

He watched as they absorbed the scene in front of them, and only then did Lance notice the massive figures on the ground.

Someone had killed two giants.

Lance watched with increasing panic as the giants focused in on something, and as he turned to follow their gaze he saw two people crouched near a group of trees not far from him. Before he could even think it through, Lance jumped out from his hiding place.

One of them was clearly unconscious, or might even be dead, but Lance didn’t have time to find out. He waved at the one who was still awake, noting their similarities in age in the back of his mind.

“Get out of here! Run!” The other boy looked dazed, and Lance wasn’t sure he had heard. “Our camp isn’t far. Take your friend and leave!” He watched the other boy’s head fall forward in response.

Great.

That was useless.

Now he had no backup.
Now he had to protect these random strangers.

And now he had three giants to face.

Lance raised his notched bow, drawing back and taking aim as the giants charged forward. He was lucky that they didn’t split up, too overcome with furry to formulate a proper battle strategy. He aimed for the center one, hoping that if his arrow hit in the right place the giant would fall and knock over the others.

That was the plan anyways.

Lance sent the arrow flying, willing it to hit true, but was disappointed when it flew right over all
three of the massive heads.
How do you even miss something so big! Lance chastised himself. He would have been embarrassed if there weren’t three incredibly large and malicious giants charging him.

Alright…time for plan B.

Lance notched another arrow in case it didn’t work, but he wasn’t really sure there was a point. If his plan failed then he was done for.

They can use it as a toothpick.

Wow, thanks for that confidence boost me!

Anytime man.

Lance forced his mind to focus, and called upon the power that resided deep in his chest; in his lungs and vocal chords. He felt it stirring, ready for use, and seized it. After a deep inhale he bellowed:

“Stop!”

The giants paused, confused as to why they were no longer running forward in rage. They looked at each other, then down at the lanky figure in front of them. Lance smiled to himself, grateful for his mother’s blessing.

He had the gift of Charmspeak, which basically allowed his words to be all powerful; like commands you couldn’t disobey.

And people think children of Aphrodite are useless.

Not that they all had the gift that is. Only a rare few were born with it, and Lance himself hadn’t known he possessed the immense power until a few months after coming to camp.

Allura had caught him convincing a group of much older teens to let him use a compound bow, even though he was not permitted to use such a weapon at his age and inexperience. She had watched, ready to scold Lance once the teens refused, but was shocked to observe them hand one to him.

She had stormed up to them and demanded to know what they were thinking, and that’s when she saw it. Just barely, but it was there. A faint cloud, almost like mist, glossing over their eyes. And she realized that Lance, skinny, trouble-making, charismatic Lance, was a force to be reckoned with.

He had gotten reprimanded of course, and instructed never to use his powers on others unless
absolutely necessary. And no that did not mean for pranks. Or to go on quests. Or to convince Coran that his mustache was really a large, hairy caterpillar.

So basically he was left with all this potential and no loop holes.

Allura was very thorough.

Not many people knew about his gift. They would treat him differently if they thought he was controlling them whenever he spoke, or so Allura had said. There was also that thing about Charmspeak making people lose their wills if used too frequently on the same person that Lance wasn’t too keen on.

So he had kept it a secret, and had been true to his promises, for the most part.

But Lance wasn’t perfect, though he would never admit it.

He had used his powers when he had found Pidge crying, and after she had told him why, he had been furious. He sought out each member of the Hephaestus cabin and commanded they apologize. Allura had found him later, and he was reprimanded severely. She had had to visit each of the people he had spoken with and ask them not to spread the word of Lance’s gift. And then she had forced him to apologize to them, which didn’t seem entirely fair to Lance, but he was already in enough trouble and didn’t want to extend his punishment further. As it was, he had to clean the stables where they kept their various creatures for a whole month.

Not really ideal for a child of grace and beauty.

Regardless, the Hephaestus kids were more open with Pidge, and that was all that Lance cared about, even if they tended to avoid him wherever possible, but most people figured it was because of his rambunctious personality.

He had been careful about his powers after that, not using them even when he knew he could have escaped trouble. Like all the bets with Sabrina.

However, he was now in a life-or-death situation, and Allura was nowhere to be found, which was actually a pity, seeing as Lance would have loved the backup.

Still, he was feeling more confident as he watched the giants’ eyes gloss over slightly, indicating his hold on them.

“Good. Now, I want you to turn around.”

They did, each step shaking the earth, making Lance’s knees wobble. It was easier controlling giants than humans, seeing as their brains weren’t as highly developed. Normally mundanes, and especially demi-gods, needed more convincing. He grinned as he watched them obey, and figured he had the situation under control, so he minus well have some fun, right?
“Stand on one foot.” They did. Lance chuckled to himself.

“Ok…now I want you to raise your right hand and smack your head.” He watched as the giants conformed, but realized too late that they were all carrying weapons. He watched in horror as they hurried to heed his words, and cringed at the three loud thunks that ensued. The giants shook their heads, Lance’s grasp on them fading as pain became the more prominent thought.

“Oh crap! Uh…Be still!” Lance could feel the panic rise in his throat, causing his voice to shake. Without a clear voice his Charmspeak wasn’t as effective, and the giants blinked a few times, clearing their eyes as his power faded. The one in the middle felt its head, and a small tinkle of blood made its way down its face. It snarled, and Lance gulped.

“Run away now! Go back to your homes where it’s nice and warm, lots of food that isn’t human. Humans are actually toxic did you know? They taste terrible as well, believe me.” But it was no use. Even with the added convincing the giants were not swayed. His grasp on Charmspeak was gone, and Lance didn’t have time to call on it again before the giants charged.

He dodged, leading them away from the two people passed out behind him, so that they wouldn’t get caught up in the fight. Lance drew back his bow and fired, this time landing an arrow in one of the beast’s upper thigh. It shrieked but didn’t slow, and its brethren split up, trying to flank their attacker.

This isn’t good. Lance notched another arrow and took aim, but the giants were advancing from three sides now, and he was quickly losing ground. He shot at the one to his left, which seemed to be a bit faster than the others, but the arrow merely grazed its shoulder.

So this is how I go hey? Not very heroic.

Lance dropped his bow and drew his knife, determined, at least, to go down in a fight.

I’ll make my mother proud. I’ll make my siblings proud! I’ll make Pidge and Hunk proud! I’ll-

His thoughts were interrupted as a large axe embedded itself in the side of the giant to his right, and it staggered. Lance was taken aback, but quickly recovered as he saw hordes of his fellow campers rush out of the woods and begin to attack the giants. He had never been so happy to see Allura in all her rage, her eyes glistening as she formulated several battle scenarios in her head. She was shouting commands, and the campers took up positions rapidly.

The giants looked startled at the sudden intrusion, but recovered quickly and began to attack. Lance noticed Hunk among the group of hand-to-hand combaters and smiled.

Now this was a fight!
Lance felt his confidence return as he picked up his bow and moved to check on the two strangers. They were still out cold, but both had pulses. He moved to signal one of the Apollo kids to help him lift them when he heard Hunk shout.

Lance whirled to see if he was alright, but Hunk was yelling at him, waving his arms around. Lance was momentarily confused, but then it hit him.

Like, literally.

The giant furthest from the battle, the one he had grazed in the shoulder with his arrow, had thrown a large chunk of debris at his head, and Lance felt his vision go blurry, his ears ringing. He watched as Hunk ran towards him, his mouth moving in what should have been words, but Lance didn’t hear them.

Something warm and sticky trickled into his eyes, and he was engulfed in darkness.
Being the boss kind of sucks

Chapter Summary

Allura battles her innermost thoughts as she tries to get answers to questions.

Chapter Notes

EDIT:

Why was past me so terrible at spacing. Honestly. Get a grip me.

Allura paced the floor as she waited for news.

The camp medics were tending to the wounded, and children of Apollo with healing abilities were going around helping those with less severe injuries. There weren’t many, just a few minor cuts and scrapes, either from battling hand to hand with the giants or inadvertently from Lance.

Allura wasn’t too concerned about them however. They would heal in no time. Her main focus was on the son of Aphrodite himself, and the two strangers that were brought into camp.

She hadn’t known at the time that there were others in the clearing, and hadn’t had much time to ponder it. One was clearly a demigod, and had passed through the barrier easily, but the other had been blocked. Allura had had to invite him in, even though he was unconscious, in order for the magical boundary to allow him entry into camp.

So he was human. Fully human.

And near death.

The other boy was barely better off, but his injuries were more treatable; things like dehydration and a mild concussion.

But then there was Lance.

Stupid, reckless Lance.
She should have known he wouldn’t go back to camp at her command, and scolded herself for not taking the necessary precautions. She thought back to the events leading up to him being so badly wounded.

She had received a message from Pidge as her team reached the area where the commotion was occurring, informing her that the helmet piece was now working, and she could see what was up ahead. Allura had been impressed, but couldn’t spare the time to congratulate the child of Hephaestus. She had asked for specifics; what she was seeing, what they were up against.

Pidge told her of the two dead giants in the clearing before them, which startled Allura. Giants were not supposed to wander this close to the border of camp! And why were they dead? What had killed them?

She hadn’t gotten the chance to ask, as Pidge suddenly informed her via earpiece of three more giants a bit farther away. They were walking away from their group, or had been anyways, until the wind shifted, and Pidge had told her, rather loudly, that they were hurriedly making their way towards the clearing.

She had watched, holding their position as the giants emerged from the forests edge.

She had watched as they looked around, noticing their dead comrades.

She had watched as they focused in on something at the far end of the clearing, but at the time she didn’t know what, or who, it was.

She had watched as someone jumped out the woods to her left and started yelling.

And her heart had dropped.

Because it was Lance.

And then it all made sense.

She knew in that instant that it was Lance who had attracted the beasts, or at least these three anyways. It must have been when the wind picked up, when Pidge had informed her of their sudden change in direction. His scent was too strong; he was too powerful, yet too inexperienced in using his gifts.

And she was partially to blame for that, for forbidding him from using his Charmspeak.

Allura turned back to her squadron, quickly relaying her plan of action. The giants were already advancing on Lance, and her time to act was short. Something whistled past her, and she froze. It was an arrow, now embedded in the trunk of a large oak tree not ten inches from her.
What is he doing! How did he miss! Trajectories raced through her mind; angles, wind compensations. That was the Athena blood in her veins. Problem solving was a gift, but also a curse. She regained her composure, and gave the signal for everyone to move. But they didn’t.

Or rather, couldn’t.

Allura felt every muscle in her body seize as one single word rang out, loud, crisp and clear as if he was standing right beside her.

“Stop.”

She watched in horror as everyone around her fell still, some with weapons drawn, and others mid reach. She was helpless. Her body wouldn’t obey her.

*Lance is using his Charmspeak!*

She didn’t know whether to be proud, terrified or intimidated, so decided on all three at once. She watched as the giants froze, experiencing the same reaction she and her squadrons were. Allura figured Lance must be using an immense amount of power in order to not only stop three giants, but also the three dozen or so demigods just beyond the forest edge. No small feat to say the least.

There was not much known about the gift, seeing as it was so rare. Regardless, Allura was positive that the force of that single word would be draining Lance’s energy, whether he knew it or not. She just hoped it would wear off in time for them to help in case things turned south.

And as was the case with many things that involved Lance, things did indeed go south.

Allura was appalled as Lance commanded the giants, and consequently the rest of them, to turn around and stand on one foot. It was humiliating, pointless, incredibly arrogant, and infuriating, but they had no choice in the matter. His words were too compelling; his voice too strong.

It was when he commanded they smack themselves with their right hand that Allura lost it. She was fortunate enough to have been holding her spear in her left hand, so the attack hadn’t done much damage, except maybe to her pride. The campers with shields and other weapons were not as lucky. A few of the Ares kids were knocked out by their own strength, and one camper from the Hermes cabin ended up drawing blood, but aside from that there were no major wounds.

Which was incredibly fortunate to say the least. Allura could also feel Lance’s hold on them slip, and used the opportunity to plug her ears, informing the others to follow her stead, in case he used his powers again. A few of the Apollo kids rushed to check on the people who had hurt themselves, and Allura allowed herself a brief moment to guarantee that there were no life threatening injuries.
She turned back to the scene before her, watching in horror as Lance bolted to the other end of the clearing. He had his bow drawn, and was able to land a hit this time, but the giants were closing fast. He dropped his bow and reached for his knife.

Like a good warrior, fighting even when the odds were against him.

She gave the signal, hoping that her team was watching, and charged. Someone threw an axe and it embedded itself in the nearest giant’s side. The archers took up position but didn’t let loose their arrows, lest they hit one of their own. The battlefield was too chaotic, which was typical of most battles, but Allura hadn’t wanted it to go this way.

Her planning had been rushed due to Lance’s interference.

This was now a rescue mission.

The sounds of fighting rang out, war cries from the remaining Ares children, steel against flesh, but as it all unfolded Allura’s mind narrowed to a deadly focus. She blocked out the noise of battle, concentrating on giving orders and keeping everyone safe.

That was her job.

And she was good at it.

Or at least that was what she would have liked to think, if Lance wasn’t always preventing her from fully believing it.
She watched as the third giant advanced on him, but he had his back turned, crouching by the two figures she hadn’t noticed before.
She would have noticed them if she had been able to scan the area properly, but that was in the past.

She cried out in warning, and a camper nearest to her turned and saw what was about to happen. He called out to Lance, and the boy turned, recognizing his friend’s voice.

*No don’t look over here! Look behind you!*

But it was too late. She watched the rock as it was thrown through the air, knocking into the side of Lance’s head with such force she was astounded that he was still sitting upright. She ran to him, the camper that had called out prior, Hunk she realized, already at his side.

He was checking for a pulse, and when he called for a healer Allura let attention turn to the giant. It was smirking wickedly, and Allura’s blood began to boil. She hoisted her spear, drew back and threw it with such incredible force, that when it landed its mark, the giant was thrown back a few feet from the impact.

She turned her attention back to Lance, who was now being treated as efficiently as possible given their circumstances. The two strangers were also being looked over, but she had no time to ask about any of them. She had a battle to run.
She drew the sword strapped to her side and rejoined her group. Coran had been giving directions in her absence, and she saw that there was only one foe left to best. It was bleeding profusely, and as the campers advanced on it she saw the terror in its eyes.

Allura was good at what she did.

But that didn’t mean she enjoyed it all the time.

She took a bow from one of the Apollo campers and sent an arrow flying, putting the creature out of its misery with a single shot. The fighters in front of the giant jumped back as it fell, then looked back to her. Some of the Ares kids were disappointed that the fight was over, but the majority of her campers sighed in relief. Though she had instructed only the more experienced combatants to join her, fighting off giants was never an easy task. She could see the exhaustion evident on their faces, but also hints of pride.

They had won, but this was not the time nor place for celebration. They had to get back within the borders, especially Lance, whose demigod scent, mixed with the smell of blood flooding from the wound in his head, was sure to attract more beasts. She ordered everyone to form up and head back immediately, sending Coran to scout ahead in case something else showed up.

She rejoined with Hunk and the others, the injured having been fastened into make-shift stretchers. She called for several of the stronger campers to help lift the boys, and they had slowly made their way back to camp.

Miraculously nothing jumped out at them, and Allura had sent up a silent prayer to the gods. When they reached the barrier, the stretcher holding what appeared to be the older stranger, would not go through, thus leading Allura having to invite him in. Mundanes were usually not permitted inside the camp, more for their own safety than that of the campers, but this man was in no condition to be turned away.

Which led her to where she currently was; pacing a hole into the floor outside the infirmary. Now that the immediate threat was dealt with, she could investigate the questions that had plagued her mind earlier.

First and foremost: who were these two strangers?

She couldn’t answer that one without questioning them themselves, but seeing as they were currently out of commission, she moved on to the next one.

What were giants doing so close to her camp?

That one was a bit easier to solve. The strangers, whoever they were, had obviously been trying to seek refuge here. That made sense for the demigod anyway, but why the human? What was their
connection?
As for the giants themselves, either the demigod had brought them here, or they had been drawn in by something else.

She hoped it was the first theory, but would need to thoroughly investigate to be sure. But there were more pressing issues, like what to do about Lance’s power.

If he would make it that was.

Allura cursed herself for even thinking it, but the logical side of her was difficult to silence. Despite popular belief, she had always had a soft spot for Lance. Not in any kind of romantic way, more maternal. He had come to camp under such strange circumstances, frighteningly similar to the one that had just enfolded, and had such a powerful scent.

Not to mention his Charmspeak.

Allura had always felt the instinct to protect him, which was a difficult task, seeing as he was always getting into trouble. It also made it difficult for her to punish him when he disobeyed her, like the incident with the Hephaestus kids, but she knew that if she didn’t keep him under tight ropes then terrible things would happen. Like today, with the giants.

She was in turmoil over him getting injured, and blamed herself for not being more cautious. Of course he had followed them. It was in his nature to protect, both those he was loyal to and those he had no connection with at all.

She recalled how he had jumped out to protect the two strangers against three giants, and how his first thought had been of checking on them once backup had arrived. It was an incredibly dangerous trait, stupid, reckless.

But it was also admirable, and it was entirely Lance.

He would make it. He had to.

Coran approached her from the side, knowing all too well the look she got when her mind was racing. He wasn’t exactly in the mood to be decapitated by a startled Allura. He cleared his throat.

“Any news?” Allura glanced at him briefly and shook her head, her mind working overtime with theories and possible solutions.

“Ah. Well, Lance is a stubborn lad. I’m positive he’ll make it through.” He watched Allura’s face betray just a hint of doubt as he spoke, and it made his heart ache for her. It was hard being the camp leader. It was worse when one of your own was injured in battle. And he knew that Allura would be blaming herself.
“Allura, you can’t take full liability for this.” She shook her head, her long hair falling forward as she did, appearing almost white in the glow of the sun. It was almost setting, the battle having taken most of the day.

“It’s my fault. I should have known that giants were this close to the barrier. I should have known there was a demigod nearby who needed my help.” She was distracted even as she spoke, her mind not letting her focus on their conversation. “I should have had someone escort Lance back to camp! It’s my fault he’s hurt!” Allura wasn’t one for crying, and even as she stated her allegations her voice remained steady, her glistening eyes the only indication of her turmoil.

Coran looked out at camp, admiring the shade of orange and pink everything was turning as the sun began to dip below the horizon. He waited a few minutes before he spoke, allowing Allura to collect herself.

“Lance is almost an adult. He made his decision, against your orders. He knows that, and he doesn’t blame you. So neither should you.” His words were blunt and to the point, but he knew that Allura would heed them better than if he were to sugar coat them. That was what made her a great leader. She didn’t need her hand to be held.

He turned back to her and she nodded, the words having grounded her. Her mind was still spinning, but it was more focused.

“Right. Thank you Coran. I have to look into some important matters. Let me know if there are any updates.” She turned and left, her brief moment of weakness forgotten.

No, weakness wasn’t the right word.

Compassion didn’t make a person weak. It made them stronger. And Allura was stronger than anyone Coran had ever known.

It was merely a moment of humanity; her showing a side to herself she normally kept hidden. Not because she was ashamed of it, but because she was a child of Athena. She dealt in facts and logic, and people looked to her for those things. She was the head of their camp. The protector. And when people saw her humanity they lost courage. She was supposed to be fearless, stoic, and calm at all times.

That was her job.

And she was good at it.

But that didn’t mean she enjoyed it all the time.
Allura made her way back to the main cabin, making mental notes to speak with Pidge about her device when she had the time. She had to check on the border, converse with the sprites in the forest, maybe ask the satyrs if they had heard or seen anything odd lately.

She had to guarantee that her camp was safe before she could focus on anything else. Lance would pull through. She would interrogate the strangers when they woke. Her questions were waiting to be answered, and she would solve each one with time.

But time was of the essence.

She grabbed a few things from her room and headed out, the camp now shrouded in the deep purples and blues of dusk. It was beautiful to behold, but Allura couldn’t stop to admire the view. Not when there was work to be done. Maybe once all this was sorted…

She chuckled lightly to herself, knowing that would be a long ways off. Her task was just beginning, and she needed answers.

She turned towards the forest, now blanketed in shadow, and disappeared into the night.
Keith woke up to a pounding headache. His muscles were cramped, and as he stretched he felt several joints pop.
He decided to remain still as his body woke up.

His mouth was dry, but he was used to waking up parched, and paid it no mind. It was his stomach that was demanding attention, keeping his thoughts from focusing properly.
If only he had his bag.
Wait.
Where was his bag?
Actually...where was he?!

Keith jolted upright, and immediately regretted it as his vision clouded over, making his head throb and spin. He rubbed his temples, waiting for the dizziness to recede.
The events of the previous day caught up to him, and he spun his head around, looking for Shiro.
The room was dark, but his eyes adjusted quickly, and he could make out several beds in a row along the wall. The opposite side of the room had tables full of medical equipment: bandages, crutches, ointments; the whole nine yards.

So he was in some sort of hospital.

Keith pulled back his sheets and noticed his boots had been removed. But he didn’t care. He needed to find Shiro.
He tentatively got out of bed, his legs wobbling slightly as he put weight on them. There were bandages on several parts of his arms, but he paid them no mind either.
Shiro.
That was who he cared about.

Besides himself, there was only one other person in the room, sleeping a few beds over from him. Keith could tell just from the silhouette that it wasn’t Shiro, but he went to check anyways.
It was a boy. Keith could tell that much, but the majority of his face was covered in thick gauze, and his eyes were shut tight. He looked like he was in pain, and Keith normally would have tried to
help, but his brother was missing, and he needed to know if he was ok.
Or if he was alive.

No.

The battle with the giants had knocked Shiro out, but Keith had felt a pulse when he had checked
on him, right before passing out himself.
But what had happened after that? There was the strange figure that had emerged out of the woods
and then...nothing.
What if the giants hadn’t been stopped? What if they had taken Shiro?
Keith’s breathing was ragged as he made his way to the front of the building. His hand was on the
handle when the door suddenly burst open.

Blinding light filled the room, and Keith fell back, his reflexes not as quick with stiff muscles.

“Oh crap! Are you okay?” A worried voice accompanied a massive shadow that blocked the exit.
Keith blinked several times as his eyes re-adjusted, and a hand reached down to help him up.
Keith swatted it away, crawling back a few feet before getting back on his feet. He wasn’t about to
trust this stranger. He needed to find Shiro.

“Wow, alright then. I just wanted to help.” The figure walked further into the room, closing the
door gently behind them.
Keith could see that it was a man, about the same age as him, with dark skin and large frame. Not
that he was fat, just bulky. Like he could pack a mean punch.

“I didn’t think you would be awake yet so I don’t have much with me, but there’s some water here,
and a few muffins from the kitchen. He walked towards Keith, who scurried backwards, feeling for
his sword, but all his weapons were gone.
Several curse words flew through his mind.
He was completely defenseless.

“Relax. I’m not going to attack you. It’s just a water bottle. Here, catch.” He tossed an object at
Keith, who caught it out of habit. At least his reflexes were working again.
It was, indeed, water, and Keith licked his chapped lips.
He downed it, not realizing how dehydrated he was, and wiped his face with the back of his hand.
His bare hand, he noticed.
Now his gloves were missing?
Great.

Still, Keith was grateful for the water.

“Thanks.” The stranger had been watching him with a bemused expression, like he was trying to
solve a puzzle.

“No worries man. There’s some more on the counter if you want.” He walked past Keith, towards
the bed with the other boy in it.
Keith decided he could trust this guy enough to ask about Shiro.

“Where is my br-” he stopped, not wanting to reveal his familial ties just yet. “My friend.”
The stranger looked back at him.

“Tall guy, white bangs and a scar across his nose?”
Keith nodded, hope sparking in his chest.

“He’s with Allura. She’s asking him some questions. I can take you to them in a bit if you want.”
Keith’s head filled with questions. Who was Allura? Why was she questioning his brother? Where the heck were they?

But for the most part he felt relieved.
Shiro was ok. That was all he needed to know.
The boy went back to what he was doing, and Keith decided he could wait a few minutes to see Shiro. Now that he knew his brother was alive, his mind began to focus on other things. Like how hungry he was.
Keith wandered over to the counter where the stranger had left the muffins, and took one, sniffing it before taking a bite.
He barely tasted it as he scoffed it back, reaching for the other and a second bottle of water.

When he finished he edged closer to the stranger, who was checking on the bandaged figure in bed. He noticed the look of concern that was etched on the larger boy’s face, and wondered at their relationship.
The stranger noticed his staring and gave him a pained smile, but didn’t say anything. Instead he got up, retrieved his bag from the counter, and motioned for Keith to follow him.

“I uh-” Keith looked down at his bare feet, and the stranger followed his gaze.

“Oh geez. Sorry!” He walked over to a closet Keith hadn’t noticed before and retrieved his boots, as well as his jacket and bag.
Keith ran forward to accept them.
He didn’t own much, not after travelling for so long, so the few possessions he still had were incredibly precious to him. He tugged on his boots and coat, and slung the bag over his shoulder, grateful for its familiar weight.

“What about my weapons?”
The stranger looked sheepish.

“Actually I can’t give those to you...not until Allura says so.”
That ticked Keith off. He had a right to his items. But the boy in front of him looked stronger, and though Keith could probably take him, he wasn’t exactly prepared for a fight. Besides, he was taking him to see Shiro.
So instead he frowned and followed the other boy outside.

It was bright out, and Keith judged it to be around midday. The afternoon sun was warm against his skin, and he closed his eyes as he felt the heat on his face.

“I’m Hunk by the way.” The stranger was holding out a hand, and Keith eyed it skeptically. He wasn’t much for physical contact, not with strangers anyways, but Shiro had always been fond of manners, so Keith shook it.
"What kind of name is Hunk?"
Keith hadn’t meant to say it out loud, and blushed, ready to apologize. But Hunk was laughing.

"It’s more of a nickname really. Lance coined it, and it just sort of stuck."
"Who’s Lance?"

Hunk’s face dropped, his smile fading.

"He’s my best friend.” He didn’t elaborate, but Keith knew enough about body language to not pry further. “What’s your name by the way?” The smile was back on Hunk’s face, and Keith wondered how genuine it was.

"Keith."
"Well, nice to meet you Keith.” He gave Keith a half smile, and they walked the rest of the way in silence.

They approached a large, wooden cabin and Hunk stopped just shy of the steps.

"Allura and your friend are in there. I have to check on some things, otherwise I’d join you.” Hunk turned to leave. “Also, just a word of advice. Allura can be pretty intense, and I get the feeling you are as well. Try not to butt heads if you can help it. She runs this camp, and will ultimately decide if you stay or not.” Keith eyed the cabin skeptically. He turned back to Hunk, but the boy was already walking away.

Keith watched him go, wondering what he had meant about him being intense. He would have pondered it further but Shiro was just beyond that front door. Keith took the stairs two at a time, ignoring the protest of his leg muscles, and entered the cabin without knocking.
A man with a pretty impressive mustache was sitting at a table near the door, and jumped when Keith barged in.

"Excuse me young man but there is currently a meeting in progress. You can’t just barge-"

"Where’s Shiro?"
The man looked miffed at being interrupted, but understanding dawned on his features as he recognized Keith as one of the strangers who had been brought to camp.

"Oh, you’re awake. I apologize. Someone should have been at the infirmary when you woke up.” He rose from his seat and came around the table to greet Keith. He held out a hand, which Keith was forced to shake. “I’m Coran, head of the Hermes cabin and right hand to-"
Keith interrupted him again.

"That’s great, but I would really like to see Shiro.” His patience was wearing thin. He wanted to see his brother.
The man, Coran, huffed, but decided that the boy had been through enough, and didn’t need to be reprimanded right then.
He led Keith up a set of stairs to an office, where he knocked upon entering. A woman with startling white hair and coffee coloured skin glanced up at them. Keith judged that she was attractive, but he had never been very interested in women. As it was, her electric blue eyes were ringed with dark circles, as if she hadn’t slept in a few days. Keith shifted his focus to the man sitting in front of her, who was slowly turning around to see who had intruded.

“Shiro!”
Keith leapt forward and engulfed him in a hug. Shiro, who was only half way out of his chair, grunted at the impact, and Keith let go immediately.
Stupid. He should have remembered Shiro’s broken ribs.

“Sorry.”
But Shiro was smiling, his eyes scanning Keith’s face.

“Are you alright?”
“I should be asking you that! You’re the one that was knocked out by a giant!”
Shiro chuckled, but groaned when the action jarred his ribs. The concern must have been evident on Keith’s face, because Shiro quickly reassured him that he was fine.

“It’s nothing really. Just a few cracked ribs and a minor concussion. I’ll be one-hundred percent in no time thanks to Allura here.” Shiro gestured to the woman sitting across from them, and Keith turned his attention back to her. She smiled, but it looked forced, like she wanted to get back to business, but was reluctant to interrupt the reunion.
She gestured to the chair beside Shiro, and Keith took it.

“I am Allura, head counselor at this camp. And you must be Keith.” Keith had been expecting another handshake, but the woman simply tilted her head in greeting. He decided he liked her.

“Coran, would you be so kind as to bring our guests some refreshments?”
The man nodded and left, closing the door softly behind him. She regarded the two of them for a moment before continuing, her eyes distant, like there was a million conversations going on in her head and she was trying to decide which one to begin with.

“Keith, Shiro has told me most of what occurred a few days ago, but there are some questions-”
Keith held up a hand to stop her.

“A few days ago?”
Allura nodded.

“You’ve been out for about two days. You must have been exhausted.”
Keith was in disbelief. Two days?! Shiro put a hand on his knee.
“I only woke up about a few hours ago. I figured you needed the rest.”
“You need rest as well! You were hurt way worse than I was!”
Shiro shook his head.

“Don’t remind me.”
Allura cleared her throat, eager to get back on topic.
“Yes, well, I’ll have healers come and check on you after I’ve determined a few things. If you’ll allow me to continue.” It was more a demand than a request, and she cocked one eyebrow accusingly at Keith. He gulped and nodded.
Hunk was right about her being intense. He decided to follow the boy’s advice.

“Thank you.” She glanced down at a piece of paper in front of her, grabbing a pen from a cup on her desk. “You are a demigod, but I’m sure you are aware of that by now.”
Keith nodded. He had only recently discovered his half-godly heritage, and was still coming to terms with it. Allura continued.

“And your brother is fully human.”
Keith glanced at Shiro, but he was looking at his hands, so he just nodded again. So Shiro had told her they were family. What else had he said?

“Do you know who your godly parent is?” Shiro’s head snapped up at that, a look of dread on his face.
It made Keith’s gut twist with anxiety.

“No. My mom, our mom,” he gestured between them, “never spoke about him.” That wasn’t entirely true, but Keith wasn’t willing to reveal that much about his life.

He knew that his mother had had an affair with his father. Not that it was her fault; he had seduced her. But it had put a lot of strain on her marriage with Shiro’s father. He was in the army, and had come back from deployment to find her with a new baby. In the end he divorced her, and she was left alone with two kids to raise.
Keith loved his mother, and it still pained him to think about her death, but the cancer had spread too quickly for them to control.
He forced his mind away from those memories, locking them away in the back of his mind.
She had told him about his heritage when it became apparent that she was not going to make it, and Keith had originally refused to believe it.
Gods? Existing?
It didn’t make sense.

But Shiro was able to convince him of the truth. The sudden barrage of monster attacks further endorsed the fact.
But aside from that Keith didn’t know much. Not that he wanted to. His biological father had never been around. He didn’t even show up for his mother’s funeral.
Keith felt anger bubble in his stomach.
Shiro was watching him carefully, and Keith blinked, clearing his mind of the memories. He didn’t want to lose his temper now.

Allura was regarding him with skeptical eyes, like she knew he wasn’t telling her the truth. But she
didn’t pursue it, which made Keith grateful.

“No worries, you’ll be claimed eventually.” Keith wasn’t sure what that meant, but Allura didn’t elaborate. “How long have you been on the run?” Shiro answered her.

“About two weeks. When our mother passed away we were attacked by monsters. She had warned us that might happen, and had given me the location of a place where Keith would be safe.” Keith was staring at his brother in confusion. Shiro had never told him it was their mother that had given them the map. What else was he keeping from him?

Allura raised her eyebrows at the information.

“You were never attacked before then?”

Shiro shook his head.

“Our scent was able to cover up Keith’s for the most part, and the monsters that did venture too close we took care of.” Keith blanched.

“Wait...what?!” Shiro didn’t look at him. “You were fighting monsters and didn’t tell me? I could have helped! How long were you and mom doing that?!” Shiro took a deep breath.

“Ever since you were born.” Keith felt his chest tighten. All this time he had thought the monsters had only showed up after his mom had died. All this time Shiro had known he wasn’t fully human, and Keith had been kept in the dark up until a few weeks ago. He wasn’t sure what to feel: guilt, anger, or betrayal.

“All this time you knew...and you didn’t tell me. All this time you and mom were fighting monsters and I was oblivious to it.” He stood, knocking his chair back a few inches. “If I had known I would have left!” “That’s why we didn’t tell you.” “But I was putting you in danger!” Shiro grabbed at his sleeve, but Keith tugged it away. He didn’t want comfort right now. He wanted answers. And then a thought occurred to him. A heart wrenching connection.

“Mom didn’t die from cancer, did she.” Shiro’s mouth fell open but no words came out. Keith felt something in his chest snap. “Shiro. What happened to mom.” Shiro clenched his jaw, but there was no use lying anymore.

“She was poisoned. A chimera followed you home one night. Mom had the Sight, meaning she
could see through the mist that most monsters use to glamour themselves. She told me to get you far away from the apartment.” Shiro took a shaky breath. “I tried to refuse. I wanted to help, but she said this one was too dangerous. She couldn’t take the risk of both of us getting injured.”

Keith’s breathing was ragged as Shiro continued.

“When we came back she was already asleep, and when I asked her what had happened the next morning she told me everything was fine. I didn’t know at the time that she had been bitten by the snake. I could have gotten her help. But the poison was spreading too quickly. She got sicker, and she finally told me the truth. That was the day we admitted her to the hospital, but it was too late.”

Keith recalled the day Shiro was referring to. He had known for a while that something was wrong with his mother. She was always tired, and was throwing up constantly. It made sense when the doctors had called it cancer, and Keith had been ignorantly hopeful that the chemo would work. But of course it wouldn’t. She never had cancer. She had been killed by a monster. And it was all his fault.

Keith didn’t realize there were tears in his eyes until one overflowed and ran down his cheek.

“Keith. It’s not your fault. It was an accident. If anyone is to blame it’s me. I should have been there to help her!” Shiro was standing now, and was reaching towards Keith, but Keith moved away from him. Allura was standing now as well, but she didn’t say anything.

“It’s my fault. It’s all my fault.” Keith whispered to himself. His mind was reeling, his body going into shock. “No, Keith, please listen to me!”

“GET AWAY FROM ME!” Keith bellowed and ran for the door, yanking it open with such force it nearly flew off the hinges. He could hear Shiro calling after him, and Allura as well, but he didn’t stop. He nearly collided with Coran as he rounded the corner, and the man called after him, but Keith’s mind was on autopilot. He needed to get away from them. He needed to be alone.

He bolted out the front door of the cabin and ran. He didn’t know where he was going, just that he had to be by himself. He needed time to think. Faces streamed past him; some stopped to stare while others called after him. He didn’t stop.

Tears blurred his vision but still he ran. Ran until his lungs burned, and his legs seized. He welcomed the pain. He deserved it.

It was all.

His.
Keith finally came to a stop when he tripped on something, his hands catching most of the fall as he toppled head over heels. When he came to a halt he didn’t even bother getting up. He had no idea where he had ended up, but it was quiet, and the ground was soft with moss underneath him. He curled into a ball and let his emotions escape. Memories of his mother flashed in his mind’s eye. Her laugh. Her smile. Her entire being!

She was gone, and it was all because of Keith.
What other damage had he inflicted?
Who else’s lives had he ruined just by being alive?

Did Shiro’s father actually divorce their mom? Or had he been killed as well!? Killed by monsters that had only ever wanted Keith!

Keith. Who had only been born because some idiot god hadn’t been able to keep it in their pants! He didn’t know who his real father was, but he decided then and there that he would never accept him. Not after what he did. Not after what he created, and then abandoned.

Keith sobbed as the intrusive thoughts set up camp in his head, not caring if someone heard him. Not caring if monsters found him. He deserved to be attacked. Yearned for it even.

But nothing came, and as the silence stretched on, Keith let himself fall into it.
Memories and worry

Chapter Summary

Hunk helps the other stranger out.

Chapter Notes

EDIT:
..im so tired..
Please. Space. Paragraphs.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The dining hall had been nearly empty when Hunk made his way into the back kitchens; lunch having come and gone. He normally would have cared about missing it, but the past few days had had him stressed.

Lance had him stressed.

But when didn’t he?

The boy was a source of constant worry, and Hunk was sure that he lost years of his life every time Lance got into trouble. At this rate he was going to die in his twenties.

Hunk cringed at the thought of death. Vivid memories of Lance covered in blood, his body limp and pulse weak, made Hunk shudder. He had almost lost his best friend.

Hunk forced his mind away from the thoughts. Lance was alive. And Hunk would be the first person he saw when he woke up. They would hug and laugh, and hopefully not cry, and then everything would be back to normal.

Right?
He grabbed some more water from one of the fridges, as well as more muffins and a banana. The stranger, Keith, had eaten most of the supplies Hunk had originally brought for Lance, but he didn’t mind. The boy had looked terrified. Terrified and hungry.

But even in his newly woken up state, Keith had been intimidating. It was his eyes mostly. They were intense, and carried a great deal of anger in them. Hunk had felt them digging into the back of his skull as he had checked on Lance, and had cut the check-up short in order to get Keith back to his friend.
He didn’t fully trust the new addition to their camp. Not yet at least.

Hunk shouldered his bag and made his way back to the infirmary. The afternoon sun was hot on
his back, and he scowled up at it. The day had no business being nice. Not when his best friend was injured.

But that was petty thinking, and he sent up a silent apology to his mother, who was the goddess of seasons, particularly summer. The last thing he needed was an offended deity.

Hunk could hear voices as he drew nearer to the infirmary, and hesitated just before entering, to see who was inside talking.

It wasn’t Lance, and Hunk gulped as he recognized who was speaking.

Sabrina.

Hunk gulped and opened the door just a hair to hear her words better. He didn’t really enjoy spying on others, but he was curious as to what Lance’s half-sister was saying.

“-such a stupid thing to do. You could have been killed you know that?” Her voice was shaky, as if she was on the verge of crying. Hunk wished he could see her face.

“And then what? Who would I get to tease? Who would I get to braid my hair, or give me dating advice? I need you Lance. I mean, I’ll never admit it to your face, but you’re like, the best brother in the world.” There was a moment of silence, and Hunk held his breath, scared at making any noise and being discovered. It was rare for Sabrina to show this side of herself. Hunk hadn’t even known it existed.

“You’re lucky. That’s the only reason you’re still alive.” She sniffed. “Oh and don’t think this means you get out of our bet. I won fair and square. You still owe me.” Hunk could hear the scuffle of a chair as Sabrina stood, and he quickly ran to the edge of the building where she wouldn’t see him. Sabrina exited the building moments later, wiping her face as she looked both ways, making sure no one was around to see her. She lifted her chin and tossed her hair over her shoulder, and in a split second the Sabrina Hunk knew was back.

Proud, confident, scary Sabrina.

He waited for her to leave before entering the cabin.

Lance was in the same position he had been in when Hunk had first visited, but someone had been in to remove the sheets from the bed Keith had been in, and the bandages on Lance’s face and head were fresh.

Hunk had been going to change them originally, but Keith had distracted him, and in that time someone, probably one of the Apollo kids, had done the task for him. Not that he was complaining. He wasn’t entirely sure if he was ready to see what his friend looked like beneath the dressings. The healers had said that most of the damage had been to the side of his head, around the temple, which was why he was still knocked out, but there had been a deep gash around his eyebrow, and had required stitches.

Hunk wasn’t sure how Lance would react to having a scar in such a noticeable area.

He sat down in the chair Sabrina had been in and dropped his bag. Lance was still asleep, and the portion of his face not shrouded in cloth was relaxed. They must have given him something for the pain as well.
“Hang in there buddy.”

“How is he?” Hunk hadn’t heard Pidge enter, and as he looked up he saw the boy (Hunk could tell he was male today) approach, his hands deep in his pockets. Hunk returned his attention to Lance.

“I haven’t spoken to any of the healers recently but I think he’s ok. I mean, he got hit pretty hard.”

“Yeah but, he’s been out for two days now. The other guys woke up already. Why hasn’t Lance?” Hunk didn’t reply. Worry knotted his gut, and he feared his voice would betray him if he spoke. Pidge sat down across from him.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you worry. It’s just...you never think this stuff will happen, and when it does you’re kind of thrown for a loop.”

Hunk nodded.

“I wish there was more I could do...” Hunk glanced up at Pidge then, and saw the concern etched in his features. Hunk wasn’t the only one missing Lance.

“He’ll wake up soon enough. You know how he is, always sleeping in, and taking naps. Lazy bugger. He’s basically a sloth.”

Pidge chuckled at that.

“A really good looking sloth.”

“Practically a model.”

“Lance: the sloth model. Can we call him that from now on?” Hunk grinned, but it faded as he remembered the damage to Lance’s face. Pidge must have realized what Hunk was thinking, and spoke.

“Do you think he’ll have a scar?”

Hunk glanced up again and considered.

“Most likely. Even with the experienced healers, there’s only so much one can do. I just hope Lance is ok with it. You know how he can be.”

“If you’re referring to the pimple incident, then yes.” That had felt like ages ago. So much had happened in the last three days that Hunk had nearly forgotten.

“There’s more to Lance than just his looks though. You know it, I know it.” He thought back to the conversation he had overheard with Sabrina. “A lot of people know it. I just hope he does.”

Pidge nodded, but before he could reply the door to the infirmary burst open.

“Keith!”

It was the older stranger, the one with white bangs and the scar. His eyes were frantic as he searched the room, coming to a halt on Hunk and Pidge.

“Have you seen my brother?”

“Brother?” Pidge had turned in his seat to face to the intruder.
“Yes. He ran off after-” The man stopped, shaking his head as if he had forgotten he was with other people. “I need to find him. I need to explain...”

Hunk and Pidge exchanged a look, and they quickly got up to help the stranger.

“Here, you should sit down.” Hunk reached for a chair but the man shook his head again.

“No. No I need to find Keith.”

“You’re really in no condition to be running around camp looking for your friend. You only just got up!” Pidge barely came up to the man’s chest, but his words were commanding, and the stranger glanced down at him, as if noticing his presence for the first time.

Pidge continued.

“Tell us what happened.”

“We were talking to your leader, Allura, and some things happened, and Keith got upset and ran out. I need to find him and explain myself.” The man sat and put his head in his hands. “I shouldn’t have said anything. I’m so stupid!”

Hunk crouched so they were eye level.

“Listen. We’ll help look, but I need you to stay here. You need to rest.”

“No!” The man stood again, and Hunk fell back in surprise.

“Ok, ok!” Pidge had his arms out, trying to keep the stranger from falling or bolting out the door.

“You can come with us.”

“Pidge that’s not really a good-”

“Hunk, does it look like he’s going to listen to you anyway?”

Hunk considered, then sighed in response.

“Fine.”

Relief flooded the man’s face.

“Thank you!”

Hunk went to retrieve his bag. He wasn’t impressed that he was leaving Lance’s side once again, but the man looked worried, and Hunk could relate to that.

The three of them ducked out of the infirmary and into the bright sunlight.

“I’m Shiro by the way.” The man extended a hand out in greeting, and Pidge and Hunk shook it, introducing themselves as they did.

“Nice to meet you. Now...do you have any idea where he went?” Their camp was pretty big, and Hunk didn’t want to spend all day looking for Keith. He had to be there when Lance woke up. Unfortunately the man, Shiro, shook his head.

“He was out the door before I could see which direction he went.”

Pidge groaned.

“Great. Is he, by any chance, really good at hiding?”

Hunk could tell from the look of guilt on Shiro’s face that Keith was, in fact, a professional.

“But I know the places he likes to go when he’s upset. Anywhere quiet, with no one around. And he likes to get high.”

Hunk raised an eyebrow at that last bit, and Shiro noticed.
“Not like that. I mean he’ll climb stuff. Building, towers. Anything that gets him off the ground.”
Hunk processed the information, trying to think of possible places. Pidge answered first.

“Our camp is relatively flat, but he could have climbed one of the cabins.”
Shiro shook his head.

“I don’t think so. It’s too crowded, and Keith doesn’t know anyone here.”
Hunk had been thinking of the cabin rooves as well, mostly because he didn’t particularly like the
other place he had thought of.
He sighed, seeing no alternative.

“Then we should check the forest.”
Pidge gave him an incredulous look.

“That would take forever! The forest is huge!”
“I know a place...Lance likes to go there a lot.” He turned to Shiro. “There’s this one really old tree
on the westward side of the woods. I’m not sure if it’s the tallest, but it’s pretty high, and the
branches are perfect for climbing. I would know. Lance has fallen out of them on more than one
occasion.”
Shiro was nodding his head.

“Then we should check there first.”
“You guys go on ahead. I’ll see if my helmet piece can detect anything.”
Hunk turned to Pidge.

“Didn’t that not work?”
“What do you mean? It detected those giants!”
“Sure, but it didn’t pick of these two at all. Or Lance for that matter.”
Pidge scowled.

“It needs some modifications! And monsters have different signals than us. And it was being used
in long-range. And-” Hunk interrupted.
“Ok sorry. Geez. Tell Allura where we’re going then.”
Pidge harrumphed, but nodded, and turned to leave.
Shiro watched him go, then turned to look at Hunk.

“Helmet piece?”
“Long story.”
Shiro nodded, and Hunk amended, realizing his answer had been curt.
“Well, not long so much as confusing. It’s been a hectic few days.”

Shiro chuckled at that, making Hunk glance at him in surprise. He didn’t know much about the
brothers, but he got the feeling they were polar opposites. Shiro seemed kinder, more thoughtful,
whereas Keith was hostile and impulsive.
“You’re telling me.”
Maybe he was jumping to conclusions. Or stereotyping. Or both.
Hunk chastised himself. He had never believed in first impressions, since people tended to change constantly, yet there he was judging these two strangers. He made a mental note to get to know them better once things settled down.
Once Lance woke up.

“So...Keith is your brother?”
Shiro nodded, but he was distracted. They were making their way through camp, and he was searching every nook they passed. Maybe the small talk could wait.

They reached the forest edge and followed a well-worn path for about ten minutes, then Hunk turned off, leading Shiro down a less travelled route.

“Thank you for helping me by the way.” Shiro’s voice sounded behind him, and Hunk would have turned, but he was focusing on the ground, careful to watch his footing.
“No problem. I mean, I would be pretty worried if something happened to my brother as well.”
“Like Lance?”
Hunk did look back this time.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that-” But Hunk smiled.

“No, it’s ok. Lance isn’t my brother, but he could be. He’s my best friend.”
Shiro gave him a half-smile, but his eyes were sad.

“Allura told me what happened, what she knew anyways. I owe your friend a debt. My life even.”
Hunk was gaping, but the statement was shocking.
Lance had saved these guy’s lives. Or at least played a large role in it.
But at what cost?
Hunk nodded and turned back around. He didn’t want to think about that. Lance was going to be ok.

They remained in silence for the rest of the walk, until they finally reached their destination.

“Well, this is it.” Shiro moved passed Hunk and made his way to the base of the tree.
It was an oak, probably close to five-hundred years old, with gnarly bark and thick, twisting branches.
Lance had often dragged Hunk out this way. He had discovered the tree years ago, and had convinced Hunk to help him build a tree fort in its mighty limbs. They had only gotten the base in though. Lance broke his arm after falling from one of the higher branches, and when they had gotten back to camp, Allura had forbade them from going back to the tree.
Not that Lance had listened.

But Hunk had refused to help him after that. As if was they were punished with cleaning the dinner dishes for a month.
So the project had been abandoned. Still, Lance would venture out this way when he felt down or if he needed to get away. Sometimes Hunk would join him, if he knew Allura was away or too busy to notice their absence, but as he grew older he stopped. It had been a while since Hunk had actually been to visit the old tree. The memories were bittersweet, and Hunk called out to Shiro.
“Listen, I really have to get back and check on Lance. You can find your way back right?” Shiro stopped and examined him, then nodded and waved.
“Thanks Hunk.”
He hated leaving Shiro alone, but he needed to be with his best friend.

All the time he could have spent with Lance felt wasted.
He wanted to finish the tree house. He wanted to build it with Lance.
He didn’t care if Allura found out and made them wash dishes for the rest of their lives.
As long as Hunk was with Lance it didn’t matter.
He needed to be there when he woke up.

And he would wake up.
He had to.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter titles are hard...

Also, let me know if I have anything wrong with the gender representations (with Pidge). I'm hoping I have the pronouns and understandings correct, but feel free to correct me and I'll change them right away.

:)
Shiro watched Hunk as he left, making sure he knew where the path out was. The old oak stood out in the grove of trees, towering over many of them. It wasn’t the tallest, like Hunk had mentioned, but it was wide, and its branches extended well into the surrounding canopy.

Shiro approached the trunk, hoping that Keith was there. He was worried about his brother. Keith tended to overreact, and blow things out of proportion, but Shiro couldn’t blame this on those traits. This one was on him.

He didn’t know why he had revealed the secrets he had kept for so long. It was foolish, especially in their situation. They were in a new place, among strangers, having just woken up from weeks’ worth of injuries and exhaustion, and were both still in shock from the giant attack. Shiro would have kept the truth from Keith for as long as he could, but talking to Allura had muddled his mind.

There was something about her that compelled him to tell the truth. Her eyes maybe, which were an intense blue; intelligent and sharp.

He could get lost in those eyes.
And he had, which was how he had ended up in this situation.
Stupid. He should have known how Keith would react. He was his brother for crying out loud.

But at the same time Shiro felt a sense of relief now that Keith knew the truth, like he didn’t have to carry this heavy burden alone anymore. It was freeing, but also made his soul heavy with guilt. He needed to apologize, and explain.

Shiro walked around the base of the tree, his head tilted up to scan the many branches. It was difficult to see much; the foliage was thick and the canopy dark.
A string of curses flew through his mind. He didn’t want to call out in case Keith wasn’t in this tree and heard him, because he would just end up running away again. So Shiro would have to climb up.

He gripped the bottommost branch, wincing as his ribs screamed in protest as he hoisted himself up.
He allowed himself a moment of reprieve before continuing his ascent. He really hoped Keith was
here. He wasn’t enthusiastic about climbing every goddamn tree in this forest. But he would do it if he had to.

About midway up, Shiro spotted a large wooden platform. It blocked the upper branches from view, and Shiro wondered what it was. He pulled himself up onto it, but Keith wasn’t there. He let himself rest there for a moment, scanning the surrounding area.

The branches here opened up, revealing a spectacular view of the camp. Shiro hadn’t realized how large it was, and he counted more than fifteen cabins, all of varying sizes and shapes. A lake bordered the cabins on one side, and in the far distance Shiro could make out the snowy peaks of mountains. It was beautiful and serene, and for a moment he could forget about the monsters that bordered the edges of the camp, not to mention the countless demigods that lived below. He was after all, a single human, surrounded by powerful beings.

The thought made him shiver.

Shiro turned his attention back to the platform. It was sturdily built, but the nails were beginning to rust, and the wood was rotting away in places. He wondered at its purpose, and as he looked up once again, it clicked. Another, smaller platform was a few branches up, but Shiro was grateful to discover that there were blocks of wood that had been hammered into the trunk of the tree, forming a make-shift ladder.

So he was in a tree house. Or, what would have been a tree house. It didn’t look finished, as if it had been abandoned, but not forgotten. The wood was smooth and worn as Shiro climbed up, as if someone had been using them over the years.

He briefly wondered who, but forgot as soon as he reached the upper platform. There he was, his back to him and legs tucked up.

Keith.

Shiro swallowed, preparing himself for the upcoming conversation.

He cleared his throat, so as not to scare his brother, but Shiro knew that Keith could hear him. His senses had always been keen.

“Hey.”

Keith didn’t respond, and as Shiro moved to sit next to him, he just lifted his head from his arms and stared straight ahead. Shiro followed his gaze, looking out at a new part of camp he didn’t recognize. It was an open clearing, with various equipment set out. Shiro squinted to see better, and realized there were several figures in the clearing, holding weapons and fighting each other. It was a training arena.

Shiro smiled despite himself. Of course Keith would be drawn there. He was a good fighter, and learned quickly.

Shiro thought back to when he was eight, and Keith was one. His father had recently divorced their mom, and things weren’t the best. But still his mother smiled, and loved. The monster attacks were few and far between, but still occurred. Shiro remembered the first time he saw one. They were at the park, and his mother had been staring at a dark alley across the street. She was on edge, and had begun to pack up their things, asking Shiro to get Keith and start home. And then he had seen it.

A small worm-like creature slithered out of the alley, and Shiro had originally thought it was a snake, but the thing had two protrusions emerging from its back. Wings. He had screamed, pointing at it, and his mother had turned back to him.
That was when she realized that Shiro also had the Sight; that he could see through the mist. Like her.

Instead of fighting the beast, she had grabbed him by the hand, taking Keith in the other arm, and ran home. Then she had explained. About the monsters, about the gods, about Keith’s dad. It hadn’t made much sense, but Shiro trusted his mother, and understood enough of what she had said to know that Keith was in danger. She enrolled him in martial art lessons the next day.

And he had been fighting ever since. But Keith was a natural. His body moved easily, reacting the right way every time, and he picked up moves quickly. They were both experts at hand to hand combat when their mother had died, but Shiro had been practicing with weapons for much longer than Keith, and was worried about having to fend off monsters without her there. But Keith had surprised him.

The night their mother had passed was the worst of Shiro’s life. He was terrified, heartbroken and grieving, but he had had to be strong for Keith. Keith, who had just had his whole world turned upside-down. Their mother had told him everything before she died. About his father and how they had met, how he had been drawn to her because she had the Sight. About the promise she had made to keep their child safe. She had told him about the monsters, and how to fight them. Shiro had already known most of what she told Keith, but noticed that she left out the bit about why she was dying. She knew Keith would only blame himself if he found out she had been poisoned by the Chimera, so she stuck with the cancer story. Still, Keith was in turmoil; confused and in shock. They both were.

They were attacked that night, and Shiro had yelled for Keith to run, but he hadn’t. Instead, his brother had grabbed a large piece of pipe and attacked the creature alongside Shiro. His body had reacted perfectly, dodging and spinning with pin-point precision. It had been beautiful to watch, and Shiro would have been beaming with pride if the circumstances were different. As it were, they both bolted back to their apartment once the creature was dead, not waiting for it to turn to ash like most did after dying. His mother had taught him to scatter the ashes, giving them a longer interval between reincarnations, but they hadn’t had time that night. They needed to leave.

Shiro had the map tucked safely in his bag, along with his sword and numerous knives, when he handed Keith their mother’s weapon. It was longsword, similar to Shiro’s but more intricate. Their mother had had to use both hands to wield it, but she had used it proficiently. Shiro had always assumed she had bought it, but when Keith grasped the handle, it had vibrated, glowing a peculiar shade of crimson. It lasted only a moment, but the boys had watched with open mouths as the blade shrunk slightly in his hands, growing light enough so that he could hold it in one hand. It had morphed to fit him perfectly. Shiro guessed that it had belonged to Keith’s father, seeing as magical swords weren’t that common among human shops. Keith had stared at it in shock, but they didn’t have time to wonder at its powers. They needed to run.
And so they had.

Shiro hadn’t really needed to teach Keith about wielding the blade. He swung it with the ease and confidence of someone with years of experience. Shiro was never jealous at his expertise though, choosing instead to admire the grace with which his younger brother moved when he fought. It was a relief really.
He didn’t have to fight alone.

Still, the battles were difficult, and as they got closer and closer to their destination, Shiro’s panic grew. He worried about Keith. They were both injured and exhausted, and he wasn’t sure how much longer they could keep at it.
But Keith had changed. He was fine when they were just travelling, but when monsters showed up it was like a different side of him emerged. A bloodthirsty side. On several occasions Shiro had seen him go berserk, swinging his sword with such deadly competence and speed that Shiro wasn’t sure it was humanly possible.
But then again, Keith wasn’t fully human.
Sometimes, and maybe he had been imagining it in his exhausted state, Shiro could have sworn Keith was glowing red. Not so much his skin, but his aura, like when you squint at a bright light and your vision blurs.
But Shiro didn’t want to dwell on those memories. They were safe now, for the time-being anyway.

He turned to look at his younger brother, and sighed.
“Keith, I’m so sorry.” Keith didn’t turn, but his eyes closed as he took a deep breath, as if to ground himself. His voice was a hoarse whisper when he replied.
“I know.”
“I need you to know that it was not your fault.”
Keith didn’t reply, and Shiro scooted closer.

“What was that?” Keith turned to him then.
“No.”
“I need you to admit it.”
“Admit what.”
“That it wasn’t your fault.”
Keith shook his head and Shiro grabbed his shoulder, preventing him from turning away.

“Keith.”
Still he ignored him.

“Fine! I admit it!”
“Admit what?” Keith scowled at him.
“That it wasn’t my fault. There. You happy now?” Keith tried to scoot away but there was limited space on the platform, and Shiro was faster. He engulfed Keith in a hug, pulling his head down to his shoulder and not letting go even as Keith struggled.

“Shiro let me go!”

But it was Shiro’s turn for silence, and as he held Keith in his arms he felt the boy relax, until finally Keith hugged back. They remained like that for a while, not speaking, simply savouring the comfort of the embrace.

Finally Shiro loosened his grip, allowing Keith to straighten. His eyes were rimmed with red, but no tears fell.

“I just miss her. And I can’t help but feel responsible. If I had just left...” Keith trailed off, looking down at his hands. Shiro noticed he had his fingerless gloves back on, but they were torn and ragged looking.

He made a mental note to get him a new pair.

“I miss her as well. But do you really think she would have let you go?”

Keith looked back to him.

“No of course not, but I wouldn’t have let her know. I would have ran away if it meant she would be safe. And you as well.”

“Would that have made her happy?”

Keith was silent as he considered.

“...No.”

“And would she have resumed her life, not caring that you left?”

“No, but-”

“Then what makes you think she would have been better off if you had left?”

Keith was staring at him now, his eyebrows knitted together in frustration, but as Shiro spoke his features relaxed.

“Yeah...I guess you’re right.”

“Hmm? What was that just now?”

“Shut up.”

But Keith was smiling, and he bumped Shiro’s arm. It hadn’t been a hard hit, but Shiro winced as pain rocketed up his side, the movement having jarred his ribs. Keith’s face contorted with panic.

“Shoot sorry! Are you ok? I totally forgot about your ribs!”

Shiro managed to smile at him, and held out a hand.

“It’s ok. I’m ok. Just a little bruised.”

“And you climbed all the way up here!”

Shiro nodded, and Keith smacked himself in the forehead.

“Shiro you moron! Why didn’t you just call my name like a normal person! I would have come down!”

Shiro raised an eyebrow.
“Would you have?”
Keith opened his mouth to reply, but shut it hastily as he realized that no, he wouldn’t have. He would have remained silent until Shiro left, so that he could continue his brooding.

“My point exactly. I know you too well lil bro.” Shiro let his feet swing over the edge of the platform, glancing down at the ground. They were pretty high up, and the vertigo was sickening. He leaned back. “Still, you could have picked a shorter tree to hide in.”
Keith chuckled despite himself, glancing at their surroundings.

“It’s kinda cool though. Like a secret fort someone was building. I tripped on that root down there,” he pointed and Shiro followed his hand. “and just, laid on the ground for a bit. But then I realized I had no weapons, and if something were to attack me I would be found dead in the fetal position.” Shiro was staring at him in horror but Keith continued. “So I climbed this tree.” He shrugged.

“Climbed it so that your poor, exceedingly handsome, incredibly strong, older brother would be forced to follow after you? Very kind.”
Keith blushed in embarrassment but smiled.

“It shouldn’t have been that hard a task for such a brother then.”
Shiro smiled back, glad that Keith was feeling good enough to sass him. He ruffled his brother’s hair with his hand. It had grown quite a bit in the last few weeks, and now hung at his shoulders, with long bangs draping over his face.

“You need a haircut. You look like a hobo.”
Keith laughed.

“Gee. Thanks.” He ran his hands through it, pulling loose strands away from his face. “I actually kind of like it. The weight of it anyway.” He let his hands fall and the hair sprang forward again. Shiro frowned.

“At least cut the front then, so I can see your beautiful face.” Shiro pinched Keith’s cheeks and cooed.

“You can have a wittle muwwet. Wittle Keif wif his wong hair-” Keith pushed his hands away, but was blushing, and Shiro laughed. “You’re so annoying.” But Keith was grinning now.

“That’s what brothers are for. Besides, I haven’t seen you smile like that in a while.” Keith nodded, his face falling slightly as thoughts raced around his mind.

“Do you think we’ll be safe here?” The question startled Shiro. He hadn’t really considered their next plan of action. They had reached the camp sure, but what did they do now?

“I’m not sure. You’ll definitely be safe. It’s meant for demigods...but as for me...” Shiro trailed off
and Keith whirled on him.

“I am not staying here without you. No way. Wherever you go, I go.”

Shiro gave him a half smile. He knew Keith was speaking the truth, but he was part god. Shiro wasn’t. This camp was not really meant for him.

But Keith didn’t need to hear that right now, so instead he nodded.

“Yeah I know. You’re more stubborn than a grease stain.”

“A grease stain? What the heck Shiro, who says that?”

“Only the wisest of men.” Keith groaned and rolled his eyes, making Shiro chuckle. His brother was in better spirits, and that made Shiro feel at ease. They watched the figures training in the clearing bellow, for a while, until Shiro noticed how long the shadows had grown. It was getting late.

“We should head back to camp actually. You kind of ran out on Allura, and I’m sure she had more questions.”

Keith bowed his head in shame.

“Yeah I guess.” He was silent for a moment and then: “What do you think of her?”

“What do you mean?” Keith was glancing at Shiro, a sly smirk creeping across his face.

“I mean, she’s kinda pretty.” Shiro felt his face heat up as Keith continued. “And her hair is white, like yours. I bet you could borrow some of her hair dye when your roots start to come in.”

Keith huffed.

“Her hair is naturally white you dink.”

Keith’s eyebrows shot up.

“How do you know that! What were you two up to before I walked in?” Shiro’s face was a bright red as he realized what Keith was suggesting, and he swatted him on the shoulder.

“Her eyebrows are white. So are her eyelashes. Now get your head out of the gutter.” Shiro crawled across the platform, getting ready to descend the tree. Keith followed after him.

“Mm hmm. And why were you so close to her face to notice her eyelash colour?”

“Keith so help me I will push you out of this tree.” His face was burning, and he knew Keith could see his blush. But his little brother was laughing hysterically, so maybe he could forgive him.

They made their way down the oak from the first platform, Keith going first to help Shiro as they traversed the branches; his ribs crying in pain. Shiro was thankful when they finally touched ground.

He realized how hungry he was as they made their way back to camp after hearing Keith’s own stomach growl.

First food.

Then Allura.

Then sleep.

He was exhausted. Today had been stressful, and he was still a bit disorientated with everything that was going on.
He was sure Keith felt the same.
But at least they were together.

Shiro thought back to Hunk, and the way he had looked when he had mentioned the name Lance. Allura had told him only a brief account of what had happened with the giants, but he knew enough to know that the boy had saved them, and had gotten severely injured in the process. He hoped he would be ok, and added ‘thanking Lance’ to his list. They emerged from the forest and made their way back to the main cabin, since Shiro didn’t know how to get to the dining hall. Maybe Allura could take them.

He blushed slightly at the thought of her, then frowned.
What was wrong with him?
He shook his head, and noticed Keith staring at him.

“What?”
Keith gave him a half smile but didn’t say anything.
But Shiro knew what he was thinking. He just hoped Keith wouldn’t try and embarrass him in front of Allura.
Not that he cared much.
Or, at least, that’s what he told himself.

Only time would tell.
Lance: the insurmountable pain in the ass

Chapter Summary

Wonder boy awakens and two head strong children finally meet.

Chapter Notes

Finally a Lance chapter. It's a bit long but I haven't had his pov in a while. Also had some loose ends to tie up.
I maybe kinda have an idea of where I want this to go....

Maybe.
We'll see. :)

He could hear them approaching.
Their feet thunderous on the ground as they charged towards him.
He tried to move but his feet wouldn’t budge.
Any second they would be upon him, they would have him.

He watched as they raised their weapons and he braced for impact.
This was it.
He was going to die.
Three massive clubs descended on him; his vision darkening in their shadow.

And then he woke up.

Lance’s eyes shot open, his heart thumping as the dream faded away. He dared not move as he let his breathing calm, not knowing where he was.
The room was dark, but he could see the outline of what looked like several beds.

Was he in the infirmary?

So he was alive.
That’s a relief.

Lance made to get up, but felt hands gently push him back down.

“Woah, easy there.” Lance recognized the voice immediately.
He looked over to where it had originated, and as his vision adjusted to the low light, saw Hunk sitting in a chair beside his bed.
His best friend smiled down at him.

“How you feeling champ?”
Lance went to reply, but found his throat was too dry to formulate an actual sentence. He cleared his throat in an effort to lubricate it.
“Oh geez, here.” Hunk handed him a glass of water, which Lance drank greedily.

“Thanks.” His voice was raspy but at least it was working again. “What’s up?”

Hunk stared at him for a moment, then burst out laughing.
Lance watched him confusion.

“What?”
“It’s just,” Hunk said as he wheezed, “I was not expecting that.” He sighed as he looked back down at the bed. “I should be asking you instead.”
Lance flipped over so he could better see his friend.

“Oh, you know, just chilling in bed, having some...” he trailed off as he recalled his dream. He had been fighting the giants again, but this time no help came. He was alone. His legs wouldn’t move fast enough, and no words came from his mouth as he called for help. It had been awful, and Lance was glad to finally have awakened from it. “...pleasant dreams.” He finished. There was no need to worry Hunk.
Hunk harrumphed, not entirely convinced.

“You really know how to make a guy worry, you know that?”
Lance chuckled.

“It’s a gift.”
But Hunk didn’t laugh this time, or even smile. He was staring at Lance, a frown playing at his lips. His eyes looked tired as well, like he hadn’t slept in a few days.

“Hunk...are you okay?”
He saw his friend’s resolve shatter.

“There you go again, asking about me when you’re the one lying in a hospital bed. You’re always doing stuff like that!” Hunk’s voice was growing louder, angrier, as he spoke. “Honestly Lance, do you ever think about yourself?”
Where was this all coming from?

“Hunk, what are you talking abou-” Hunk interrupted him.

“Why do always have to be the hero!? Why do you put your own life on the line at every possible chance! Honestly Lance, it’s like you don’t even care if you live or die. But guess what! I care! I care a whole lot! So stop being such an ignorant arse!”
It was rare for Hunk to raise his voice, and it was freaking Lance out. He understood his words, but the meaning behind them was unclear. Be the hero? Live or die? What was that all about!

“Hunk I-” Lance had been in the process of getting up when a sharp pain shot across his forehead, focusing near his left temple. He squeezed his eyes shut as his vision blurred.
“Oh crap! Lance are you alright? I’m such an idiot!” Lance felt the hands return to his shoulders, trying to push him back down, but he swatted them away.

“I’m ok. Just...” He took a deep breath as the pain subsided, then opened his eyes to look at Hunk,
who was staring at him with wide eyes, his face contorted with worry.

“I’m ok.”
Hunk shook his head.

“No Lance. You’re not ok. You were badly injured and you’re not ok. You almost died and you’re not ok!”
Hunk was growing agitated again, and Lance reached out to grab hold of his shoulders.

“Hunk.”
His friend ignored him, his head still shaking, not looking at Lance.

“Hunk! Look at me!”
Hunk’s eyes snapped up to meet Lance’s. There were tears forming there, and Lance could feel his own emotions beginning to stir. He leaned forward and engulfed Hunk in a hug as best he could, his arms not fully reaching around his best friend from his position on the bed.

“Hunk. You’re right. I’m not ok.” He heard his friend’s breathe hitch. “But I’m alive.”
Lance pulled back, keeping his hands on Hunk’s shoulders. Hunk stared back at him, and slowly nodded.

“Yeah...ok.”
Lance flashed him a crooked smile.

“You can’t kill off The Lance that easily.”
Hunk rolled his eyes and chuckled as he wiped away a few tears that had rolled down his cheeks.

“The Lance? That’s bad, even by your standards.”
“Hey I’m trying my best here. How about ‘Lance: the giant slayer’?”
Hunk looked back at him.

“You didn’t actually kill any giants there hotshot. If anything it’s ‘Lance: the sweet talker’, or ‘Lance: the insurmountable pain in the ass’.”
Lance raised an eyebrow.

“Sweet talker? What’s that supposed to mean?”
Hunk sighed deeply and rummaged through his bag, pulling out a bottle of water and some food, which Lance eyed hungrily. He handed him a muffin and two oranges.

“I’ll try and explain it as best I can. The past two days have been hectic.”
Lance nearly choked on the pastry he was devouring.

“Two days?!”
“Yeah. You’ve been out for a while. I’ve been really worried.”
Lance realized with a surge of guilt why Hunk had gotten upset with him. Two days. No wonder his friend looked so haggard.

“Gods Hunk, I’m so sorry.”
“Yeah, well. You owe me at least three years of my life back.” Lance considered.

“Not entirely sure how to do that...but I’ll try my best.” Hunk was staring at his hands again, his next words quiet.

“Just promise me you’ll start thinking about your own life every once and a while. Stop trying to do everything on your own.” Lance wanted to argue, to say that he hadn’t been planning on taking down the giants by himself, that he had gotten lost and found them by mistake, but he didn’t want to start another fight. Hunk had been through enough.

So instead he nodded.

“I promise.” Hunk glanced up at him, and smiled after a moment of deliberation.

“I’m going to hold you to that.”
“Shall I write it down for you? Sign and seal?” Hunk raised both eyebrows.

“Don’t tempt me boy. I can get Allura to act as a witness.” Lance shivered at the thought of Allura. He was in huge trouble. One could even say he was in giant trouble. But Lance couldn’t enjoy his own pun. Not with the impeding discussion he was sure to have with the head councillor once she knew he was awake. He wondered what his punishment would be this time.

Hunk must have known what he was thinking, and smiled.

“Yeah she’s pissed. But not so much at you.” Lance’s head snapped up at that.

“Really?”

“The attack has everyone really frazzled. Like, monsters of that caliber aren’t supposed to get this near to camp. So she’s been off trying to figure out what’s going on. There’s also the whole thing with the new guys and what their whole story is, and all that.” Lance had nearly forgotten about the strangers he had found along with the giants.

“Are they ok? The guys, I mean?” Hunk shrugged and nodded.

“Yeah. They woke up several hours ago. The older guy seems decent enough, friendly and what have you. But his brother is...different.” Lance processed the information.
“Brother?”
“Yeah. Although the older guy, Shiro, is human. Allura had to invite him across the border in order for him to get into camp.”
Lance nodded as Hunk continued.

“They just got back actually.” Hunk noticed the look of confusion cross his friends face and added: “Keith ran off for some reason, but they’re both ok. I think they’re talking with Allura again.”

“Shiro and Keith eh?”
Hunk nodded.

“Shiro said he would stop by later if you woke up, to thank you.”
“Thank me for what?”
Hunk shrugged.

“As foolish as your actions were, you did actually save them. We were on the other side of that clearing when you interfered. I’m not sure we would have reached them in time.”

“Ok...” Lance’s head was wheeling from all the information, and a dull throb had made itself known in his left temple. “Can you explain that all to me again, but slower and with coloured pictures?”

Hunk told Lance the events of the last two days, including his side of the battle with the giants, and everything else that had happened after Lance had been knocked out. He didn’t use coloured pictures, but did supply a steady amount of food to keep Lance placated.
When he had finished Lance let his eyes close and he fell back against his pillows.

“So everyone is ok then?” He asked finally, keeping his eyes shut tight. His headache was growing worse, but he didn’t want to complain.

“Yeah. No one really got hurt besides you.”
“And they all know about my...gift.”

Hunk had told Lance about how they had all been compelled to follow his words when he had spoken to the giants. It didn’t make much sense to Lance; his power shouldn’t have been that strong. Yet from what Hunk had said, it appeared that even Allura hadn’t been able to ignore his commands.
He was in so much trouble.

“Does your head hurt that bad?”
Lance realized he had been rubbing his temples, his eyes shut tight as he combated the pain in his head. There was no point lying to Hunk, so he nodded.

“Feels like I’ve been hit in the head with a hammer”
“Not hammer so much as a large rock.”

Lance groaned. He hadn’t had time to think about it much, but now that Hunk had told him everything, he wondered at the damage his head had taken. He felt the bandages on his face. The bulk of the injury had been to his left temple, which explained the consistent throb there, but
apparently he had been given stitches for a large gash above his eyebrow. He hated to admit it, but he was anxious to know what it looked like. He was, after all, a child of Aphrodite. Scars weren’t really something you associated with beauty.

Hunk pressed something into his hand, and Lance opened his eyes.

“Take this. It’s painkiller.”

"Why not ambrosia?” Usually demigods were given a bit of the godly food to heal them from most injuries. It was unusual for them to rely on anything else.

"They gave it to you in liquid form when you first got here, and it healed most of your wound. But you've had too much. So you have to use these for now." Hunk watched Lance take the pill, swallowing it down with a mouthful of water from the bottle Hunk had brought.

“I know you’re probably tired, but I told Allura I would let her know when you woke up. She has some questions.”

Lance groaned again, but nodded. Better to get this over with now rather than later. He got out of bed with Hunk’s help, his legs shaky but solid beneath him. He was still hungry, even with the food Hunk had brought him, and wanted nothing more than to sit in the dining hall with his friends and forget about everything for a few moments.

Still, it felt good to step outside of the infirmary and smell fresh air after being inside for so long. It was dark out; the evening sky a lovely shade of purple and rose, illuminating the grass and cabins as Lance and Hunk made their way to meet with Allura.

Pink sky at night, sailors delight.
The rhyme flashed through Lance’s head as he looked up at the clouds. He didn’t know where he had heard it before, maybe one of the other campers.

But no, that didn’t feel right.
Lance got the nagging suspicion that he had learned the line before he had come to camp. He stopped in his tracks. Was he...remembering?

Hunk turned when he noticed Lance was no longer following him.

“You ok Lance?”
Lance was about to answer when a figure emerged from behind one of cabins. He jumped as he spotted the two, nearly dropping the clipboard he was holding.

“Gods! You scared me!”
It was Coran, and Lance watched as he straightened his mustache before continuing.

“Hunk, is there any-” He stopped as he noticed Lance a few feet behind Hunk, and brightened.
“Lance! Good to see you up and about! Allura was in her office with the other two guests, but go right on in. They should be finishing up shortly.” He walked towards Lance, clapping a hand on his shoulder. “She’s been waiting patiently for you to wake up Lance.” He turned and left, leaving a very perplexed Hunk and frightened Lance.

The two watched him leave.
“What’s that supposed to mean?” Hunk asked as they continued their walk. Lance sighed.

“It means I’m probably going to be doing chores around camp for the rest of my life.” Hunk gave him a sympathetic smile. Great. Not even his best friend could deny how much trouble he was in.

They reached the steps of the main cabin and Lance climbed them hesitantly. He wished he could run to his tree.

Hunk had told him about leading Shiro to the place he and Lance had tried to build a tree fort, and how he wanted to finish it now that Lance was awake. It was all very heartfelt, but Lance had grown used to having the tree all to himself. It had become his place to think. To go when he was upset or frustrated. It was also a great hiding place from Sabrina.

He knew he was being selfish, but that old oak was probably Lance’s favourite part of the camp. There was something about it that gave him a sense of comfort that no one person could provide.

Hunk was holding the door open for him when he finally reached the top of the stairs. They made their way to Allura’s office, Lance knowing the route by heart from the many times he had been sent there after getting into trouble. He gulped as they reached the door.

“Well, here we are.” Hunk was watching him, waiting for Lance to knock. “Let me just enjoy my last few moments of freedom.” “Oh c’mon. It won’t be that bad.” Lance gave him a look through half-lidded eyes, one eyebrow raised in doubt.

“We’ve only known each other for a few months.” Hunk was watching him, waiting for Lance to knock. “I found a way to make him smile. Let’s not forget that.” Lance nodded, words failing him.

They door swung open, and Allura was standing there, her face changing from annoyance to shock to something like relief as she beheld Lance. “Hi-” She rushed forward and embraced him before he could finish his greeting. Lance went stiff in her arms, completely caught off guard. Allura, their fierce leader; awe-inspiring, intelligently gifted, and not to mention uncomfortably terrifying head councillor, was hugging him.

Lance looked over at Hunk, whose jaw had dropped in surprise. He stared back at Lance and slowly shook his head in bewilderment.

Allura pulled away after a few moments, rather awkwardly, as if she realized what she was doing a bit too late. She cleared her throat and tilted her chin upwards, commanding attention.

“I have some questions, as you can imagine, so if you would please step into my office.” She gestured behind her and Lance uneasily glanced at Hunk, who shrugged and made to follow them inside. Allura turned to him before he could enter the room.

“Just Lance thank you Hunk. I need to discuss some important matters with him. Actually, if you don’t mind, would you escort our two guests to the dining hall? They were waiting outside for myself, but now that this has come up I might be a while.”

Hunk looked from Allura to Lance, who was frantically signaling for Hunk to stay. Unfortunately, Allura had more of persuasive presence, and Hunk quickly nodded and left, leaving Lance alone. Terrific.

Allura closed the door behind her, and motioned for Lance to sit. He did, and she took her seat across from him. She stared at him for a moment, her eyes focusing in on the bandage above his left eye. Hunk had helped him remove most of the gauze before they left the infirmary, at Lance’s request. He didn’t want to be seen walking around camp like some half mummified corpse.

But the bandage covering his stitches had remained in place, to keep it clean, mostly, but also because Lance was nervous to see what hid beneath. He didn’t particularly enjoy having Allura focus in on his injury so noticeably. It made him feel self-conscious, something he rarely ever experienced.

He cleared his throat loudly.

“My eyes are down here.”

Allura blinked, registering what she was doing, and looked away.

“How are you feeling?”

Nice change of subject.

“Just dandy.”

Allura nodded to herself, and after glancing at Lance once more, took a deep breath.

“I’m sure Hunk has filled you in on most of what has happened these past few days. Am I correct?”

Lance nodded.

“Good. Then you are aware that you used your power, and that most of the camp now knows of your gifts.”

Lance gulped. He braced himself for the upcoming lecture.

“The incident with the giants has become quite the popular tale, and with your power exposed, and our two new guest’s arrival, you can imagine that rumours have been spreading out of proportion.”

She sighed and continued. “Not much I can do about that now though. I just want you to be careful from here on out. Monsters are venturing nearer to our camp, and I have yet to determine the cause. The giant’s alone should not have come this close.”

She put her fingers to her temples and closed her eyes, warding off a headache. Lance was waiting for her to go on, to give him his punishment, but she didn’t say anything else.

“So...am I in trouble or...?”

Allura opened her eyes to look at him.
Crap. Shouldn’t have asked. Lance cursed himself as Allura went on.

“You disobeyed my direct orders, ventured beyond the border unaccompanied and without letting anyone know, and confronted not only one, but three giants. By yourself. With a bow and a knife and hardly any field experience. Trouble doesn't begin to cover it.” She shook her head and Lance gulped. “However, without your interference I’m not sure our guests would have made it, so I owe you thanks.”

Lance had been holding his breath, but released it when he heard that last line. He stared at Allura, wondering if he had heard her properly.

“You’re thanking me? For going against your orders and using my Charmspeak without permission? Wow. That’s a first.”
“Don’t push your luck Lance.” Allura leaned back in her chair and sighed. “But yes. I am thanking you. I applaud your initiative, irresponsible as it is, and your merit. You fought well with the limited skills you possess.”

Ouch.

“Wow. That was unnecessarily rude.” He mumbled to himself.
Allura heard and raised an eyebrow.

“I apologize if that sounds harsh, but it is the truth. However, I can only blame myself for your lack of experience, particularly with your Charmspeak, seeing as I forbade you to use it. I see now that your gift is far more powerful than I had originally thought, but you need training. Practice. I am permitting you to use your gift as of today, but only under supervision from a more experienced camper, and only on willing participants.”

Lance was speechless as he processed the information. Training? Practice? That was all good news, right? Something seemed...off.

“That’s all really cool and everything, but am I getting punished...or, like...what is happening?”
Allura regarded him with an amused expression. She was acting very strange. She gestured to his forehead.

“I think you’ve had punishment enough, wouldn’t you say? But I do ask that you do not ever cross that border again. Not without my permission. It’s just too dangerous. Your scent alone brought in three powerful giants, or, at least, that’s one possible explanation for their appearance. I still have no idea about the first two. Maybe it has something to do with that other boy...” Her voice trailed off as her eyes zoned out, her thoughts taking over as she puzzled over the events. Lance cleared his throat, but she didn’t notice.

“Um...can I go now?”
Allura looked up at him, as if she had forgotten he was still there.

“What? Oh yes, you may go.”
Lance got up to leave. His hand was on the door handle when he heard Allura call out from behind him.
“Oh, and Lance?”
He turned and saw Allura watching him with concern etched on her face. It wasn’t something she showed often, and it made him irrationally nervous.

“Please be careful.”
He nodded and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.
His mind was whirling as he descended the stairs and made for the dining hall.

Allura had been uncharacteristically...benevolent.
Especially considering what he had done. Lance had been prepared for a lifetime worth of chores, but to get off scotch free? And be allowed to use his powers for training purposes?
That was more than he had ever hoped to imagine.

Lost in thought, Lance made his way to the dining hall, which he entered and helped himself to a plate of food. It was only when he was making his offering to the gods that he noticed how unusually silent the hall was.
He blinked, zoning back in to the present, and looked around.

Everyone in the room was watching him.
Uneasiness crept into his gut, making him step back slightly. Why were they all staring at him?
Was there something on his face?

Lance realized with a start that there was, in fact, something on his face, and he subconsciously reached up to feel the bandage above his eye. Several people looked away, but the ones who didn’t all followed his hand.
It was extremely unnerving, and when he tried to flash them a smile, most of the others looked away quickly, avoiding his eyes.

Hunk approached him from the side, grabbing hold of his arm and pulling him in the direction of a table in the far corner. Lance sat down numbly, his appetite gone.

“Hey, Lance. Just ignore them.”
Lance gaped down at his food.

“Why were they all staring at me? I mean, normally I’d be cool with it, but they seemed...scared almost.”
“Well, they all know about your thing now. To them, you are scary.”
Lance looked up at Hunk, who was smiling at him gently.
He continued.

“They think you’re going to command them to do something, and they would have no choice in the matter.”
“I wouldn’t though!” His voice was louder than he had intended, and several kids nearby glanced over nervously. Hunk glared back at them.
“I know that. So just ignore them ok?”

A hand reached across the table towards Lance, making him jump back in surprise. He hadn’t realized there were other people sitting at the same table with him and Hunk. His eyes traced the hand back to its owner.
It belonged to one of the strangers he had found, the older one, with the cool hair.
“Hi, I’m Shiro.”
Lance looked back at the hand, and after a brief moment of hesitation, he shook it.

“Lance.”
Shiro beamed at him.

“I just wanted to thank you, for saving us.” He gestured to himself and the other boy sitting across from him, and Lance looked over.
The other stranger, Keith he deducted, was sitting on the same bench as Lance, though he had scooted over as far as the seat allowed, and was pressed up against the wall, his head lowered as he ate. He had long black hair that hung over his face, so Lance couldn’t get a good look at him, especially in the low light of the room.
He looked over at Shiro’s words and nodded at Lance, then went back to his meal, not bothering to say anything.

Rude.
Lance decided he didn’t like this one very much.
He turned back to Shiro, who was watching his brother with a small frown. Apparently Lance wasn’t the only one who thought this guy was being discourteous.

Hunk broke through the awkward silence.

“So...how do you guys like camp so far?”
Shiro turned to look at him.

“Well, we haven’t actually seen much of it. Just the main cabin and that old tree house.”
Lance perked up at that.

“Did you say tree house?”
Shiro nodded.

“Yeah. Hunk here helped me find Keith, who...” He trailed off, noticing his brother glaring at him from the end of the table. “Anyways, there’s this old tree fort out in the woods, in this big oak tree. It’s not finished but there are these platforms-”
Lance interrupted him.

“Yeah, I know it. I built it.”
His tone had been harsher than he would have liked, but Hunk had only mentioned bringing Shiro to the same area. He had neglected to tell him that these guys had climbed his favourite tree.
Hunk interjected, aware of the flicker of annoyance that crossed his best friend’s face.

“So he was there after all? That was lucky.”
Shiro nodded and glanced at Keith.

“Yeah. He was there.”
The two shared a look, but Lance didn’t care enough to wonder what it was.
“So, wait, you guys were both in my tree house?!” He wasn’t sure why it bothered him so much, but anger was bubbling in his stomach at the thought of two random people violating his private place.

“It wasn’t much of a tree house. Just some rickety old boards nailed to some branches.” The voice had come from the end of the table, from Keith. He had turned his body to face the others, and Lance could see his face clearly for the first time since the incident with the giants. He was glaring at Lance, his dark eyes piercing through him like daggers. Lance glared back.

“What do you mean, ‘tree house’?!”

“I said it was a poor excuse of a tree house.”

Hunk was glancing between them frantically, and Shiro raised his voice.

“Keith! What are you doing?!”

Keith looked towards his brother, his tone of voice defensive as he continued.

“I don’t like the way he’s speaking to you!” He pointed to Lance. “He’s being unreasonable! Why does it matter if we were in a dumb tree!”

Lance stood, his hands slamming down on the table. People were staring again, and those who were sitting closer hastily backed away.

“Because it’s my tree!”

Keith mimicked him, standing and taking a step forward so they were almost head to head.

“I didn’t see your name on it.” He growled, and Lance narrowed his eyes. They stood glaring at each other, not speaking, as Shiro and Hunk watched nervously, neither one sure what exactly was happening, or how to interfere.

Hunk spoke up first.

“Lance, please... just sit down. It’s not that big of a deal—”

Lance glared down at him, his head beginning to throb again. He was about to argue back when a sudden image flashed through his mind.

It was a large tree, not the old oak, but similar in height and build. There were two people in its branches, a young girl and boy, who Lance recognized as his younger self. An older man, who looked eerily similar to Lance, was standing beneath the branches, his arms outstretched as if preparing to catch the younger children. Lance didn’t recognize the place they were in, but everything about it was... familiar. He knew these people.

The image left as quickly as it had come, and Lance blinked a few times, his vision re-focusing on his surroundings. Hunk was watching him with concern, his hands ready to catch him should he fall, and Lance realized he had stumbled as the memory had hit him.

Keith was still glaring at him, and Shiro was reaching for him, his mouth moving. But Lance didn’t hear his words.

He had remembered something. Something from his past.

His family.
Lance turned and ran out of the dining hall, ignoring the eyes that followed him. He needed to get out in the fresh air. He needed to think.

The pain in his head grew as he ran towards the woods, his feet carrying him over roots and holes in the ground, not faltering once. He knew this path by heart.

It led to his tree, and right now he craved nothing more than to sit in its familiar branches. He recalled the image. It had been brief, but Lance was sure. That had been his dad. His sister. Where were they? What had happened to them? To him?

Questions flew through his mind, but he didn’t have answers. He suddenly understood how Allura must have felt. Must feel. He hated not knowing.

The forest was impossibly dark when he reached the grove, but Lance didn’t mind. He knew where he was, and how to get back, not that he wanted to anytime soon. He could make out the lights from camp as he reached the first platform, and sat, curled up in a natural nook the bark of the old oak had created.

He let his mind wander, thinking back on everything that had happened since he had woken up. Why was he remembering things all of a sudden? Was it because of the blow to the head he had sustained?

Pain rocketed across his forehead at the thought, and Lance shut his eyes tight, waiting for it to pass. But the pain only grew, so much so that tears formed in his eyes.

Lance held his head in his hands, cursing himself for running off. It was impulsive and stupid, and he knew Hunk would be worried sick until he came back. But right now he needed to be alone with his thoughts; his memories.

The pain lessened to a dull, persistent throb, but Lance could handle it. He opened his eyes, his vision blurry from the tears.

Ten minutes.
That was all he needed.

Just ten minutes alone.

He sat there, trying to make sense of everything. If his family was alive, then he needed to find them. He needed to know what had happened. But what if he couldn’t find them? What if they were dead?

Dread rose in his throat, and his hands began to shake. He was on the verge of a panic attack. He looked up at the night sky and began to count the stars, something he did whenever he grew anxious or overwhelmed.

One.
Two.
Three.
It was a trick someone had taught him long ago he realized. Someone close to him. His dad maybe?

Lance tried to recall the memory of his father, but was only greeted by a stab of pain in his left
temple.
Alright then.
He went back to the stars.

Four.
Five.

He wondered if his family was looking up at the same sky as his eyes followed a satellite as it made its way across the horizon.

Six.
Seven.
Eight.

His breathing calmed, and his hands stopped quivering.

Nine.

A twig cracked somewhere below him, and Lance glanced down. He couldn’t make out much below him, but he recognized the voices that accompanied the movement of branches.

Hunk and Pidge.

He sighed, his ten minutes were up.

Hunk emerged first, clambering onto the platform and settling beside Lance.
“Lance, seriously. Please stop running off.” He was panting from the exertion of climbing the tree.
“Yeah! And pick less creepy places to hide!” Pidge said breathlessly as she clambered up to them, tossing down a heavy looking device.
Lance shifted so they would all fit on the platform.

He realized he was glad his friends were there. He didn’t want to be alone with his thoughts anymore.

“Sorry. I just...was feeling off.”
“Yeah I noticed. You kind of had a meltdown at dinner.” Hunk had his legs tucked up underneath him, not keen on letting them hang over the edge. “I mean, that Keith guy wasn’t helping, but still.”

“Did I miss something interesting again?” Lance glanced over at her, glad to see his friend again. Hunk nodded, but Lance interjected before he could tell her anything.

“What’s that you got there Pidge?”
She looked surprised at his question, and beamed.

“It’s my helmet piece! I finally fixed it!” She held it out proudly for them to see. Lance didn’t know much about tech or engineering, so the wires and random lights didn’t make much sense to him.
Still, he smiled.

“Wow, looks impressive. What does it do?”
“It tracks things. It picks up signals and energies from lifeforms and computes the data so I can see it visually on a screen. It led us to you!”
Hunk rolled his eyes.
“We already knew Lance was going to be here.”

Pidge frowned at him.

“Maybe, but I was still able to track him. His energy is pretty strong actually. No wonder though, with your powers and all.” She looked passed Hunk to smile at Lance, who returned it halfheartedly. Pidge went on.

“How come you never told us? I mean...it makes sense. Way back when with my cabin-mates. I’ve always wondered...” Her voice trailed off as she watched Lance’s face. His smile had faded, the throb in his head making itself known.

“Here. Take this.” Hunk handed him a pill from a plastic baggy he had pulled out from one of his pockets. Lance took it without question.

“Thanks.”

“We need to tell Allura about those headaches. Or one of the healers.”

Lance shook his head, but stopped as the motion made the pain worse.

Ok...maybe he would mention something.

“Actually, I think...”

He sighed. “I think I’m starting to remember things. From my past.” Lance watched his friends faces go from confused to comprehending, Hunk’s mouth falling open slightly.

“Wait, really?!”

“Lance that’s awesome!”

They spoke at the same time, and Lance nodded.

“Yeah, well...I mean...back in the dining hall a picture flashed in my mind. It was brief, but I felt like I knew who and what I was seeing. Like a memory.”

Pidge was clapping her hands excitedly, but Hunk looked more concerned than celebratory.

“Do you remember anything else? Can you think back to before you came to camp?”

Lance shook his head. He hadn’t been able to recall anything since the brief moment at diner. As time went on he was beginning to doubt that he had really seen anything at all.

It made him uneasy.

Pidge sighed.

“Well, that sucks.”

Hunk turned to her, aghast.

“Dude!”

“It’s dudette actually.”

“What? But you were male this morning!”

Pidge crossed her arms and tittered at him.

“Don’t you know anything Hunk? Besides, I find I think better as a girl, and I needed to work on my device.”

“Maybe, but ‘dude’ is gender neutral. I say it to everyone.”

Lance chuckled despite himself. It was nice to hear Hunk and Pidge bicker, which doesn’t sound all that great, but it was such a familial thing to do, like siblings arguing. It made Lance grateful for them. Their presence. His family.

“I’m starving.” He said to diffuse the situation. Hunk, ever the motherly one in the group, gave him a knowing look.
“Yeah well if you hadn’t of run off in the middle of dinner...”
Lance stuck his tongue out at him.

“Wow, ok rude.” But Hunk was smiling.
Pidge gathered up her gadget and began to make her way down the tree.

“I’m also hungry, and the bonfire is about to start. So let’s get out of this creepy forest and have some s’mores.”

Oh right. Lance had completely forgotten about the bonfire that was held whenever a new demigod came to camp. There hadn’t been one in a while, and Lance, though not a huge fan of Keith, found himself excited.
He wondered what cabin the boy belonged in. Which god was lucky enough to call themselves his parent.

Despite their first encounter, Lance found a part of himself hoping that Keith wasn’t related to him. He figured he just didn’t want that sort of guy for a half-brother, not with his attitude, but that didn’t feel like the right reason. He didn’t ponder on it though. Whatever godly parent Keith had it didn’t matter. Lance had already decided he didn’t like the guy.
Shiro was alright, but Keith?
Nuh-uh.
No way.

Not in a million years.

Hunk must have known what he was thinking, because he blocked Lance’s way before he could get down from the platform.

“Oh, and you have to apologize to Keith.”
“What! No way!”
“He didn’t know how you felt about this place.”
“I don’t care.”
“Lance.”
“Hunk, move.”
Hunk shook his head.

“Just say sorry to him. If he’s still an arse about things then you can at least say you tried.”
Lance glared at his best friend, but knowing how stubborn Hunk could be, sighed heavily.

“Fine.” He drew out the word and rolled his eyes. Hunk nodded, pleased with himself, and made his way down the tree.
Lance followed after him.
Fine.
He would apologize. He would say the word. But he wouldn’t mean it. Keith was a jerk, but Shiro seemed like a nice enough guy, so Lance would apologize to him more than anyone.

With game plan in mind, the trio made their way back to camp.
Keith gets claimed, and things start to make sense

Chapter Summary

Basically what the chapter title says.
"make sense" is a loose term here, seeing as more questions begin to arise, making for a very confused Keith.

Keith was in a rotten mood.

He was sitting beside Shiro around a roaring fire as Allura introduced them to the campers who had congregated there. It was a large crowd, and Keith had already forgotten their names. He just wasn’t interested. His mind was on other things.

Like that guy.
Lance.

What a total maniac.

He thought back to their encounter at dinner, how he had gotten in Keith’s face and had the gall to pick a fight with him. It was rare that people confronted him. He had this...quality about him that usually warned people to stay away.
Like a ‘don’t mess with me’ vibe.

But this guy hadn’t been afraid to call him out. It was interesting to say the least, but it also pissed Keith off.
Like, a lot.

After he had run off, rather dramatically in Keith’s opinion, Hunk had apologized to them and hastily followed after his friend. Keith had watched him leave, then glared at the people still staring at him. At least they had the mind to look away.

Shiro, on the other hand, had not been impressed.
Keith remembered their argument.

“What the hell was that!?”
“He’s overreacting.”
“Keith he saved our lives! He was seriously injured doing so! Why can’t you be more considerate of other people?!”
“That doesn’t mean he gets to talk to you like that! It’s just a stupid tree! Who cares if we were in it!”
“Listen Keith, we’ve been here for a grand total of two days, and in the eight hours we’ve been awake you’ve managed to piss off a good majority of the people helping us!”

Keith had scowled, but couldn’t deny Shiro’s words. Allura had been understanding when they had returned, for the most part. But it was obvious that she was incredibly frustrated with them for wasting hours of her precious time. They had answered her remaining questions, Keith trying not to gag as Shiro made a fool of himself, rambling on about their lives and stumbling over his words whenever Allura addressed
him. It was hilarious at the time, but now Keith was more annoyed at his brother for his obvious crush.

Shiro had no business getting all friendly with these people. Keith had no intention of staying. He had made up his mind after the incident with Lance. He did not want to spend any more time with that guy than necessary.

Besides, it was still unclear in Shiro would be allowed to stay at the camp, seeing as he wasn’t a demigod. And if Shiro wasn’t staying than neither was Keith.

They had sat in silence after that, Shiro biting his lower lip, a weird habit he developed whenever he was worried. Keith glared at his food, no longer hungry now that his brother had scolded him. Whatever.

Shiro was too nice. He always let people walk all over him in order to avoid confrontation. He also couldn’t say no. Keith hated it, especially since whenever Shiro volunteered himself for something, he would drag his younger brother along to help. Not that Keith minded helping others. He just liked to do it on his own terms.

But Keith hated it when Shiro didn’t stand up for himself. He didn’t care if Lance had saved them. Shiro was his brother, his only family left. And he wouldn’t allow some snot-nosed brat to get all uppity at them over something so petty.

Needless to say Shiro didn’t appreciate his reasons. He thought it was disrespectful and rude, and had demanded that he apologize the next time they saw Lance.

“No.”
“Keith.”
“He doesn’t deserve it.”
“You will apologize or so help me I will make you get on your knees and beg his forgiveness.” Keith had gulped at that. He would have laughed if the threat had come from anyone else, but Shiro was a force to be reckoned with when he was angry. And he was very angry.

“Fine.”
Shiro nodded, satisfied for the moment.

Allura had come into the hall shortly after that, making Shiro stand and wave at her. She didn’t return it, instead addressing the entire room in a loud voice.

“Everyone is expected to attend the welcoming bonfire happening in fifteen minutes. Please make your way to the fire pit and sit with your cabin mates.” She gestured towards Shiro and Keith. “If you two would follow me.”

She didn’t wait for them to join her, instead turning and making her way back outside. Keith wondered if she ever ate.

When they caught up to her she informed them of the ceremony that took place whenever a new demigod arrived at camp, and told Keith that his father could possibly claim him, if he felt the desire to.

Great.
Now he got to meet his dad?
What a fantastic way to end this wonderful day.

So there they were, sitting around a massive stone circle caging a roaring fire, the light bouncing off the many faces now staring at him and Shiro.

His brother was completely ignoring him, not on purpose, but he was engaged in a conversation with some people sitting beside him. Keith vaguely remembered that they were from the Apollo cabin, whatever that meant.
He didn’t know much about the Greek gods.
He didn’t care much about them either.

Instead he watched the flames. He was glad for the warmth they provided, his own clothing doing a poor job at keeping out the cool breeze that accompanied the dark skies. He would have to steal some better supplies if he and Shiro were going to leave again.
Maybe grab some more weapons as well.

Movement on the far side of the fire caught his eye. Three figures were emerging from the woods, and as they approached, Keith felt his stomach drop.
He ducked his head.
Maybe Shiro wouldn’t notice.

The elbow to his side said otherwise.

“Keith, he’s back. Go say-”
“Yeah yeah.” He slowly stood, walking around behind the growing crowd of people as he made his way over to Lance.
He was with the other boy, Hunk, and some shorty Keith didn’t know.
Why did he have to be with other people?
This was embarrassing enough.

Hunk noticed him before the others, and nudged Lance’s side. He turned, and when he saw Keith, a look of distaste crossed his face.
Keith chose to ignore it and clenched his fists.
He would do this for Shiro.

He walked up to the group, staring Lance right in the eyes.
He had nice eyes. Blue, like aquarium water.

Wait...what?

Keith shoved the thoughts aside and dug his nails into his palm, the pain helping him focus.
Lance opened his mouth to say something but Keith was faster.

“Sorry. About before.”
Three pairs of eyes stared at him in shock. What, have they never heard an apology before?
He saw Hunk nudge Lance again, who blinked and raised an eyebrow at Keith.

“Wow, really?”
What was that supposed to mean? Keith swallowed the sarcastic retort he had been ready to say.
He knew Shiro was watching him.
“Yes.”
A small smile spread across Lance’s face, dimples appearing on his cheeks, and Keith felt his face flush slightly. What was going on with him? Maybe he had been sitting too close to the fire.
“I’m sorry as well. It’s been a...weird day.”
Keith stared at the boy in front of him, the anger he had felt earlier dissipating. Maybe he had misjudged him.
“I guess I should thank you as well...for saving us.”
Lance crossed his arms and puffed out his chest. “Oh, you know, all in a day’s work. Those giants were no trouble at all. I’m really quite skilled in the art of fighting.”

Never mind.
This guy was way too cocky.
And arrogant.
Keith felt his anger return; he didn’t like to be mocked. But what really bothered him about Lance’s words was that he already felt guilty about the incident with the giants, and his own failings in keeping Shiro safe. He didn’t need someone pointing out his weaknesses.

“And yet you still got knocked out.” He turned to leave, the scowl returning to his face.
Lance called out from behind him.
“Woah, cool your jets, I was just joking!”

Keith held up a single finger in reply, pushing through the throng to sit by Shiro again. Several people complained as he shoved passed them, but he didn’t care.
He sat down in a huff, glaring at the flames as Allura got the attention of the crowd.

“Everyone, take your seats please.” She waited for them to sit, then continued. “Tonight we welcome Shiro and Keith to our camp.” She gestured to them and a round of applause sounded. Keith didn’t look up.

“As many of you may know, Shiro here is not a demigod.” There were a few gasps of surprise, but the majority of the people gathered remained silent. Allura went on.
“However, his brother, Keith, is. So I have decided to let him stay here for as long as he likes.”
Keith’s head snapped up at that. Shiro was allowed to stay? He wasn’t sure how he felt about the news. A part of him had been hoping that Shiro would not be welcomed here, so that them leaving together would be a more feasible task.
But if he could stay then that meant Keith would have a lot more persuading to do in order to convince his brother to leave with him again.
He looked over at Shiro, who was smiling graciously at Allura.
This was going to prove difficult.

Allura turned to Keith.
“If or when you’ve been claimed, you will stay in the cabin representing your godly parent and meet your half siblings. Shiro can stay there as well, if there’s room, until we find other lodgings.”
Half-siblings? What was that all about?
Then it struck him. Of course he wouldn’t be the only child of a god. Of course there would be others.
But he had never considered the thought of having more relatives. Shiro was his brother. His only brother. He didn’t want more. He didn’t need more!
Keith’s mind whirled, his emotions ranging from confused to angry and back again.

“What if I don’t want to stay?”
He hadn’t meant to say it aloud, but the words were out of his mouth before he could stop them.
The crowd around him went silent, all attention now on Keith.
Even Shiro was giving him a concerned look.
Allura tilted her head.
“You must. It’s for your own safety. This camp protects-”
Keith interrupted her.

“I can take care of myself.”
“No. You can’t. The incident a few days ago proved so.”
Flames of rage burned inside Keith. First Lance pointing out his inadequacy and now Allura? In front of the whole camp nonetheless!
Keith found himself standing, everyone’s gaze burning into him.

“Who are you to tell me what I can and can’t do!? If I want to leave then I will!”
Shiro reached for him but Keith pushed his hand away.

“Keith stop this-”
He turned to face his brother.

“No! I never wanted to come here! I never wanted any of this!” He whirled on Allura. “And you can’t force me to stay here! I’m not your prisoner! I-” He stopped abruptly, his skin growing hot. A collective gasp went up from the crowd, and even Allura took a few steps back.
Keith looked down as his hands, and was shocked to see them glowing red, like metal that’d been left in a forge too long. He stumbled backwards, feeling hands on his back as Shiro stood to catch him.

His brother’s voice was shaky as he spoke.

“What is this?! What...” He trailed off as the red glow of Keith’s skin grew brighter, pulsating around him like a beacon. Keith felt adrenaline course through his veins. Strength filled his muscles, driving away the exhaustion that had been building up.
He felt good.

No.
Better than good. He felt powerful.

Everyone around him went still, and Shiro pointed to something above Keith.

“What...what does that mean?”
Keith followed his brother’s finger. There, glowing softly above his head, was a spear. Keith gulped, his mind incapable of determining why the weapon would be floating above him.
It was silent for an entire three seconds, then a loud cheer went up from a group of kids to Keith’s right. He jumped, the sudden noise startling him.

Allura spread her arms wide and called out in a loud voice.

“Ares it is!”
The cheers from the group grew louder, some of them banging on shields as they shouted up into the night sky.

“One of us! One of us!” The chant gave Keith goosebumps.

Shiro looked just as disturbed.

“Can someone please explain this?”
Allura walked over to them, a small smile on her lips.

“Keith has been claimed. It’s wonderful news actually, seeing as some gods don’t bother. But Keith is a son of Ares, the god of war.” She clapped him on the back, harder than Keith had been expecting.

“That was quite the claim as well. Normally a symbol associated with each god will appear before the child in question, but with you Keith, there was much more to it. You have power. Untapped potential. I look forward to harnessing it.”
Keith wasn’t sure he liked the sound of that, but his mind was still whirling.  
A son of Ares?  
God of war?  
He hated to admit it but that sounded...cool.  
Really cool.

No.  
Keith had already decided he would hate his godly father.  
It was his fault his mother had been killed.

Shiro was beaming at him, unaware of the dark thoughts that plagued his brother’s mind.  
“Wow. That’s...wow.” He ruffled Keith’s hair affectionately. “Makes sense though. You’re always looking for a fight.”  
“I’ll introduce you to your cabin mates.” Allura led them to the rowdy group of teenagers. Keith noticed that the other kids were packing up to leave, the show over and done with. Some stayed behind, pulling out marshmallows to roast on the fire. His eyes caught Lance’s from across the way. Lance looked away quickly, but Keith swore he saw something like approval cross the boy’s face.  
Maybe he was imagining it.  
Why would Lance care what cabin he was put in?

Better yet, why did Keith care what Lance thought?  
He turned his attention back to the group of people in front of him.

“Welcome aboard! The name’s Marcus. This is Kate, Ben and the small one over there is Tough Tiff.”  
Keith nodded at each, but wasn’t absorbing much. Shiro held out his hand and greeted them all politely.  
“We have a few empty bunks in our cabin, so you’re welcome to stay with us. You look like a good fighter. You both do. Can’t wait to train together.”  
That caught Keith’s attention.

“Train?”  
The boy, Marcus, nodded.  
“You betcha! We Ares kids pride ourselves in our fighting ability. We’re the muscle of this camp. Plus the annual Godly Games are coming up.”  
Keith raised an eyebrow in confusion.  
“Godly Games?”  
Allura interjected before Marcus could answer.

“I’m sure both Keith and Shiro are very weary. Why don’t you show them to your cabin?”  
Keith wasn’t tired at all. His body actually felt better than it had in weeks. Had that red glow done that?

“Thank you Allura.” Shiro smiled at her gratefully, and Keith noticed the exhaustion in his brother’s features. Of course Shiro was tired. How could Keith have forgotten?

They followed the Ares kids, his half-siblings apparently, through a maze of buildings, before stopping in front of a large cabin. Shields decorated the front wall, reminding Keith of a Viking ship, and various weapons were littered on the porch. The inside was much the same, with knives jutting out of dart boards hanging on the walls, bows scattered haphazardly on the floor, and the occasional spear dislodging from the ceiling.

Keith loved it.
Shiro was less keen. He eyed the cabin skeptically, as if this was all some elaborate prank, and these people didn’t actually live like this.

Marcus led them to a back room where several bunk beds were set up in a row. Most were separated by dividers for privacy, but a few on the end were bare of any décor. Marcus let them choose which they wanted out of those.

“You guys are welcome to borrow any clothes from us until you can get some new ones made. Just get on the good side of the sprites and satyrs. We usually start our day at the arena after breakfast, but you guys can sleep in tomorrow or whatever. Feel free to drop by whenever you’re ready.”

Marcus turned to leave, but stopped just shy of the door. “Oh, and don’t let the Aphrodite kids get you alone. They can be...overwhelming if you’re not used to them.”

Keith and Shiro exchanged a look of mutual confusion as Marcus left.

At least they were in this together.

Shiro shrugged and made for the bunkbed, but Keith was quicker, jumping up on the top bunk before Shiro could claim it.

“Hey!”

“First come first serve.”

Shiro crossed his arms.

“I was here first. In every sense of the word. Eldest gets top bunk. Those are the rules.”

He moved to shove Keith off, but he held tight.

“Those aren’t rules, that’s just self-entitlement!” He broke off with a yelp as Shiro began to tickle him, squirming to try and avoid his hands.

“Shiro that’s cheating!”

His brother laughed, relenting.

“Fine. You can have top bunk. But you owe me.”

Keith watched him remove his boots and sweater and lay down on the bed with a huff. There was silence for a few minutes and Keith wondered if his brother had fallen asleep, but then he spoke.

“I’m glad we’re here. I feel like...we’re finally safe.” Shiro’s voice was soft below him.

Keith didn’t reply. He was still unsure about staying at the camp. There was still so much he didn’t understand.

Maybe he could stay a little while. Just to get some answers.

Besides, he liked the thought of training with these new guys. Maybe he could learn a few tricks to help him and Shiro fight off monsters when they did leave.

There was also food here, and shelter. Realistically it was the ideal place to be. The survivalist in Keith was making a strong case to them staying, but the stubborn part of him was unyielding.

Keith laid on the bed, letting his thoughts chase each other around his mind, staring up at the ceiling. There was throwing knife lodged in between the wood panels, and he reached up to take it. Just having the blade in his hand gave Keith a huge sense of relief. He had grown used to sleeping with a weapon near him, and felt his body relax as he examined the knife.

It was simple; about five inches long with a worn leather handle. The blade itself was rather dull, but Keith didn’t mind. That was an easy fix.

He shifted to place the weapon beneath his pillow.

Shiro might feel safe at this place, but one could never be too careful.

Speaking of Shiro, Keith noticed his brother’s breathing had grown long and even. He stuck his head over the edge of the bed and saw him passed out, his body sprawled out on top of the covers. He looked peaceful, and Keith smiled to himself.
He could stay, if only for Shiro’s sake. But it wasn’t definite. Just long enough for Shiro to regain his strength.

Keith stretched on the bed, feeling his muscles pull tight over his body. He still wasn’t tired. In fact, he was feeling oddly curious.

Marcus had mentioned Aphrodite kids.

He recalled from his limited Greek knowledge that Ares and Aphrodite were a thing, or something like that. So why had Marcus warned him about them? What was so special about children of Aphrodite?

Keith jumped down from the bed, bending his knees to soften his landing, so as not to wake Shiro. He made his way out of the cabin, not meeting anyone as he left. They must have all gone back to the fire.

Keith recalled his earlier outburst, and decided it would be safer to watch from a distance at first.

He followed the smoke and soft orange glow of the fire as he made his way back through the camp. When it came into view he ducked behind the nearest cabin and scaled the wall with ease.

From his vantage point he could make out the faces of most of the people gathered around the bonfire.

The crowd had dwindled significantly, but small clusters of kids still remained, huddled around the flames as they cooked marshmallows and the like.

Keith recognized some of the faces, but the names eluded him. He hadn’t been paying attention when Allura had introduced them.

Whoops.

He could hear laughter and the flow of several conversations from the groups below, but he didn’t understand most of the references. He wondered if any Aphrodite kids were down there. How could one even tell?

His gaze landed on a smaller group of people, sitting a bit farther away from everyone else. It was dark, but Keith recognized them immediately.

Lance.

And Hunk.

And that other one.

Why were they sitting so far away from the others? As Keith observed, he noticed the nervous glances the other campers would send over their way from time to time. What was that all about? The three didn’t look particularly threatening, but then again, Keith didn’t know much about them.

He was about to slide down from the roof to edge closer when a figure ran up to the small group. Keith watched as she (he could tell it was a female from her figure and long hair) wrapped her arms around Lance, making the other two step back in surprise.

Who was that?

And why was she hugging Lance like that?

Wait. Why did he care?

Keith shook his head, trying to ignore the twinge of envy he felt. Where had that come from? Maybe it was because he had never imagined someone ever liking Lance enough to greet him in such a manner. The guy was a jerk.

Keith could hear their voices, and noticed several of the other groups had fallen silent to watch the exchange.
“Lance! Why didn’t you tell me you were awake! I’ve been worried sick!”
Lance was standing awkwardly in her arms, but slowly wrapped his own around the girl to return
the hug.
“Sorry.”
They broke apart, Hunk and the smaller one exchanging looks.
“Don’t ever do something so stupid again. You hear me!”
“Sabrina I-”
“No excuses!” She flipped her hair over her shoulder. “You think dying is the only way to get out
of our bet? Nice try.”
Bet? What was going on? Who was this Sabrina chick?
Lance ran a hand through his hair and Keith felt something inside of him ignite. He ignored it.
“Oh gods…” Lance began rubbing his temples, and Keith wondered if he had a headache.
“Didn’t think I’d let you off the hook so easily did you? I had something in mind, but it seems a
little bit extraneous now, seeing as you almost died. So I’ll have to think of something else.” She
turned then, and noticed the crowd watching them.
“What are you all staring at? What, we too pretty for you to handle?”
They looked between her and Lance, uneasiness spreading through the ranks.
The girl, Sabrina, began to laugh.
“You guys are scared of him aren’t you!” She grabbed hold of Lance’s head and pulled him into a
headlock, messing up his hair with her hand. It was an impressive feat, considering she was good
head shorted than him.
“Hey! What are you-” Lance began to protest, squirming in her grip.
She interrupted him, addressing the crowd.
“This stretched piece of taffy is not going to hurt you. He’s not about to ask you all to jump in the
fire, or to make out with a manticore, so stop quivering in your undies.” She released him and
smiled innocently as Lance smoothed down his locks.
“Anyways. I’m going to bed. Are you sleeping in the cabin tonight?”
Lance nodded. Gratitude was plastered on his face. Whatever Sabrina had said, it worked.
The crowd collectively turned away, resuming their own conversations. Some even came up to
their small group, shaking Lance’s hand and striking up conversations.
Keith was more confused than ever. Lance? A threat? In what way!
And what had she meant by him asking them to jump in the fire?
Keith watched from his perch as the girl sauntered away, the groups dividing to make room for her
to pass. Who the hell was she!?
Keith decided he would ask Marcus later. He slid down from the roof, making sure no one had
seen him, and made his way silently back to the Ares cabin.
He was rounding a corner when he ran right someone, yelping in surprise, though he would deny it
later.
Keith jumped back into a fighting stance, a natural pose for him after the past few weeks.
Staring back at him with a sly smirk, was the girl.
Sabrina.
“How’s it going little sneak?”
She flipped her long hair over one shoulder, the blond of it mixing with the shadows, giving it an
overall blue tinge. She was lovely. Exquisite really, going by societies beauty standards.
A hand rested on the hip of her slender frame, and though she was relatively short, she had this aura about her that exuded confidence, and would have rendered anyone else in this situation speechless. But Keith was caught up on her words.

His confusion must have been evident on his face, as Sabrina chuckled slightly. There was little humour in the laugh though, and as she moved forward, Keith felt oddly threatened.

“Oh yes. I saw you up on the roof. Creepy hobby by the way.” She leaned in close, raising one eyebrow questioningly. “What were you doing up there? Spying?” Keith didn’t answer. She continued.

“Stubborn eh? Maybe you were just,” she twirled lightly, her hair spinning out in a wide arc, “enjoying the view?” She giggled this time, edging closer. Keith gulped.

“I don’t blame you really. I am breathtaking. But so are you...” She placed two fingers on Keith’s chest, walking them up slowly until they rested just above his heart. “I don’t usually date children of Ares. Hotheads the lot of them. Your little...outburst, back at the claiming ceremony, kind of proved that.” She rested her palm on his chest, her voice dropping to a husky whisper. “But I’m willing to make an exception.” Wait....the hell was she on about?! And then it clicked.

“You’re a child of Aphrodite aren’t you.” It was more of a statement than a question, but Sabrina answered anyway.

“Yes. What gave it away?” She giggled again, but Keith no longer felt threatened. Marcus’s words were beginning to make sense. Keith was sure that if Sabrina was more to his taste then he would be drooling over her, but women had never done it for him. Sabrina was watching him closely, but stepped back when she didn’t get the reaction she had been hoping for.

Keith was expecting her to be angry, but rather than peeved, Sabrina was smiling knowingly.

“Ah. I get it. Men one: woman zero, and gods what a loss.” Keith voiced his confusion this time.

“Um...what?”

“Oh! Ladies and gentlemen! He speaks!” She chuckled, but seeing that Keith didn’t join in, trailed off. She was still smiling as she went on though. “It’s ok. I get it. Any straight guy would have been bending over backwards just then. That tends to happen when confronted by children of Aphrodite. We have that effect on people.” She glanced over her shoulder, checking to see if they were still alone.

“So tell me then, who were you staring at?” Keith felt his face flush, though he was baffled as to why.

“I wasn’t staring at anyone.” Sabrina raised an eyebrow questioningly.

“Hmmm...You know, I don’t think you’re a very good liar. I can tell because my half-brother is probably the worst liar I’ve ever met, so I’m pretty good at deciphering the truth.” Keith ignored the lying bit.

“Half-brother?” Sabrina nodded.
“Yeah. He’s a real troublemaker. You’ve met him actually. He saved-” She trailed off as realization dawned on her face, her mouth opening in shock, then transitioning into a large grin as she looked up at Keith. “You were staring at Lance weren’t you!”

Keith couldn’t answer, his mind trying to grasp what she had said. Lance was her half-brother? That meant he was a child of Aphrodite. Keith hadn’t been expecting that, but now that he thought about it, it made sense. Lance was, from what Keith had inevitably noticed, very attractive. Too bad he was such a whiny jerk.

But he did have nice hair.
And eyes.
And goddamn those legs were-

No.
Whiny jerk.
Keith shook his head to clear his mind of the thoughts, forgetting that Sabina was watching him.

“You so were!” She laughed boisterously, going so far as to slap her knees in glee. Keith felt his blush deepening. But why? He didn’t like Lance. At all. He had already decided that.

“I was not staring at that crybaby! The guy’s a jerk!”
The laughter ceased immediately, Sabrina’s head snapping up to glare at him. Keith thought he felt the air grow colder as she approached him. She jabbed him in the chest with her finger, the sharp pain making Keith step back.

“So do not. Ever. Insult Lance in front of me.” Sabrina’s glare was like daggers, and the threatening feeling returned. She went on, her voice menacing.

“Lance is probably the bravest person I know. He risked his life for you and your friend. He almost got killed in the process. And yeah, maybe he can be a bit much sometimes. Maybe he can be arrogant, and reckless, and loyal to a fault, but that does not give you the right to call him a jerk. He has the biggest heart of anyone in this camp, and if he’s a bit emotional after all that happened so what. What gives you the right to judge him? You don’t even know him.” She emphasized the last sentence, jabbing his chest with each word.

Keith was too stunned to do anything except stare down at the girl. He had been told the same thing over and over. That Lance had saved them. That Lance had almost died. But for some reason, hearing them from her made the words resonate inside him.

Lance, had saved him.
Him. Keith.
Who he didn’t even know.
And he had saved Shiro as well.

And he had almost died.

Guilt coursed through him. How could he had been such an ungrateful prick? Sabrina was right....he didn’t have the right to judge Lance. He didn’t know him.

But he wanted to.

The thought startled Keith, but as much as he tried to deny it, a part of him wanted to get to know Lance. He wanted to apologize, and mean it this time.

He wanted to find out more about this stranger.
And then he could judge him properly.

Keith shoved his hands in his pockets, ashamed of himself.

“And then he could judge him properly.”

“You’re right. I’m...” he sighed, “I’m sorry.”

Sabrina stood glaring at him for a moment, then relented, her body relaxing as she stepped back from him.

“I’m not the one you should be apologizing to.” She eyed him up and down, a hint of a smile forming. “But, I can tell you’re sincere, so I’ll give you some advice. Lance likes to cover his true emotions with humour and this nonchalant attitude. It’s annoying as all Hades but unless you know him well enough most people are fooled.” She paused, watching him for a moment before continuing.

“I know how obnoxious Lance can be. He’s my half-brother for crying out loud. And I don’t know what he did or said to make you so angry with him...but I think you were fooled. So don’t beat yourself up.”

Keith wasn’t sure how to respond, so he simply nodded.

Sabrina narrowed her eyes at him, the sly smirk returning to her face.

“You kind of remind me of him, but not in the conventional way. You’re like his opposite, but also his equal, if that makes sense. I think you would balance each other out...” She titled her head to one side, then nodded firmly as if to solidify a point. “Yep. Definitely a good match.”

Keith paled.

“Wait...what? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Sabrina simply wiggled her eyebrows up and down a few times, and turned to leave.

“I’m nothing like him. We are not a good match!”

Sabrina didn’t look back, raising a hand to wave at him as she left.

“I don’t like Lance!” Keith called after her, his voice echoing off a few buildings, making him cover his mouth quickly. He glanced around nervously, but no one was near. Nevertheless, Keith hastily returned to the Ares cabin, closing the door silently as he entered. Shiro was still the only other person there, for which Keith was grateful. The encounter with Sabrina had completely drained him; all his energy was gone.

He removed his boots and coat and crawled back up into the top bunk, cringing as the bed squeaked as he shifted. He froze, waiting to see if Shiro woke up, but the steady sound of breathing continued uninterrupted.

Keith settled his body beneath the covers, his head resting on the pillow. It was soft. So, incredibly soft. After spending the last few weeks sleeping on hard ground, Keith had almost forgotten what a real bed felt like.

Exhaustion crept into his body, and Keith welcomed it. His eyes grew heavy as he stared up at the ceiling.

Sabrina was wrong.

He wasn’t anything like Lance. And he wasn’t his opposite either. He was just Keith! What had she meant by a ‘good match’?

Keith felt like he knew the answer, but didn’t want to consider that either.

No way.

He did not like Lance.

At least, not in that way.

Or did he?

Nope.
But...possibly...
NO!

It was all too much to think about, and Keith forcibly shoved the thoughts from his mind, like erasing a white board. With his mind blank, Keith shut his eyes, letting the exhaustion sweep over him, pulling him into a deep, dreamless rest.
**A mutual thing**

**Chapter Summary**

Lance has a chat with Sabrina, leading him to realize some things.
Things like...maybe he was wrong to say that to Keith.
Maybe he should apologize. Again.

Maybe he liked him?
Gods no. That was all Sabrina talking.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sabrina was lounging on one of couches in the main common area when Lance entered the cabin of Aphrodite. He didn’t see her at first, as most of the lights were either off or dimmed, and was creeping across the floorboards when a pillow smacked into his side.

He whirled and saw his half-sister sprawled out on her stomach across the sofa, her socked feet swinging lazily back and forth in the air. She smiled at him, one eyebrow raising surreptitiously.

“Bout time you came back.”

Lance walked over, plopping the pillow down on her head, and sat on the couch opposite her.

“I thought you were going to bed. Didn’t know you were waiting for me.”

She turned her face to look at him but didn’t make any move to get up. She looked incredibly comfortable, and Lance felt his own exhaustion beginning to make itself known.

“I was going to bed, but I had a rather...invigorating encounter with someone.”

“Oh yeah?”

Sabrina nodded.

“Care to elaborate?” Lance said as he waited for her to reply. She shifted so she was sitting upright, her hair slightly askew from being hit with the pillow.

“You know him. New guy. The hot one.”

“Keith?” Lance spoke before thinking, and, noticing the large grin that spread across his half-sisters face, realized his mistake.

“Busted!” Sabrina said as she chucked the pillow at him again. Lance quickly tried to amend.

“I was going to mention Shiro as well! You didn’t let me finish.” But Sabrina wasn’t having it.

“Oh, so you think Shiro is hot as well?”

Lance felt his face begin to burn.

“Quit twisting my words. I was answering the ‘new guy’ part of your stupid hint.”

Sabrina waved her eyebrows at him, a move that Lance had taught her when she first came to camp.

Of all his siblings, he liked Sabrina best, though he would never admit it to her. His other two sisters, Mariah and Yuki, were great, but they didn’t appreciate Lance’s humour and sarcasm as much as Sabrina. He had a half-brother as well, Kevan-with-an-‘a’, or Kev for short, but he had left their camp a year ago in order to attend university. He never really appreciated Lance’s humour either, though, in his opinion, Kev’s nickname had been one of Lance’s better innovations.
The eyebrow trick, on the other hand, was something Lance had always been proficient in. Not everyone could move them in the oscillating motion, like deep ocean waves, but Sabrina was a natural. It was hilarious really, but where Lance used the technique for humour, Sabrina had managed to twist it into something else. Something...mischievous.

He didn’t like when she used it against him.

“It’s fine,” Sabrina went on, “I think they’re cute as well. Wouldn’t even bother with Shiro though, he’s enthralled with Allura.”

“How do you know that?” Lance asked, relieved to change the subject.

“It’s obvious. He couldn’t take his eyes off her. It was really cute, but I feel bad for him. Allura doesn’t date. Like, at all.”

Lance considered the information. He hadn’t been watching Shiro at the ceremony. His attention had been focused on Keith more than anything, his curiosity about the boy’s parentage outweighing the annoyance he felt towards him. Ares made sense. The god of war was a firecracker. Unstable. Always looking for a fight. A total hothead. Just like his son.

Yeah, Ares made sense.

“...Lance?”

His eyes jerked up, and he saw Sabrina staring at him with humour plastered on her face. He must have zoned out.

“What?”

She rolled her eyes.

“I asked who you were watching if not Shiro, but I think I know the answer.”

Lance felt his face flush again. Why was Sabrina so good at reading him? She always seemed to see past his charade.

Lance sighed; there was no point in denying it now.

“Who else would I be watching? It was a choosing ceremony. For Keith. I was watching him be choosed. Chosed. Choosened? Gah, I was waiting to see who would claim him. Just like everyone else there.”

Sabrina rolled her eyes.

“Mmmhmm.”

“I was!”

Sabrina gave him a look like ‘I know you’re lying but I’ll let it go for now’, and began to braid her hair. She spoke as she worked.

“Wasn’t really a shock. Still, would have been nice to get another boy in our cabin.”

“I’m glad he’s not in our cabin.”

Sabrina smirked and glanced up at him.

“I’m sure you are.”

“Stop!”

She giggled and went back to her hair.

“He’s odd though. Quiet, but also not afraid to speak his mind. Sort of menacing but also wickedly cute when he gets all flustered.” She smiled to herself and Lance felt a pang of jealousy. Since when did Sabrina know so much about Keith? When had they spoken? He pushed the thoughts
away.
Why did he care?
He hated Keith.
Still...

“When’s the wedding.” Lance’s words were more spiteful than he had intended, but Sabrina didn’t seem to notice. She tied off one braid and began another.

“I wish. Funnily enough he was immune to my charms.” That caught his attention.
“What do you mean?”
“Well, I used all my best tricks, and he barely reacted. When I mentioned you were my brother though...Pow.” She made an explosion sign with one hand. “It was like a light switch.” Lance quirked his eyebrows in confusion.

“I don’t get it.” Sabrina gave him a look through half-lidded eyes, an expression of ‘how could you possible not get that you dim-witted fool’.
“Think about it...a girl like me, with all my feminine charms and alluring words, had no effect on him. But I say your name once, and he’s suddenly a blushing mess.”
“So a guy didn’t fall for you, so what?” Sabrina threw her hands up in exasperation.

“Lance how are you this thick!”
“Hey-”
“Keith,” she interrupted, “does not like girls.” She emphasised each word.
“That’s kind of rude. Maybe you just weren’t his type.”
Sabrina looked ready to explode, but managed to keep her cool.
“Oh, I’m not his type all right. I think he prefers the tall, dark and handsome.”
“There are plenty of girls that fit that description. Shay for one, but Hunk likes her, so Keith can back off.” Lance got an image of Hunk punching Keith so far over the mountains that there would be nothing left of him but a twinkle in the sky. It was a nice image.
“Lance.” Sabrina waited until his attention was back on her. “Keith likes guys.”

Oh.
Oh!

Lance felt his stomach do a small flip. He didn’t know why he suddenly felt weightless, but Sabrina was watching him earnestly, so Lance pushed the feelings aside. He cleared his throat.
“Neato.”
Sabrina’s mouth dropped open.
“NEATO!? THAT’S ALL I GET?!” Her voice bounced off the walls, and from the next room over a muffled ‘shut up!’ could be heard. It sounded like Yuki.
Sabrina didn’t seem to care. She hurled another pillow at Lance, hitting him square in the face.
“Ouch what the heck!” Sabrina was watching him expectantly, and Lance finally caught her meaning.

“I don’t like Keith! The guy is a mouth breather!” Lance had been expecting Sabrina to laugh at the reference, but instead her face grew serious.

“Why do you have to piss people off?”
Wait...what?
Lance was thrown off by the question, and grew defensive.
“I’ve no idea what you’re talking about. I’m a delight.”
“Sometimes yes. But you have this nasty habit of pushing people away. You hide behind humour and it throws people off.”

Where was this coming from?!
“If you’re talking about Keith then you have it all wrong. He completely over-reacted.”
“Maybe, but what exactly happened between you guys? Hades it’s only been a day!”
Lance sighed, thinking back to the fire.

Keith had approached them, and Hunk had nudged Lance’s side to get his attention. Lance knew what he had to do. Apologize. Then Hunk would stop bothering him. They had made eye contact, and Lance was startled by how Keith’s eyes almost looked purple in the glow of the fire, but he had been even more surprised when Keith spoke first.

“Sorry. About before.”
Lance had been too shocked to reply at first, and Hunk nudged him again.

“Wow, really?” It wasn’t the most polite thing to say in response, but Lance had not been expecting Keith to say sorry. Maybe he had misjudged him.
“Yes.” Keith replied.
Lance couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face.
“I’m sorry as well. It’s been a...weird day.” Lance watched as Keith’s expression softened. Maybe Keith wasn’t a bad guy after all, a fact further solidified by his next words:
“I guess I should thank you as well...for saving us.”

What!
This guy!
Shiro had basically said the same thing to him not long before, but hearing the words from Keith made Lance’s heart begin to race. That had to be a side effect of the giant attack. His body was just all out of whack.
Whatever the reason, Lance felt it better to cross his arms in case Keith saw his chest pounding. He took a deep breath as well, to help steady his breathing. Time for evasive maneuvers.

“Oh, you know, all in a day’s work. Those giants were no trouble at all. I’m really quite skilled in the art of fighting.” It had been a jab at himself really, seeing as he had almost died in the process, but Keith didn’t laugh. He didn’t even crack a smile.

“And yet you still got knocked out.” Keith had turned and left, leaving a very perplexed Lance. The joke had been directed at himself so why was Keith getting all uppity about it?

“Woah, cool your jets, I was just joking!” Lance called after him, but Keith had only replied with a rather rude gesture.
WOW.
Lance watched him go, pushing campers out of his way as he rejoined his brother. Beside him Pidge snickered.
“Good one.”
Hunk sighed beside him.
“Lance...was that really necessary?”
Lance stared between them.
Pidge rolled her eyes at him.
“Honestly Lance, your people skills never fail to amaze me.”
“I have excellent people skills!” Lance replied in a huff.
“Why did you say that though?” Hunk was rubbing his forehead, his face displaying obvious disapproval.
“It was a joke!”
“Wasn’t very funny.” Pidge muttered to herself, her attention back on the crowd as Allura took center stage.
“Yeah, ok, so it wasn’t my best, but that doesn’t mean he had to get all offended! And what was that comment ‘you still got knocked out’? Rude!”
“He apologized to you though, and then thanked you! And you tell a joke in reply?!” Hunk was growing agitated, a look Lance rarely saw in his best friend.

“What! I’m the victim here!” Lance was incredulous. Why were his friends ganging up on him? Why weren’t they agreeing with him that Keith was a jerk?
“No you’re not! You were just as rude to him as he was to you!” Hunk’s voice was growing louder, and some campers nearby looked over in concern. “Now you have to apologize all over again! It’s like herding cats I sweat to the gods!”

“What! No way-” Lance was cut off by Allura’s voice, informing everyone to settle down and take their seats. Hunk Lance and Pidge made their way to a bench and sat down in silence.
Lance pouted as he listened to Allura speak.
What was up with everybody? Had his joke been that awful? It didn’t make sense, and a headache was beginning to form behind Lance’s temples.
He focused on Keith, and the pain receded slowly. So now he had to apologize. Again. Super.

Keith didn’t deserve it. Lance didn’t want to say sorry to him at all, especially when Keith began to argue with Allura. Who did this guy think he was?
Lance had watched as Keith’s skin began to glow red, and even Pidge had looked up from her gadget to ogle him.
“What in the world...” Hunk trailed off as they watched Shiro point to the symbol above Keith’s head, and it suddenly all made sense.

So Keith was a child of Ares.
Lance smiled to himself, curiously relieved. He caught Keith watching him and looked away quickly to hide his face. He didn’t want to be smiling over Keith.
Keith pissed him off.
Keith was a piece of work.

Still, Lance felt oddly disappointed when Marcus, the head of the Ares cabin, led Shiro and Keith away. He shook himself of the feeling, deciding it was only due to him wanted to get the apology over and done with.
Now he would have to wait until tomorrow.

Sabrina listened as Lance retailed his story. He left out certain parts, like his heart racing and his thoughts on Keith, but he couldn’t hide their conversation. Sabrina had face-palmed when Lance told her his ‘joke’, but hadn’t said anything. She listened intently to what he said, as if trying to decide whether or not Lance was exaggerating any part of the story.
“Nothing really happened after that.” He finished, and she considered his words.
“So, basically, he said sorry, you said sorry, he said thanks, you told a really bad joke, he sassed you, and you got the finger?”
Lance frowned.
“I mean, I think I told it a bit more elegantly than that, but yeah.”
Sabrina nodded, then smiled sympathetically at him.

“I think he did over-react. A bit.” Lance could feel his face brighten. “But it was warranted.” Never mind.
Sabrina went on.
“I mean, he doesn’t really know you well enough to know when you’re joking, or being sarcastic. He probably thought you were making fun of him.”
Lance felt guilt creep into his stomach at her words. He hadn’t considered that maybe Keith had misinterpreted his joke. The more he thought about it the more it made sense.
Had that been why Hunk had gotten so upset as well?

They hadn’t spoke of the incident after Keith and Shiro left, since most of the attention had shifted to their small group. Lance had felt numerous pairs of eyes watching them, and the air was thick with unease. When he tried to make eye contact with his fellow campers they looked away quickly, avoiding his gaze.
Hunk had tried to distract him by telling him to ignore them, but Lance hated feeling this vulnerable; like he was a dangerous specimen on a dissecting table, and the campers were all scientists too afraid to approach.
Pidge had picked up on the vibe as well, and made several rude remarks to anyone close enough to hear her, but it didn’t help Lance’s mood.
He was a monster to these people. His fellow campers. His friends.

They were terrified of him, and for what? His voice?
He could feel himself descending into a pool of melancholy, and had distanced himself from the fire. Hunk and Pidge had followed, but their words of comfort had no effect.

It was Sabrina that had made all the difference.
He looked up at her, and smiled amiably.

“Thank you, again, for back there.”
She stared at him, then chuckled.

“Nice subject change.”
Lance felt the guilt return. He looked down at the pillow in his lap.
“Oh, sorry, I got distracted. I’ll apologize to Keith again.” He sighed. “But I do mean it. Thank you, for telling everyone not to be scared of me. I hated feeling that way.”

Lance heard the couch across him squeak as Sabrina got up, then felt a depression beside him as she sat. She wrapped her arms around him in a side hug and squeezed.

“You aren’t scary. You’re just powerful. People often think those things go hand in hand, but they don’t have to. Besides, you’re you.” Lance looked over at her as she released him. She smiled at him and gently punched him in the arm.
“You’re a giant nerd with bad jokes and a stupid face.”
“Gee, thanks.” But Lance smiled back.
Sabrina got up and yawned, stretching her arms wide.
“Gods I’m sleepy. I need my beauty rest.”
Lance tossed the pillow up at her, making her step backwards in surprise. She didn’t retaliate though, instead making the ‘I’m watching you symbol’ as Lance stuck his tongue out at her. “Give Keith another chance. I think you might be surprised by him.” She walked out of the room before Lance could reply.

Not that he had anything to say. Sabrina’s words had made him realize his mistakes. She was good at that, making people see reason. Lance sometimes wondered if she possessed Charmspeak as well, but Sabrina was simply gifted at making people understand. She would make a great teacher, or guidance councillor. It was one of the reasons she was the head of their cabin. After Kevan had left the title went to her, since she was a great diplomat and got along well with her siblings. She was a great friend and Lance was grateful to have her.

A yelp of excitement brought Lance out of his thoughts. Sabrina emerged from the bedroom with a toothbrush in her mouth. She took it out and waved it at Lance. “I’ve figured out what I’m going to make you do for our bet!”

Oh no.
Lance had forgotten. Again! “You’re still going to make me do that? I’m injured!”

“Nuh-uh. You’re fine. I threw that pillow at your face and you hardly made a sound. In fact, you can probably take your bandage off tomorrow.”
Lance felt uneasy about that. He didn’t want to know what the scar looked like.

“But I still have stiches!”

“Just go to the healers tomorrow. They only put them in because the ambrosia was working to fix your head injury, and they couldn’t give you more or you’d burn up.” She flicked her toothbrush at him again, sending bits of foam his way. “Tomorrow they can give you more though, and then your face will be healed up.”
Lance had forgotten about the nectar of the gods. Ambrosia would heal his wound...which meant he might not have a mark left over from the fight!

Sabrina must have known what he was thinking, because her face fell. “Oh Lance...there might still be a scar...the gash was pretty deep and there’s only so much ambrosia can do.”

His hopes fled. Lance didn’t know why it bothered him the way it did. Everyone had scars. But not everyone has them in such noticeable places. He pushed away the thought. It was fine. He was fine.

It was just a scar.

Maybe Keith would think it was cool.

Gah! Where did that come from!?“I’ll go with you tomorrow ok? Then we can see how bad it is.” She hesitated at the door before continuing. “But you know, scars are totally hot. Rugged. I bet Keith would love it.”

WHAT!
Sabrina ran away giggling, the pillow Lance had thrown just missing her. His face was burning at the thought. No.

Sabrina was just getting in his head. Putting ideas there.
Lance didn’t like Keith. He wasn’t even sure if he tolerated him yet.

Sure, he would apologize again, sincerely this time, but after that he had free-range to judge Keith.

He would be his most pleasant self, that way Hunk and Pidge and the rest of them couldn’t blame
him when Keith acted out.

Yeah. Perfect plan.

Lance went into the second bathroom to get ready for bed. His reflection startled him, having not seen it properly for the past three days. The bandage was stark white against his tan skin, but he didn’t dare lift it.

It’s just a scar he thought to himself as he brushed his teeth and washed his face as best he could. It felt nice to exfoliate. Refreshing.

After applying his various face creams Lance changed into his pajamas and crawled into bed. The Aphrodite cabin was fortunate in that it had two large bedrooms, each with several bunks to accommodate numerous demigods. Originally the rooms had been separated by gender, but those ideals were long out-of-date.

Since there were only the four of them currently residing in the cabin, the rooms were cold and empty, and Lance usually slept in the bunk above Sabrina, beside Yuki and Mariah. The other room had been transformed into a closet of sorts, with various scraps of clothing piled in heaps on the bunks. Yuki was something of a designer, and made many of the outfits the Aphrodite kids wore. She also helped supply the camp store with clothing when needed.

Lance wandered into the closet room, not wanting to wake his sisters in the other. He found an empty bunk and crawled in, shivering as the cool sheets surrounded his body.

Exhaustion rushed into him as his head hit the pillow, and before he knew it, Lance was asleep.

He was in the woods, near his tree. The branches swayed softly in the breeze, but no sound could be heard. He wandered over to the base, but as he looked up to the nearest branch, he watched as it stretched sickeningly away from him. Up and up it went, the vertigo making his head spin.

He turned away, and suddenly he was in the clearing. Footsteps shook the ground, and as he turned to face them he saw three giants charging towards him. They were grotesque, their features twisted and pulling in strange directions. As they drew closer they grew in height, but his feet would not budge. Try as he might, he could not run. He had no weapons.

He tried to speak, but no words came out.

The giants shifted as they loomed down over him, their features contorting into faces he thought he knew. They looked familiar. A girl, and boy, and a man. The boy he recognized as himself.

He tried his voice once again.

“Who are you?”

There was no answer. Instead the man and girl turned to leave. The boy began to cry. He tried to follow. He couldn’t move. The girl and the man moved away from the clearing, out into the woods, where he could no longer see them. A scream pierced the air, loud enough to rip the sky in half. It sounded familiar. A deep voice followed after.

“Run!”
Suddenly he was moving. Away from the scream. Away from the boy who stood crying in the clearing. He ran until the ground gave way, and then he ran on nothing. Darkness. Utter blackness beneath his feet.

“Run.”

The voice was fainter this time, and he slowed his pace. Nothing. The air was still. Small dots lit up the ground. Stars maybe.

“Run...”

 Barely a whisper. He stopped. He listened. But there was nothing. And then he was falling. His stomach dropping as he plummeted through space. Stars became white streaks. They sped by, growing faster and larger until he was shrouded in white light.
He thought he heard it again, the voice. The word.

Run.
But there was only silence.

Lance’s eyes snapped open. He hadn’t jolted awake. Rather, his body felt numb after the dream, like he had dove off the highest diving board and landed wrong in the water.
The room was still dark, but traces of dawn light were peaking in through the window. Lance tried to recall the dream, the faces, but try as he might they slipped through his grasp, like trying to catch smoke with nothing but your hands.
His heart was pounding, but as the dream faded he was able to take a steadying breath.
It was gone. He couldn’t remember anything but fear. The dream had escaped him.
Lance sat up, his head throbbing slightly from the movement.
What had it been about?

He reached up to feel his cheeks, and his hands came away with clear liquid.
His face was wet with tears.

Lance sat in the darkness, watching the sun peak over the mountains, sending rays of morning light across camp.

What had it been about?

Chapter End Notes

Gah this chapter was hard to write. I want the next one to be Lance as well, just because this one seemed short and unfulfilling. Anyways, wanted to post this because I'm not sure when I'll have time to write more. Hopefully soon.

Also, began reading the Trials of Apollo, (which I totally forgot existed) and I'm
baffled at all the information I've messed up.
Whoops.

Oh well, this is loosely based anyways...*nervous laughter*

Hoping for more Klance encounters in the next chapter..hee.hee.hee
Actually, more of everyone encounters. That's right. I haven't forgotten about you
Hunk, nor you Shiro.
WINK.

Love the feedback as well!
Please enjoy this meager offering :)
Is that a friendship forming...or maybe just a scar

Chapter Summary

Lance runs into a certain someone, and decides its finally time to remove the bandage and see what lies underneath.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lance hadn’t felt like going back to bed. His senses were alert after the dream, though he couldn’t recall it. He had no desire to linger in the room, the dregs of the night slowly ebbing away with the sunrise as he got up and stretched.

The floor was cold beneath his feet as he went about his morning routine. The stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror; the bandage was still on his face, covering most of his left eyebrow and forehead. Today was the day.

Time to face facts.

His hand was trembling slightly as he reached a finger up to touch the gauze. “Get a hold of yourself. You’re being stupid.” He muttered to himself.

One tug. That’s all it would take.

Lance held his breath and tried to peel off the tape that secured the bandage down. It pulled back slightly, bringing the skin with it, and Lance let go immediately.

“Nope! Nuh-uh. Not happening.” He’d always hated bandaids. It took him weeks to take them off, him usually preferring to either let them fall off on their own or get Hunk to do the honours. He made the mistake of asking Sabrina to do it once, but had learned his lesson quickly after being taunted mercilessly for days afterwards. She and Pidge found it hilarious to just stick bandaids randomly on his skin when he wasn’t paying attention from then on, so Lance had learned to keep his arms and legs protected whenever they were feeling particularly evil.

But this tape?

This tape made bandaids feel like post-it notes. He was screwed.

Lance scowled at the bandage. “Fine. Stay on. What do I care?”

He left the bathroom, changing into a clean outfit and creeping quietly across the cabin so as not to wake his half-sisters. It was incredibly early, especially for Lance, seeing as he preferred to sleep in passed double-digits whenever possible.

But the dream had rattled him, and he wanted to get outside in the fresh air.

He knew Sabrina would be angry at him for not waiting for her to get up, but he also knew that she would just want to bring him straight to the infirmary to get some ambrosia and finally see the damage beneath the bandage.

Lance was less keen. He would go to the infirmary sure, but he would do it alone. Just in case. In case it was worse than he thought.
Stop being such a drama queen about this, he thought angrily as he walked through the cabins. Scars were normal. Natural even. But not for children of Aphrodite.

Lance dug his hands deep into his jacket pockets, irritably kicking pebbles that were unfortunate enough to be in his path. He was annoyed with the bandage. The bandage that hid the wound. And then he was angry at himself for being annoyed. And then he found himself blaming Keith and Shiro. Which made him feel guilty and shameful and downright awful. Lance was so preoccupied with his feelings that he didn’t notice there was someone in front of him until he heard a small gasp. “Lance?”

His head jerked up, snapping out of his thoughts. Lance was standing outside of the dining hall, and sitting on the steps was a boy with long black hair and strange eyes. Lance felt his breath hitch. What was he doing here? The dining hall wasn’t even open yet...

“Keith?” The boy didn’t say anything, and an awkward silence descended upon them. Lance ran a hand through his hair; a habit he had developed whenever he was anxious. But why was he anxious?

He watched Keith’s eyes follow his hand; his cheeks turning a light shade of pink. Cute. WAIT. NO. Nononono. Noooooooopppee.

Lance cleared his throat. “Um...what are you doing here?” Keith averted his gaze, instead focusing on an object he held between his hands. It looked like a knife. Lance gulped. “I uh...” he made a noise that sounded like a cross between a laugh and a cough, a smile creeping across his face in embarrassment. “I’m kinda used to waking up early. Shiro was still asleep so I went to see if Marcus and them were awake, but their beds were empty.” He glanced up at Lance, the smile making his eyes squint slightly. “Yeah, the Ares kids like to go for early morning jogs. They live to torture themselves in cruel and unusual ways.” Lance said, earning another small chuckle from Keith. He had an adorably shy laugh.

“I must have just missed them then.” He looked out at camp and shrugged his shoulders. “I’ve just been wandering around camp.” “That’s not a creepy hobby at all.” Lance hadn’t meant to say it, recalling what Sabrina had said about Keith not understanding his sarcasm, but the boy chuckled. “Woah, déjà vu.” He mumbled to himself. Lance didn’t know what he meant by that, but something about the way Keith had said the words made him feel like he was missing something. He decided not to ask.

“Listen...Keith,” the boy looked over at him, his eyes reflecting the sunrise, casting shades of deep violet and mauve on his irises. Lance knew it was just the lighting, but it was still a striking sight. He wondered what colour Keith’s eyes normally were, and what it would be like to stare into them.
Lance felt something stir deep in his gut, but pushed on while he still had the nerve. “I just wanted to say that I didn’t mean what I said last night. It was a joke...a really bad one. Which is unusual for me since I’m normally a comedic genius.” He was rambling, he knew.

Gods, what was wrong with him?!

Lance took a deep breath and went on. “Anyways, it was a stupid thing to say and I’m sorry.” He watched Keith for any sort of reaction. Anger, malice...maybe a clenched fist that would suddenly come into his field of view.

But Lance was taken by surprise, yet again, when Keith smiled. His heart nearly leapt into his throat.

He felt his face begin to flush, and found himself almost wishing that Keith had chosen to punch him instead.

Pain he could deal with.

Adorable closed-mouth grins he could not.

“Thank you for saying that.” Keith replied.

Lance looked away quickly, hoping Keith hadn’t noticed his blush.

“Um...yeah. Right, so...the uh,” Lance gestured to the dining hall, “breakfast doesn’t start for another hour or so, but if you’re hungry the Demeter kids could probably whip something up. Hunk is a great cook. Like almost as good a cook as he is a fighter, though I think he prefers tinkering with gadgets with Pidge.” He was rambling again, but the words kept spilling from his mouth, like his filter was removed. “There’s also the Hermes cabin; they always have a stash of junk food. Don’t think Coran knows about it though so maybe don’t spread that around. If you say you heard it from me I will deny everything.” He trailed off as he noticed the look of amusement on Keith’s face.

Oh gods.

Totally uncool Lance, he thought to himself. He, a child of Aphrodite, gifted with Charmspeak and unearthly good-looks, practically bathed in charisma and probably the most suave guy in camp, was being reduced to a blabbering fool.

It was time to leave. Keith was having some sort of effect on his brain, and Lance felt like he had no control over his own body. His palms were clammy, his face flustered, and the word vomit that had just spewed from his mouth had him seriously considering asking Keith to punch him.

He turned to leave, his long legs carrying him hurriedly away.

“Wait, Lance!” Keith called after him. Lance hadn’t meant to turn around. He had specifically asked his feet not to. But did they listen?

Traitors.

Keith stood and walked over to him, stopping a few feet away. He was holding the knife in a tight grip, and Lance found himself welcoming a stab from the weapon. Maybe it would knock some sense back into him.

But Keith didn’t oblige, which was rude, and instead shuffled his feet in the dirt nervously.

“I also want to say sorry. About being a jerk. And...” he glanced up at Lance shyly. “Yeah. It’s a personality trait I must have inherited from,” he trailed off, making a pointed glance up at the sky. Lance understood though.

Keith realizing his dad was the god of war, or a god in general, was probably rather shocking, and Lance found himself forgiving everything Keith had said or done to him in the brief day he had gotten to know him.

He smiled, his composure returning to normal. Maybe Keith wasn’t such a bad guy after all.

“I actually don’t hate you right now.”
Keith chuckled, shaking his head slightly.
“That’s a relief. Apparently you’re quite the opponent.”
Lance was taken aback.
“Where did you hear that?” he asked. Was it just him or did Keith look embarrassed?
“Just...rumours.”
Lance quirked one eyebrow.
“Well. They’re all true. I’m awesome. Best in camp.”
Keith didn’t reply, and Lance could feel the awkwardness begin to creep back into the air.
Right...even if he had forgiven Keith, that didn’t mean he knew him well enough to start with the sarcasm. He chastised himself.

“I’m joking, Keith.”
Keith blinked.
“Oh, sorry, no, I figured you were...I was just thinking.”
Lance gave him a quizzical look, but didn’t press the matter.
“Actually,” Keith continued, “I was wondering if I could just hang out with you until the dining hall opens. I don’t really know my way around camp yet, and I don’t want to wake Shiro...” He trailed off, looking up at Lance timidly.

Lance was delighted.
Like, beyond thrilled, to hear Keith ask to hang out with him.
His heart was all ‘Hades yeah!’ but his head was screaming ‘calm down you pompous organ! You’re making a fool of yourself!’
It made no sense. Why was he feeling this way?!
Sure, Keith was cute...like really cute.
Hot even.
But those were just physical characteristics. Children of Aphrodite were rarely affected by them.

Strange really, considering Aphrodite is the goddess of beauty and everything, and most people assume that outer appearances are her whole gig, but that isn’t entirely true. Beauty is more than good-looks, and children of Aphrodite tend to be more in tune with personality, and the aura people give off.
Sure they flirt and tease, and are uncharacteristically beautiful to look at, but they themselves tended to fall for the things that made a person unique. Things that aren’t usually seen at first.

Which was why Lance was so confused about the way he was feeling.
He hardly knew Keith. There was no reason for him to be acting the way he was.

This all has to do with Sabrina. She planted these stupid ideas in my head, and I’m just confused about things still, Lance thought.

Keith was watching him expectantly, and Lance decided to make up an excuse.
“I’m actually going to head to the infirmary, to get this checked out,” he pointed to his head, where the bandage was so obviously displayed. There was no way Keith would want to join him there.

“Oh, that’s perfect! I’ve been meaning to go there and ask them where they put my weapons!”
Lance groaned inwardly, his mind panicking as his heart raced.
It was all very disorientating.
But there was no backing out. Keith looked so...pleased; relaxed even, that Lance would have to have been Hades himself to deny him his request.

In hindsight he should have seen it coming. Lance reprimanded himself for picking the infirmary of all places. He hadn’t been planning on going there at all. At least, not yet.
He needed time.

But there was no point now. Lance felt dread fill his stomach as he thought about what mark would be left on his face, and how he would react.
He didn’t exactly want to breakdown in front of Keith.
He should have woken up Hunk! Or Sabrina! Or Pidge!
They would have understood...but Keith?
No way.
Scars were normal for children of Ares. Encouraged even.
Keith wouldn’t understand if Lance got upset.

Oh gods...this was going to be terrible.

They walked in silence for most of the walk, but Lance was surprised to find it not entirely uncomfortable. There was no need for him to make conversation, since Keith supplied a steady flow of questions.
“What’s that building?”
“Cabin of Athena.”
“Does Allura stay there?”
“Technically yes. She’s the head of the cabin. But she also runs this camp. Something happened to the previous leader and Allura was forced to take over...but she doesn’t talk about it.” Lance shrugged, “Anyways, most days she just sleeps in the main cabin.”
Keith nodded, absorbing the information.

“What about those ones?” He pointed a row of cabins a ways ahead, much larger than the surrounding ones, which made a semi-circle, like the end of a cul-de-sac.
“Those are the cabins of Zeus, Hades and Poseidon. They’re empty.”
“Why?”
“Children of the big three are rare. There is a story though, that many years ago there used to be a team of demigods who would complete major quests and stuff like that. There was a child from each of the big three, as well as two others, a child of Athena and maybe Ares? I can’t really remember. They were heroes.”
Keith examined the cabins, but Lance turned a corner, towards the infirmary, and they fell out of view.
“What happened to them?” Keith called from behind, jogging slightly to catch up.
Lance shrugged.
“No one really knows. They went missing around the same time Allura became head councillor. Died during a major quest or something.”
Keith was quiet beside him, and Lance wondered what he was thinking. The story, dubbed the Paladins of Old, was one that every camper knew, but hardly spoke of. It was sort of a taboo subject, since Allura, who normally answered every question with enthusiasm, would shut down and avoid a straight answer. Even Coran had been unwilling to give Lance a clear reply when he had asked years ago. Sure, he could use his Charmspeak and force them to tell him, but Lance wasn’t that kind of person.
Besides, there was a certain mystery to the story that appealed to him.

Lance stopped abruptly, realising they were now in front of the infirmary. Keith bumped into him with an ‘ooft’ and quickly moved away, muttering an apology as he hid his face. Lance felt his nerves begin to act up, making his insides squirm and jitter; a reaction caused by a mixture of Keith touching him and anxiety over what was about to happen.
He took a deep breath to steady himself, not wanting to look a coward in front of Keith.

“I’ll be right back. You can wait out here if you want, but I’ll ask them about your weapons-”
Lance was interrupted as the front door of the infirmary opened, and a short boy with curly red hair stepped out. He stopped, looking up at Lance, a large smile spreading across his lips. Lance reciprocated.

“Joel!”

The boy ran up and wrapped his arms around Lance, his head barely reaching his waist. Joel was Lance’s favourite healer. He was a child of Athena, and was a grand total of eleven years old, but his intellect far surpassed that of many people Lance knew. He was proficient in healing, which was a gift often associated with children of Apollo rather than Athena. Still, he was respected among the other campers for his knowledge, despite his young age. He also had a wicked sense of humour, and was a mega fan of science-fiction.

“Lancey! You aren’t dead!”

Lance ruffled the boy’s hair, and stepped back.

“Course not little buddy.”

Joel frowned to himself, putting a finger to his lips in thought.

“Kinda was hoping you would come back as a zombie. That would have been so cool! We could have fought monsters and stuff!” He punched the air a few times to demonstrate.

“Zombie? I was thinking more vampire. They’re a lot better looking.”

Joel shook his head.

“Nope. Definitely zombie. Pidge and I decided already.”

Lance rolled his eyes. Of course they had. Pidge and Joel had an odd relationship, like a weird comic-book duo. It was strange really, a child of Hephaestus and a child of Athena being good pals, but the things they came up with were as outlandish as they were extraordinary.

Pidge took to calling Joel ‘Rover’, and the two were thick as thieves. Or, they had been at least. With Joel becoming more and more proficient in the health field, he spent most of his time at the infirmary, but the two still hung out whenever time permitted.

“Oh, Joel, this is Keith, one of the guys we rescued.” Lance gestured to the boy behind him, and Joel blinked as if seeing him for the first time.

“Woah...” He ran up to Keith and walked around him in a circle. “You’re cool! Like a ninja! How did you fight off those giants? Do you have any cool powers? Is that other guy super strong? Who’s your favourite super hero?”

Keith blushed, glancing at Lance for help.

Lance chuckled. There was no escaping Joel when he had questions, but Lance decided that Keith could probably use the aid. Besides, Lance felt a lot better knowing Joel was the one on duty this morning, and decided now was as good a time as any to ask.

“Actually Joel, I was wondering if you could help me.” Joel turned back to Lance with wide eyes.

“Of course!”

“I need some ambrosia and to get this dreadful bandage off my face.”

Joel’s composure changed immediately, his mind shifting gears into medical mode.

“Definitely. The ambrosia from before should have run its course by now. Go on in and sit down.”

“Aren’t you coming?” Lance asked.

“I was just going to grab some breakfast.”

“Oh! Well, then I’ll be off. Thanks, Joel!”

Joel regarded him mischievously.

“Anytime!”

Lance shrugged. Joel had the entirety of camp wrapped around his finger. No one could refuse him, especially when he pulled his famous puppy eyes.
If he wanted breakfast before it was ready, all he had to do was ask.

Lance walked into the infirmary, with Keith slowly following after. He looked around the room but didn’t explore past the front entrance. Lance took a seat on one of the beds. He studied Keith, feeling his heart start to pump more enthusiastically as he did.

“You’re welcome, by the way.”

Keith turned his attention to him, an eyebrow raised in confusion.

“For what?”

“For saving you from Joel. He’ll want those answers eventually, but I did manage to buy you some time.” Lance positioned himself more comfortably on the bed, propping both legs up beneath him and laying back. Keith was watching him intently.

“Who is your favourite super hero by the way?” Lance asked. He needed to focus on something other than Keith, but there was a part of him that was genuinely curious.

Keith looked at him as if deciding if he was going to answer, then crossed his arms and leaned against the door frame.

“Why don’t you tell me first,” he paused, “Lancey...”

Lance felt his face burn. He hadn’t paid the nickname any heed when Joel had called him that, completely forgetting that Keith had been there to hear it.

He felt embarrassment wash over him as he sat up and gaped at the boy.

Keith had a wicked grin on his face, the morning light silhouetting his figure in the doorway, and Lance could feel the blood rushing into his cheeks as he took in the sight.

“I’ll have you know that only Joel uses that nickname. Usually people call me The Lance, or Lancinator. Lance-the-most-awesome-and-totally-cool. I’m known by many names really...” He trailed off as Keith chuckled softly. Gods it wasn’t fair that someone so brash could have a laugh like that.

Keith should have a laugh like rocks smashing together, something loud and obnoxious that Lance could easily detest.

But this?

This laugh was like bells, but not as shrill, as if someone had covered them in cotton. It was like rain pattering on the roof at night; comforting and familiar.

Lance couldn’t hate it.
He yearned to hear more of it.

Joel returned then, charging into the infirmary with an apple in his mouth and nearly knocking Keith over as he ran passed him. He slowed to a stop and placed a collection of food items on the bench beside Lance. He removed the apple, taking a large bite as he did.

“Newph recuhd!” He said through a mouthful of fruit. He swallowed and wiped his mouth, then turned his attention back to them. “Let’s take a look at that head of yours.”

Lance took a deep breath as Joel washed his hands and brought over the necessary tools. Keith wandered further into the room, curious, but also cautious as he approached them.

Lance managed a weak smile at him, before turning to face Joel.

“Alright Lancey, I’m just going to remove the bandage and take a look.”

Lance nodded, not risking a glance over at Keith as Joel reached up to remove the gauze. He pulled at the tape, and Lance balled his fists at the pain. He could feel the tiny hairs on his forehead being ripped out, and held his breath.

It only lasted a few moments, and then the bandage was off, and Lance felt the cool air rush in to replace its spot. Joel examined the cut, and Keith edged closer.
“Looks great! Those stitches did an amazing job. It was cool getting to use something other than ambrosia for once.” He rummaged through a bag, pulling out a small square of the stuff and handing it to Lance. “But there’s nothing quite like the nectar of the gods.” He looked over at Keith, motioning for him to come closer. “This is my favourite part. Ambrosia is a super-effective healing agent, though it’s fatal in large doses, for us at least. But it’s really cool to watch it work.” Joel focused back on Lance, and Keith locked eyes with him, as if asking permission. Lance nodded, closing his eyes as he took a bite of the ambrosia.

He felt vulnerable with Keith watching him, but he wasn’t about to ask him to leave. Besides, watching ambrosia work was really cool, and Keith had probably never seen it in action. The taste of strawberry rhubarb pie filled his mouth. That was another neat thing about ambrosia; it tasted like the users favourite food. Lance had always wondered why his was strawberry rhubarb. It wasn’t like it was served at camp often...

He opened his eyes, and saw Keith was focusing in on his forehead, a look of wonder plastered on his face. Lance felt a tingling above his left eyebrow, and knew the ambrosia was starting to take effect.

“Woah…” Keith whispered, and Joel beamed.

“Awesome right?! You can see the tissue’s fusing, new skin cells developing…it’s fantastic!”

It didn’t feel fantastic.

It felt itchy.

Lance bunched his eyebrows, wondering what sort of mark, if any, the ambrosia would leave. He had been told that the gash had been deep, which was why the stitches had been necessary in the first place, but ambrosia was powerful. Maybe, just maybe, it would heal him completely.

Joel reached up with gloved hands, and Lance felt small plucks as he removed the stitches, having waited for the opportune moment to do so. He could have taken them out first; that would have been easier. But that would also have caused Lance some pain, and Joel was a great healer, so he had waited until the cut was healed enough from the ambrosia to take them out. Now the nectar of the gods could finish its task.

Keith was still watching him in amazement as the tingling subsided. Lance knew the wound was healed, but didn’t reach up to examine it. He didn’t want to know...not yet.

Instead he leaned back, feigning disinterest.

“Did it work?” he asked.

Joel was still focusing in on his forehead, which made Lance nervous. Keith’s eyes locked with his for a moment, and he cleared his throat and looked away quickly.

Definitely not a good sign.

“There’s a scar, isn’t there.” It hadn’t been a question, more of an admittance to himself. Lance sat up and tried to ignore the pang of disappointment he felt.

“Yes, but that was to be expected.” Joel said, reaching for a mirror and holding it up for Lance. Everything on his face was normal. His eyes were the same colour, his skin tone still dark and even, but the mark had changed his entire reflection. It was like seeing a picture of yourself taken from an odd angle. Recognizable, but not entirely familiar.

Lance reached up and touched the scar. It was smooth and white, in stark contrast to his tan skin. It ran directly through his left eyebrow, forming something of a boomerang shape that pointed towards his left temple. It wasn’t as large as he had been dreading, which gave him some comfort, but it was still
noticeable.
There would be no covering it up.

Lance exhaled, not realizing he had been holding his breath, and handed the mirror back to Joel. “It looks really cool. Like Khal Drogo from Game of Thrones!” Joel exclaimed happily as he began to clean up.
Lance wasn’t familiar with the reference, but nodded anyways, knowing Joel wouldn’t understand how he was feeling. He hesitantly looked back at Keith, who was watching him with a curious expression.

Great, Lance thought. He probably thinks I’m being melodramatic.
But Keith was nodding, a slight smile playing at his lips.

“You do look like Khal Drogo. Sort of…” Keith trailed off, as if considering.
Lance would normally have been surprised that Keith was familiar with Joel’s reference, but he could feel his composure slipping.

“You’re just saying that. It looks awful.” Lance didn’t know why he was admitting that to Keith, but the words were out before he could stop them.
Keith’s expression dropped, the smile being replaced with concern.
Oh super now he feels bad for me, Lance cursed himself for his slip up. He felt terrible, and he didn’t want to with Keith there...

Joel was busy putting things away, and Keith edged towards Lance hesitantly.
“I doesn’t look awful.” He said quietly, and Lance looked up at him. He was smiling softly, his expression tender.
Maybe….
Maybe he did understand.

“In fact,” he went on, “It looks kind of cu-” He was interrupted by the door swinging open; a figure blocking out the sunlight ominously.

“LANCE YOU SON OF-”
“Hey Sabs!” Joel called cheerfully from the corner. He waved at her, and Sabrina immediately stopped what she had been about to say.
Lance was thankful that Joel was in the room. Sabrina would be less inclined to rip his head off in front of the boy.

“Oh, hi Joel.” She turned back to Lance. “I told you to wait for me! I was going to be here for emotional support and-” she stopped mid-sentence, noticing Keith for the first time. “Oh!”
She flipped her hair over her shoulder and looked Keith up and down, then moved her gaze slowly, purposefully, back towards Lance.
“I see how it is.”
Lance could feel his face beginning to burn. This was bad. Sabrina was the last person that should have seen hanging out with Keith.
Not that it means anything, he told himself.
Right.

He stood and placed himself in front of Keith, not noticeably, but enough to hopefully distract Sabrina from him long enough to change the subject.
It worked, and she put her hands to her mouth and gasped as she noticed Lance’s new scar.

“Lance! Your face!”
“Wow, thanks.” He felt a pang of grief at her comment, but it didn’t hurt as much as he thought it would. Keith’s words had helped ease his mind a bit. He wondered what he had been about to say before Sabrina had interrupted.

“Oh stop. I meant that it looks good! Better than I thought!”

“WOW, THANKS!” But he was smiling. Sabrina wasn’t one to lie. Keith had moved passed him, and was creeping towards the door as they spoke. Sabrina noticed him though, and turned as he reached the doorway.

“Oh, Keith!”
His shoulders tensed, and he slowly turned back towards them.

“Yes?”
Sabrina crossed her arms and smirked at him.

“Leaving so soon?”

“I-uh...I’m going to see if Shiro is awake yet. And then go for breakfast.”

Lance’s stomach growled audibly at the last word. Joel giggled, having settled himself at a desk in the corner and was munching happily on his own food.

Sabrina also had a smile on her face, her eyebrows quirked up in amusement.

“Breakfast sounds great. We’ll meet you there.” She said, turning back to Lance to get a better look at his scar.

Keith stood in the doorway for a moment, watching her as she walked towards Lance. Their eyes met, and lightning struck.

The sea dried up.

The air stopped moving.

The world stood still.

And then Keith blinked and left, leaving Lance blinded by the incoming sunlight.

Chapter End Notes

Welp this took longer than I thought. Again.
Sorry bout that :)

Keep meaning to bring Hunk and Pidge back into the story, but end up making new characters. Blah.
I have plans to bring them in the next couple of chapters so don't fret.
Also trying to incorporate some more Voltron references...as well as other references..."Khal Drogo" for one.

Joel says "new record" for those wondering.

I also really like the idea of Lance having a scar. I wanted him to have it as a character builder, seeing as it's Lance and beauty is important to him, both outer and inner.
Maybe I'll sketch out a picture of how I envision it and post it here, but who knows.
I do like the eyebrow scar though, they can look really hot on the right person.

And Lance is definitely the right person.
Keith agrees.

I'm also a fan of mutual pinning, so get ready for more of that.
Hope you enjoyed :)

Shiro had been resting peacefully, his dreams pleasant enough, considering what he had been through recently. Still, when he woke, slowly, so as not to jar his ribs, he had been disorientated at first.
Where was he again?
Right...the cabin of Ares.
A Greek god.
And Keith’s dad.

Shiro had known about Greek gods and demigods and all the lore that went along with them from a very young age. His mother had made sure that he knew the risks, and how to avoid them. He had fought countless creatures. He had seen infinite amounts of oddities.
So he thought he would have been more prepared when Keith was claimed.

But nothing could really have prepped him for seeing a floating spear appear above his younger brothers’ head. Or the fact that he had been glowing red.
Those were things that Shiro would never have been ready to see.
Still, he was glad Keith had that piece of him now. He knew his true father. And even if he never accepted that part of himself, at least it would be there, like a piece of a puzzle that was necessary in order to see the entire image.

Shiro moved each part of his body separately, feeling out the aches and pains and slowly managing to get out of bed without much trouble. He groaned as he leaned down to put on his boots, his side protesting heavily from the movement.
Broken ribs were the worst.

He stood and noticed the top bunk was empty. Keith was gone.
Shiro felt the sheets of his brother’s bed, the blanket having been pulled back up over the pillow.
They were cold, which meant he had been gone for a while.
Panic bubbled in his gut, but Shiro forced it down. There was no need to worry. Keith wouldn’t be foolish enough to run away on his own...right?

Shiro thought back to the bonfire, at Keith’s outburst before the symbol had appeared. He had known that Keith wasn’t acting like himself, but he hadn’t thought it was because he didn’t want to stay at the camp. It was safe here. They had traveled so far and gone through so much to get to it. Why did he want to leave?
He had wanted to ask last night, but had been so exhausted that the topic hadn’t come up naturally. But Shiro knew that eventually he would have to ask Keith outright what was on his mind.

He crossed the room, noticing the other bunks were empty as well. What time was it even? The sun was still low in the sky, meaning it was early, so he hadn’t overslept. Shiro exited the cabin,
realizing he had no idea where to go from there. Where was the main cabin? He had been hoping to apologize to Allura for Keith’s behaviour the night before, but he had no clue how to get there. The camp looked completely different during the day, and Shiro hadn’t had the chance to actually tour it yet. Maybe he could ask Allura to show him around....

A figure turned the corner, making Shiro tense.
“Shiro, you’re awake.” Keith waved at him, and his body relaxed. Thank God.
Or was it gods...?
As relieved as he was to see Keith, Shiro still had to play the big brother act. He put a hand on his hip and pointed a finger at Keith, shaking it dramatically.
“Where were you? Bed empty, no note...you could have been killed!”
Keith grinned, understanding the reference.
“Or worse, expelled.” Keith finished, walking up to Shiro and stopping in front of him. Shiro ruffled his brothers’ hair.
“That’s not the right quote.”
“Neither was yours.”
“I know, but I’ve always liked that line.” Keith shoved Shiro’s hand away, but the grin remained in place. It was nice to see his brother smiling so freely. What had changed overnight? Or that morning?

“Seriously though, where did you go?”
Keith shrugged.
“I woke up early, didn’t want to bother you, and got hungry. Turns out the dining hall isn’t open twenty-four seven.”
“That’s completely barbaric.” Shiro said, using his best British accent. Keith cringed.
“Oh gross that was so bad. You’ll ruin Harry Potter for me forever.” He yelped as Shiro reached over and poked him in the side.
“You love my accent just admit it.” He said, approving of the smile that was still plastered on Keith’s face. “What did you do then? If the dining hall was closed I mean.”

“Nothing really. Just, wandered around.” Was it just him or was Keith blushing? He was hiding something, Shiro knew. Keith was good at lying, but not to Shiro. His eyes would always dart to the left before a fib.
So what was the truth?
“Really? Just...walked around by yourself?”
Keith had the decency to look away, his face turning a deep crimson.
Interesting...

“I might have been with someone.” He mumbled, then: “But it doesn’t matter. I’m starving so let’s go eat!”
Shiro decided he would pry later. His own stomach was crying out for food, and he wanted to get his strength back as quickly as possible. He hated feeling useless.
Keith turned back the way he had come and motioned for Shiro to follow.
“It’s this way.”

Shiro followed after, wondering what had caused this complete mood swing in his brother. Usually it took days, if not weeks, for Keith to quit brooding. When he got upset about something, like he had last night, it usually took everything Shiro had to get him back to his normal self.
He had been fully expecting a grumpy, uncooperative sibling this morning, but instead found a happy-go-lucky version of Keith walking purposefully down a path between the cabins.

They turned a corner, and Shiro recognized some of the buildings. The dining hall could be seen up ahead, as well as the main cabin, which Shiro glanced up at as they walked by.
“She’s not there.” Keith’s voice called out to him from a little way’s ahead, and Shiro realized he had stopped in front of the steps of the main lodge.

He turned to look at Keith, feeling his own face start to burn.

Keith smirked at him.

“I saw her walking with that mustache guy when I was heading back to our cabin. They looked like they were deep in conversation.”

Shiro couldn’t explain the drop he felt in his chest, like that feeling you get when you were expecting one thing and got the exact opposite.

But he hadn’t been expecting anything....had he?

And mustache guy....that must be Coran. Shiro remembered the lively fellow, his bright red hair and twinkling eyes. He had seemed like a nice enough guy, but Shiro hadn’t thought much about his relationship with Allura.

It hadn’t occurred to him that maybe she was already dating.

Or married even.

But Coran?
What has gotten into you?! Shiro thought to himself. He wasn’t one to judge others unfairly. So why was he? Coran was probably a great person, and if Allura was happy then Shiro wouldn’t interfere.

And why should he anyway? He had only just met her. It was weird for him to be thinking about her this much...right?

“Dude!”

Shiro blinked, his mind snapping to attention. Keith was watching him with a bemused expression, his arms crossed over his chest loosely.

“Sorry, what?”

Keith rolled his eyes.

“I said you don’t have to worry. That guy is like...her dad or something.”

Relief washed over Shiro, but he was able to hide his feelings better this time.

“Why would I worry who Allura walks with?”

Keith huffed, rolling his eyes again.

“Whatever you say Romeo.” He turned and continued towards the dining hall. Shiro glanced back at the main cabin once more before following.

The dining hall was bustling, considering the early hour. A steady flow of conversation filled the morning air as Keith and Shiro approached the front entrance, or one of them. Two walls had been opened, turning the hall into a sort of pavilion that could be entered or exited easily. Campers sat at the tables, and at the back wall a line of food items were laid out. A central fire pit was also burning lazily, and Shiro wondered at its purpose, seeing as the morning was already warming up to be hot day.

It was airy and bright, and looked completely different from the night before, but Shiro was more baffled by the staff.

Odd humanoid beings were drifting between tables, talking to campers and providing food when asked. Some looked vaguely female, with long flowing hair and delicate features, but Shiro wasn’t about to assume genders. Others were completely human looking, if you only focused on their torsos. Everything from their waists down was...well, goat. Or deer, in some cases.

Some even had horns!

Shiro reached out to grab hold of Keith’s shoulder to steady himself. Luckily Keith looked just as mystified, his mouth open slightly as he ogled a half-goat man as he walked by them.

What got to him most wasn’t the beings themselves, but rather the fact that the campers didn’t
seem frightened.
At all.
They smiled and chatted with the creatures, exchanged pleasantries and the like, as if they were
used to them being there.
But wasn’t the whole point of this camp to keep monsters out?

“Morning!”
Shiro and Keith both jumped, and turned towards the voice. They saw a waving Hunk, followed by
a sleepy looking Pidge. Shiro smiled in greeting. Keith only nodded.

“How are you guys?” Hunk called.
“Feeling great, thanks for asking.” Shiro replied, though his side still ached. There was no need to
burden Hunk with that information however.
“Have you guys seen Lance by any chance? He wasn’t at his cabin.” Hunk asked as they got
closer. Shiro shook his head, but noticed Keith’s face turn a slight shade of red.
“I just got up actually,” said Shiro, “but my brother here might know something.” He nudged Keith
and raised an eyebrow questioningly. Keith glared back, but his cheeks and ears were pink.
He glanced between Hunk and Pidge.
“I may have seen him-” Keith was cut off as Pidge ran passed them suddenly, barreling down the
path Shiro and Keith had just come from. Hunk beamed, and the brothers both turned to see Lance
and a girl Shiro didn’t know walking towards them.

“Let’s see!” Pidge demanded, pulling on the front of Lance’s shirt to pull his head down. She
seemed to be examining his eyebrow. “Meh, kind of lame.”
Lance scoffed and the girl beside him laughed.
“Lame?! This here is a battle scar. Forged by giants. Show it some respect woman!”
Pidge crossed her arms, letting Lance right himself.

“Forged by giants’ eh? I thought you were hit with a rock.”
“A rock thrown by giants!”
“Giant. Singular.”
Lance threw his arms in the air and sighed dramatically.
“Why must you torment me so?”

Hunk had moved passed Shiro and Keith while the others spoke, and was now standing in front of
Lance. He regarded his friend for a moment, then engulfed him in a bone-crunching embrace,
lifting Lance off the ground slightly.

“Hunk...bones...breaking-” Lance managed to huff out, and Hunk set him down.
“How do you feel?” he asked, and Lance shrugged, but Shiro noticed something about his
expression that hinted at resignation. Shiro leaned down to whisper at Keith.

“What’s going on?”
“He got his bandage removed this morning, got a cut healed, and now there’s a scar.” Keith
replied, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Shiro looked down at him, but Keith was
focusing on the group, who were making their way towards them.
Lance smiled at them, his gaze lingering on Keith for a brief moment before he turned back to
Shiro. He noticed the white mark that ran through the boy’s left eyebrow, where the bandage had
once been. Hadn’t he had stitches? How had it healed over so quickly?
Lance spoke before he could ask.

“This is my half-sister Sabrina, by the way.” He gestured to the girl behind him, and Shiro shook
her hand.
“Nice to meet you.” He said, and she smiled wickedly.
“Oh believe me, the pleasures all mine.” She replied, and Lance elbowed her as Hunk and Pidge rolled their eyes. Shiro decided to was better not to ask.
Pidge walked up to Keith and looked him up and down, then crossed her arms again and frowned at him.
“I’m Pidge,” she said, “and you’re Keith. We sort of met last night, when you flipped off Lance.”
Shiro whirled on his brother.
“You did what?!!”

Keith held up both hands in front of him in defense, taking a few small steps backwards as he did so.
He opened his mouth to reply but Pidge spoke first.
“It was totally awesome. And Lance deserved it.” She winked innocently back at Lance, who had his bottom lip jutting out in a pout. She turned back to Keith and held out her hand for him to shake. “Anyways, big fan, hoping to see and hear more from you in the future.”
Keith stared down at her with wide eyes, then, surprisingly, a grin spread out across his face. He shook her hand and Shiro blinked a few times to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

This was definitely a new Keith. Willingly shaking someone’s hand? Preposterous. Grinning as he did so? Terrifying.
But Shiro found himself smiling as well, though he was still going to have to ask his brother about the whole ‘flipping off’ business.

“Are we just going to stand around outside like a bunch of posers or are we going to eat?” Sabrina announced loudly, gaining everyone’s attention.
“Sabrina’s right. Let’s go find a table.” Hunk said, and Lance stared at him in shock.
“Did you just say ‘Sabrina’s right’? Hunk...you’ve betrayed me!”
“Hungry Hunk is not the same person as Normal Hunk.”
Lance opened his mouth to reply, but shut it with a shrug after a moment of deliberation.
“Fair point.”

They wandered into the pavilion, weaving between tables towards the back of the hall, where a long counter displayed a mouth-watering selection of foods, spread out buffet style. Shiro helped himself to a plate and goblet, and got in line behind Lance.

Shiro filled his plate but noticed there were no drinks set out. He had been hoping for a cup of coffee.

“Hey, Lance,” he asked, and the boy turned to face him.
“What’s up?”
“Where are the drinks?” Keith came up beside him as he asked, his own goblet empty as he stared at Lance expectantly.

“Oh, you just think about what you want and the cup fills.” He said matter-of-factly. Both Shiro and Keith exchanged looks, then stared down at their goblets.
Coffee, he thought, and wondrously, steaming black liquid began to fill the cup. Keith was gaping, and turned to his own cup. In a blink of an eye the cup was brimming with sparkling pink liquid.

Shiro frowned at him.
“Really? Cream soda? It’s the morning!!”
Keith replied by downing half the drink in one go, leaving a frothy pink mustache on his upper lip. Lance had watched the whole exchange, a small smile playing at his lips as his cheeks reddened.
He looked away before Keith noticed, but not before Shiro had.
Interesting...
Pidge, who had been behind Keith in line, cleared her throat loudly. “Let’s get a move on people!” She walked past them, towards the central fire pit, and to Shiro and Keith’s bewilderment, dumped a portion of her food into the flames. Several sparks went up into the air, and Pidge walked away towards an empty table.

“Um...”
“...What-” Shiro and Keith spoke at the same time, and Hunk and Lance laughed.

“It’s an offering, to your godly parent. We usually only do it at night, at dinner time, but you can offer tribute whenever, if you feel like it. Pidge must have a project she’s working on, and is hoping to gain Hephaestus’s favour.” Hunk explained, and Shiro nodded.
“How does it work?” Keith asked, and Shiro found himself curious as well.

“The gods like the smell of burnt food, apparently. You guys should actually make an offering, since you didn’t last night.” Lance said, and Hunk nodded in agreement.
“Good idea. Just go up to the pit and say who you’re offering to, and then dump some of your food into the fire. Hestia also gets a portion of the tribute so don’t skimp out.” he said, and motioned for them to follow as he approached the pit.

Hunk pushed Keith forward gently, who looked not at all impressed at the notion of dumping some of his breakfast into a fire. He glanced at Shiro, who nodded encouragingly.
“Right...” he said, then: “Ares, I guess,” and threw in some of his eggs and a piece of toast. The fire sputtered and a burst of sparks flew up. Keith stepped back in alarm, but Hunk and Lance were both smiling.

“Cool. Shiro your turn.” Lance said, and Keith stepped aside for him to pass.
Shiro stared down into the flames, which were burning smugly in the small pit.

“Um...who do I make my offering to? I’m not exactly a demigod.”
“Oh shoot, that’s right,” Hunk said, his eyebrows furrowed.
“Just pick a random God,” Pidge provided from the table where she sat, a mouthful of pancake making her cheeks puff out like a squirrel.
“Ooo! Pick Aphrodite! She’s the best.” Lance said as he moved to stand beside Keith.
“What about Athena?” Shiro vaguely recalled that Allura was one of her children, and that maybe it would be appropriate for him to pay homage to the mother of the person letting him stay at the camp.
Keith raised an eyebrow at him, making the connection right away, and Shiro felt his face heat up.
Hunk saved him from having to explain himself.

“Guys, let’s not pick our favourite goddesses. I’m pretty sure they had an entire war over this already.”
“Good point,” said Lance. “Maybe stick to Ares. You are staying in his cabin after all.”
Shiro nodded, and made his offering, the sparks rising to greet him.
It felt odd, throwing away his food when he had been near starvation just days before, but he wasn’t about to start disputing the rules of camp. Especially when it involved almighty beings.

They all sat at the table with Pidge, who scooted over to make room for them. Keith sat down first, beside Pidge, and looked back at Shiro expectantly, but Shiro made a pointed look at Lance and sat on the other side of the table, leaving the spot open beside his brother.
Keith scowled at him, but it was quickly replaced by a sheepish smile as Lance dropped his plate down beside him.
Interesting indeed.
Hunk sat beside Shiro and began munching away at his breakfast. There was only one person missing.

“Where’s Sabrina?”
Lance looked up at him, then around the room, before finally pointing her out at a table across the hall. She was sitting with two other girls that Shiro didn’t recognize.
“Those are my other sisters.” Lance said, going back to his food.
“Is it like, the Aphrodite exclusive table?” Keith asked, and Shiro knew he was being facetious, but Lance nodded.
“Oh...wait, really?”
Lance looked at him and then towards the table. He nodded again.
“Yeah. At dinner we have to sit in our cabin groups. So each table is dedicated to a God or Goddess, but it’s more lax at other meals.” Keith almost looked...disappointed, to hear that, and Shiro contemplated the information.

“What about last night though?” he asked, and Hunk answered him this time.
“Technically we broke the rules, but neither Allura nor Coran were around to enforce them so...”
“Yep.”
Shiro nodded, though he didn’t fully understand. He turned his attention towards his breakfast instead.

They were eating in relative silence when one of the goat-men walked up to their table. Shiro and Keith both froze, having momentarily forgotten about the creatures.
“Hey guys, just letting you know that training will be starting in a few minutes.” His voice was...surprisingly human. Which made sense, since his upper half was, for the majority. Shiro stared at the two long horns that protruded from the beasts head.

“Pretty impressive eh?”
Shiro blinked, realizing the question had been directed at him. The half-goat guy was staring at him, a lopsided grin on his face.
“Oh..uh-very.”
“I’m Pyrola, but everyone just calls me Pi.” He held a hand, and Shiro shook it hesitantly. Pi turned to Keith, who was openly staring at the goat legs.

“What, never seen a satyr before?” he asked, and Lance pointedly reminded him.

“Hey guys, just letting you know that training will be starting in a few minutes.” His voice was...surprisingly human. Which made sense, since his upper half was, for the majority. Shiro stared at the two long horns that protruded from the beasts head.

“Pretty impressive eh?”
Shiro blinked, realizing the question had been directed at him. The half-goat guy was staring at him, a lopsided grin on his face.

“What, never seen a satyr before?” Keith continued to stare, and Lance nudged him in the arm.
“What? Oh. No, never.”
Pi crossed his arms and regarded the two of them.

“Really? Wow. Well, glad I had the privilege of being your first.” He winked at Keith, who blushed furiously. Shiro noticed Lance watching, his face unreadable.

“Anyways,” continued Pi, “I have to go set up the course, so I’ll see you guys later.” He turned and left, and Shiro had to force himself not to gape.

“So...I’m guessing there are good monsters and bad monsters, otherwise he wouldn’t be allowed in.” he observed, and Hunk gasped.

“Monster? Satyrs aren’t monsters! They’re protectors of the forest, of things that grow!”
Shiro had been about to apologize when Lance interjected.

“Woah, it’s okay Hunk he didn’t know.” He turned towards Shiro. “There are a number of Greek beings that are friendly to demigods. Satyrs and nymphs,” he gestured to one of the taller, more ethereal looking entities, “are some examples. The list is small, but not everything wants to kill us.”

“Unless you manage to piss them off, then the list is basically void.” said Pidge with a pointed look at Lance.

“Hey! That wasn’t my fault! How was I supposed to know she had a twin!”
Hunk chuckled as Pidge rolled her eyes. There was a story to be heard there, but Shiro was more focused on his brother. He had seen the way Keith’s face had fallen at Lance’s words. Especially at ‘she’.

He knew his brother was gay, and he loved him for it. But he also knew how difficult it could be for Keith at times.

Stigmas, stereotypes....
Liking someone only to find out they didn’t share the same tastes.

But Shiro had been sure he had seen signs. The stolen glances Lance would make at Keith. The smiles, the blushes.
That had to mean something.
Don’t give up yet little brother, he thought.

“He was lucky he wasn’t drowned really.” Sabrina had approached their table, one hand on her hip as she spoke. “Nymphs like to hold grudges, and Lance here managed to make the blacklist of two! Allura had to do some major negotiating to keep his sorry butt in one piece.”
Lance frowned at her.
“It was all a huge misunderstanding!”
“Who cares, that was ages ago.” Pidge said, standing and stretching her arms to the side. “Let’s go see what kind of course Pi is setting up.”

Keith looked up at that.
“What did he mean by ‘course’? Is it for the Godly Games?”

Hunk nodded, standing as well.
“Those are in a few days, but training starts now. We compete with our fellow cabin-mates, forming teams of four usually, but for training we get to pick our own teams.”
“Let’s form a team!” said Lance, gesturing to their group.
“That’s more than four though,” Keith pointed out, looking around at the six of them.
Sabrina shook her head.
“I’m already in a group,” she made a face at Lance, “a winning group,” she added.
“Ta!” She waved and ran off, joining up with the other two girls she had been sitting with before.

Lance stuck his tongue out at her as she left.
“Rude. We’ll show her. Keith, you any good at archery?”

Keith glanced up at him, then towards Shiro.
“Yes, but there’s still too many of us.”
“Oh, I won’t compete.” Shiro said, realizing he meant him.
“What! That’s not fair you have to!”
“I can’t Keith, ribs...remember?”
Keith’s face fell, but then his eyes widened excitedly.

“Ambrosia! You can have some of that!” He looked over a Lance, who had a look of apprehension on his face.
“Actually...no. He can’t. Ambrosia would kill a human.” He looked apologetically between Keith and Shiro. “Which is why he can’t compete either. Some of the events can get pretty intense, and we demigods rely on ambrosia to heal ourselves when injuries are bad enough.”
Hunk was nodded sagely.
“Sorry about that. But Keith, don’t feel pressured to be in a group with us. You can join up with the other Ares kids if you want.”
“No way, I have dibs!” Lance said, scowling at Hunk for suggesting such a thing.
Pidge jutted in before Keith could reply.
“I actually never said I would group with you guys either.”
Hunk and Lance both gaped at her.

“What!” they shouted in unison.

“Pidge don’t leave us!” said Hunk.

“I already promised Rover I would go with him! And if Keith is in your group then it’s too many!” Lance’s bottom lip stuck out in a pout, but Keith spoke before Lance had the chance.

“It’s fine. I’ll go find Marcus and join his team. Besides, I should get used to practicing with them anyways.”

Lance looked like he was about to object, but Keith was already standing, swinging his legs up and over the bench.

Shiro followed suit. He had a feeling Keith had another reason for not wanting to be on Lance’s team, but he wasn’t about to force Keith to stay.

His brother liked to distance himself when things didn’t go the way he planned. It was a bad habit really, but when Keith wanted space, he would have it, one way or another.

“I’ll see you guys later.” He said, and left the building. Shiro smiled apologetically at the rest of the group before following after.

“Keith, wait up!”

His brother turned and paused as Shiro jogged to catch up.

“I know what you’re going to say but I just-”

“I know. It’s ok,” Shiro interrupted. “I’ll help you find Marcus. I might not be any good for fighting right now but that doesn’t mean I’m any less curious about the training these guys do.”

Keith watched him for a moment before smiling.

“Alright,” he said, turning back towards their cabin.

It was true that Shiro wanted to see the exercise’s and drills the kids at this camp did, but his main purpose for following Keith out was to make sure his brother knew he wasn’t alone.

It was too often that Keith would hold in his feelings and try to hold the world on his shoulders. Shiro wouldn’t force his brother to tell him what he was thinking, but rather, simply be there for him when he did want to talk.

Besides, Shiro wanted to see more of the camp. He wanted to know what the training arena looked like, and maybe try some simple moves himself. It was a shame the ambrosia would kill him if he ate it; broken ribs were a pain in the neck, or rather, side.

And maybe, just maybe, Allura would be there.

He felt his stomach do a little flip at the thought. Maybe he would ask her if she needed any help around camp.

He liked to help.

He glanced over at Keith to see if he had seen his slight blush, but his brother’s gaze was focused on the ground in front of them.

Shiro frowned to himself. How could he be thinking about Allura when Keith was feeling down?

He made a decision then and there to try and figure out as much as he could about Lance. Though Keith hadn’t explicitly said he liked the boy, Shiro knew his brother well enough to notice the signs of a crush. It was odd that he had gone from loathing Lance to this, but Shiro didn’t linger on it.

Keith was trying, and so he would as well.

And if Lance didn’t feel the same, well, then he would do what any other older brother would do.

Break his legs.
Just kidding...
But Shiro didn’t fully cast the idea aside. He had seen Lance act all flirty towards Keith, whether he realized it or not, and if Shiro found out Lance was just playing with his brothers feelings.... Well, there would be hell to pay.

EDIT:
Artwork now available (I learned how to link them go me)
EDIT:
Learning to add pictures is a pain in the ass lemme tell you.
Anyways I still have to figure out how to link them to my tumblr but the photos themselves are now up so enjoy my bad art :)
I want more protective big brother Shiro, as well as more pining Shiro. Also Harry Potter references. They are giant nerds.
Chapter Summary

Training begins!
Keith and Shiro get to know the Ares kids, as well as practice with some choice weapons.
Though, not Keith's choice.
More Lance's.

Side note: Never make a deal with a child of Aphrodite.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marcus and the others were at the Ares cabin, dressed in full Greek armour, when Keith and Shiro walked in. Marcus waved at them, spear in hand.
“Hey guys!”
The others looked up his greeting, turning to face the brothers. Kate, who had dark ebony skin and shockingly green eyes, glanced between the two, her expression sour. Her thick eyebrows hung low on her face in a scowl, and Keith was about to ask what her problem was when a large grin completely altered her expression. She began to laugh.

“Oh my gods! I couldn’t hold it!” Her accent was thick and cheery, with Jamaican undertones.
“You should have seen your faces!”
“Kat be nice.” The other boy, Ben, spoke. He looked very similar to Kate, though his skin was a lighter shade of brown, and his eyes were golden. He shrugged as she continued to laugh. “She’s got a weird sense of humour that involves scaring the crap out of people-” He cut off as she smacked his arm, a loud crack resonating around the cabin, making Shiro flinch slightly. It had sounded painful, but Ben only chuckled haughtily.

“Do we have a fly problem? Could have sworn I just felt something tap my arm.”
Kate smirked at him, her grin menacing.
“You’ve been marked for prey Benja. And the huntress always gets her prey.” Kate pounced at him, and Ben did flinch back this time, his arms flying up to catch her as they tumbled to the floor.

They began to wrestle, though Marcus quickly interfered by jabbing them with the blunt end of his weapon.
“Guys quit it. You trying to scare off the new recruits?” Kate and Ben jumped up and stood at attention, making Marcus chuckle despite himself. “Cut it out you meat-heads.” He turned back to Keith and Shiro, walking over to guide them out of the cabin.

“Sorry about them. They’re actual siblings, like fully. Same mother, same father. It’s pretty rare actually, and their mom must have been a total badass to attract the likes of Ares twice.” Marcus drifted off, his expression almost wistful as he spoke. Keith wondered if the kids at this camp ever got jealous of each other. Like, sibling rivalries over who was the favourite.
Marcus recovered quickly, blinking away the sadness so suddenly that Keith wondered if it had even been there in the first place.
“They fight a lot, but it’s mostly harmless...mostly. Never try to get in between those two when they’re genuinely angry with each other, unless you’re a huge fan of Hades, because that’s where you’ll end up.” He chuckled, but Keith and Shiro exchanged a look of skepticism.

“’Mostly’ sounds pretty ominous.” Keith said as they rounded the corner of the cabin, approaching a small shed that was adjacent to the wall.

Marcus shrugged again, stopping outside of the shed to turn and face them.

“Let’s just say that interfering usually results in a broken bone...or three. It’s better to just let them spare it out in the arena.” He watched their faces for a moment, both displaying looks of suppressed horror, then smiled to himself and turned back to the shed.

“Now gentlemen, it’s time to select your weapons.” He opened the shed door, and a cascade of spears, swords and shields tumbled down on top of them. Marcus was agile enough to jump back in time, but both Shiro and Keith were taken by surprise, and though they were able to back away from the majority of the avalanche, they still ended up with sore toes as a large wooden shield rolled across their feet.

“TIFFANY GET YOUR ASS OUT HERE RIGHT NOW AND CLEAN THE ARMOURY!” Marcus bellowed, causing Keith to cover his ears. He turned to them apologetically. “You guys alright? Tiff was the last one in here, and she’s the worst at putting things back. Sorry about that.” “It’s ok. I’ve lived with Keith my whole life, so I’m used to random explosions.” Shiro said with a chuckle.

“Dude!” Keith whirled on his brother, who held up his hands defensively.

“What? It’s true. Your definition of cleaning is throwing everything in a pile where no one can see it. You know how many times I’ve been buried under piles of your dirty laundry after opening your closet door?” He said with a wink, and Keith replied with a glare. Shiro turned to Marcus.

“I was once bonked on the head with a baseball. Keith doesn’t even play baseball, it was just randomly thrown onto a top shelf that collapsed under the enormous weight of junk he had hidden there.” He bent to pick up the shield that had fallen down on them an examined it. “Where did you even get that thing? I had a black eye for like, a week, and you never gave me or mom a straight answer.”

Keith crossed his arms and blew the hair out of his face.

“Straight really isn’t my style Shiro.”

His brother laughed at that, and Marcus gave them both a quizzical look. Keith didn’t really feel like explaining, so he went to examine the sword selection. None of the weapons really stood out for him, and he realized with a start that he had completely forgotten to ask the healer, Joel, about his own sword.

“Hey, Marcus, you wouldn’t happen to have the weapons we came here with, do you?” Keith asked, and saw that Shiro had forgotten about them as well. They both looked at Marcus expectantly.

“Hmm...I don’t have them personally. They would have been confiscated by Allura or Coran when you were brought across the borders, for safety purposes.”

Keith frowned at that. He missed his sword. It fit flawlessly in his hand; was the right weight and just seemed to know where to go, with the proper amount of speed and precision.

It was the perfect blade.

And it was his.

And he wanted it back.
“You can ask Allura when you see her.” Marcus continued, “She should be at the arena.”

Shiro perked at that, and Keith suppressed a grin. His brother had it bad, and he was downright awful at hiding his feelings.

But Keith didn’t know enough about Allura to deduce if she was deserving of Shiro’s attention. Sure, she was letting them stay at her camp, but she was odd and distant, and Keith had always been a suspicious guy. Maybe he could ask Lance about her.

Or literally anyone else! He mentally corrected, hoping his thoughts weren’t being displayed on his face.

Tiffany rounded the corner suddenly, and seeing the mess of weapons on the ground, jumped back behind the cabin in hopes of avoiding Marcus. He was facing the opposite way, but he had seen Keith look up, and rounded the corner, dragging a guilty Tiffany behind him moments later.

“Look familiar Tiff?” He asked, gesturing to the clutter.

She feigned ignorance, regarding the spew of weapons with surprise.

“Yes actually,” she said, and pointed to several of the armaments. “That shield belongs to Ben. Or it did anyway. And that’s the sword of Gregor the Great, also known as Greg the Gassy. And that there—” Marcus cut her off.

“Ha, ha, hilarious really. You know what I mean. You almost knocked out Shiro and Keith here!” Tiffany glanced up at them sheepishly. She was tiny compared to Marcus, but there was nothing frail about the girl. She had thick brown hair, the ends dyed red, and several scars laced her bare arms, which were corded with thick muscle. This girl could probably take him on easily, Keith decided, and he saw that Shiro was thinking the same thing.

She bowed at them mockingly.

“So sorry about that. Death by weapons shed would truly be a tragic fate for our new members. But don’t worry, I’ll make sure they write something cooler on your graves.” Keith wasn’t sure what to make of the apology, if you could even call it that. He knew she was being sarcastic, but only nodded in reply.

Best not to pick a fight with a girl nicknamed ‘Tough Tiff’.

Marcus, on the other hand, scoffed, his hands on his hips as he turned to stand in front of her.

“You set that up on purpose didn’t you!” It was more of a statement than a question, and Tiffany smirked.

“Who me? Marcus how could you! Little innocent me, tsk tsk.” She batted her eyes at him, but Marcus wasn’t having it.

“Listen Tiff, I know you like to do your little ‘initiations’, but these guys literally came here swinging. They fought giants. I think that’s initiation enough don’t you?”

Shiro looked like he was about to say something, but Tiffany spoke over him.

“Sheesh I know! It’s all this dumb camp talks about. That and the stupid love child joke of a fighter.” She crossed her arms and kicked at a nearby spear, sending it sprawling across the ground.

Love child?

What was she talking about?

Marcus scowled, all good nature gone.

“Tiff, Lance is the reason these guys are alive. Our brothers!”

“Half-brothers! And only one of them is, the other is just a human.” She didn’t even turn to look at Keith and Shiro, who were both now standing awkwardly behind Marcus, watching the heated exchange.
Besides, Keith was hung up on the mention of Lance. What did Tiffany have against him? There was obviously some history between the two, or maybe she just really hated the child of Aphrodite. Whatever the reason, Keith felt it wasn’t the best moment to ask.

“Does it matter? Shiro is Keith’s blood, and Keith is our blood. So by extension Shiro is just as much our brother as Keith.” Marcus was leaning over Tiffany, his voice growing louder as he spoke, but Tiffany hadn’t budged. She glared up at him, her resolve solid as she argued with the head councillor of the Ares cabin.

They stared at each other for several uncomfortable moments, before she finally scoffed and turned away, walking back the way she had come.

“Whatever. It doesn’t matter anyway.” She said, not bothering to turn back. She ran off before Marcus could reply.

They watched her go, Shiro and Keith still standing in the same positions, unsure of what to do. Marcus sighed and turned back to them, smiling apologetically.

“So sibling rivalries were a thing. Great.

They cleaned up the remaining mess, and Keith grabbed a few extra knives to hide away on his person. He didn’t pick a sword though, determined as he was to get his own back.

Shiro decided he didn’t need anything, seeing as he wouldn’t be training for a while anyways. He did ask about his own sword a few times though, and Keith knew that his brother was missing its familiar weight at his hip, much like he was.

The weapons were all they had left of their mother, besides memories of course. Still, having them around felt like having her there, protecting them even when she was gone.

They made their way back into the cabin afterwards, and Marcus leant Keith some extra armour. The breastplate was a bit much in his opinion, but Keith was grateful for the shoulder and knee pads, seeing as he was constantly rolling away from his enemies.

Shiro was a bit more persistent.

“Shouldn’t you have a helmet or something?”

Keith rolled his eyes.

“Shiro, I’m not wearing a dumb metal hat. I’m not five.”

“Actually,” Marcus interjected, “helmets are mandatory. Some of the events are pretty intense, and not everyone has the best aim.” He motioned for Ben, who came trotting over, his own armour clanking loudly as he moved.

“Hey buddy, got any extra head gear that would fit Keith?” Marcus asked, and Ben looked Keith up and down, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“You bet I do!” He ran off, and Keith’s stomach dropped when he came back.

Ben was holding out the ugliest piece of armour Keith had ever seen in his life, a smug smile on his face.

“This was my very first helmet. Made it for Kat but she didn’t want it. Should fit you though.” He
held it out, and Keith had to keep himself from gagging.

“You’ve got to be joking.” He said, taking the thing from Ben tentatively. It was made of copper, but hadn’t been treated properly, so some areas had a sickly blue hue to them. That was the good part though.

The helmet itself was so gaudy that Keith wondered if it could even pass as adequate head protection. A large cat-like figure was pouncing out of the top, looking like a hood ornament on some knock-off Jaguar. Paw prints had been carved into the sides, bordering the helm in a crooked pattern, like the cat had been drunk off its mind and decided it would use the piece of metal as a Twister mat. It was obvious that it had been made with his sister in mind, seeing as he called her ‘Kat’ all the time, but it was really quite awful to look at, despite whatever intention had been behind its creation.

Keith held it at arm’s length, his face contorted in disgust.

“There is no way I’m wearing this.”

Beside him, Shiro burst out laughing, no longer able to contain his amusement. Keith glared at him.

“Keith-” Shiro managed between giggles, “please. You have to put it on!”

“No way in hell am I wearing this!” he turned towards Ben, “no offense.”

“How am I not supposed to take offense to that.” He replied, though he too was grinning. Keith huffed.

“Can I get something a little less, I don’t know...overwhelming?”

Marcus was also suppressing a smile as he spoke.

“I’m afraid that’s all we have actually. Until we get something custom made, that’ll have to do.” Keith gaped at him. This had to be a prank.

“How do you not have more helmets!? You guys are the war cabin!”

Marcus shrugged, and Ben stifled a laugh as Kate walked over, her own expression lightening up the room.

“Oh my gods I remember that thing!” She began to chuckle boisterously, clutching her stomach at Keith’s growing denial. “Benja made it for me as a joke-” she cut off as Ben elbowed her side. “I mean present. It didn’t fit though. Try it on Keith!”

“Wow you guys are the worst actors. I know this is a joke. So just point me towards the real helmets and we can be on our way.” Keith folded his arms, the helmet fitting awkwardly in his grasp.

Shiro was still chuckling as Marcus sighed.

“I wish it were true buddy, but that really is the only helmet we have that will fit you. So unless you want to sit out of training...”

Keith looked down at the piece of metal work.

“Can I just not wear a helmet?”


Keith sighed. Fine.
Whatever.
It was just a helmet.
Not like he had anyone to impress.
An image of a boy with long legs and blue eyes crossed his mind, but Keith quickly pushed it aside.
Oh hell no.

He took a deep breath and shoved the helmet on, feeling it slip over his ears and rest surprisingly comfortably on his head. He looked up at the others.

There was a moment of silence, and then the whole cabin erupted in laughter. Keith could feel his cheeks heating, but seeing Shiro look so content made him think it was worth it.
Still, there was no way his brother would ever let him live this one down.
He was just glad their cell phones had been busted during a previous scuffle, so Shiro had no way of documenting this moment.

He crossed his arms and huffed loudly.
“There. Happy now?”
Kate nodded, wiping tears from her eyes.

“Keith, you’re my new favourite!” she said, her words cut off by another bout of laughter. Marcus was the first to collect himself.

“Alright team, now that we’re all ready, let’s go kick some serious butt!”
Marcus, Ben and Kate cheered loudly, and Shiro clapped Keith’s shoulder.
“I can’t wait to see your purrfect performance.” Keith glared at him. Shiro went on, following the group out of the cabin. “Really, you look absolutely adorable. I could just hug you right ‘meow’!” Keith could feel his eye twitch.
“Shiro those aren’t even good!”
His brother laughed heartily.
“Aw Keith, don’t be so ‘catty’.”

Keith punched him in the arm.
“Ow Keith! That hurt! We’re going to have to get you de-clawed.” He winked, dodging out of the way as Keith moved to throw another punch.
“Shiro I swear to god.”
Shiro beamed innocently at him, and Keith decided then and there that he would get his revenge. Oh yes.
It was so on.

They made their way to a clearing, where a large group of campers had already gathered. Several people turned to gape at him as he walked by, but Keith ignored them. His attention was focused on the massive structure that stood before them. Several bleachers were arranged around a massive pit, which was filled with various items that Keith couldn’t identify from where he was standing.

Marcus stopped in front of the entrance and turned towards his group.
“Alright, I’m going to go see where we can train first, so just hang tight for a minute.” He trotted off into the crowd, leaving Shiro and Keith alone with Kate and Ben.
Shiro scanned the crowd, no doubt looking for Allura. Keith also wanted to find her, to ask about their weapons, but he would let Shiro do the talking.
Besides, he had questions of his own.

He turned towards Kate and Ben.
“Is Tiffany going to be joining?”
Kate and Ben exchanged a look that Keith couldn’t decipher. Ben spoke first.
“Not today. She’ll be off somewhere breaking rocks or something.”
“Who cares,” Kate provided, examining her spear nonchalantly. “She’s being melodramatic. Besides, I want to see what you can do!”

She nudged him with her shield reassuringly, but Keith wasn’t convinced. He wasn’t very fond of the idea of staying in the same cabin as someone who might potentially want to strangle him. Or worse, Shiro. He would have to be extra vigilant until she came around.

“Looks like the archery range is open!” Marcus called, jogging back over to their group. Ben groaned.
“Archery? Blah. Archery is for pansies!”
“Language Ben.” Marcus said sternly, and Ben sulked. “Not everything is about getting up close and personal. Besides, you need practice in range.” Kate smirked at her brother, tossing her spear up and down a few times.

“Betcha I’ll get more bullseyes than you.” Ben’s scowl turned into a smirk.
“In your dreams.”
Marcus rolled his eyes, and turned his attention towards Shiro and Keith.

“I saw Allura up at the front Shiro, if you want to ask about your weapons. Keith, you can come with us for now, they have bows already set out at the archery range.” He turned and began to walk towards an area adjacent to the arena. Keith looked back at Shiro, who was watching him with concern.

“I’ll be fine. Just go get our swords back.”
“Are you sure?”
“Obviously. I want my sword back!” Shiro shook his head.
“No, I mean, are you alright going off by yourself with these guys?” Keith considered for a moment. He could see where Shiro was coming from, seeing as Keith wasn’t one to make friends with strangers easily, and would usually rely on Shiro in most social interactions. But Keith felt like he could handle himself with the Ares kids. He liked them. Well, most of them anyways. Tiff was still a wild-card. But the others seemed fine. Better than fine even. Keith thought he could actually enjoy hanging out with them.

He nodded, realizing Shiro was waiting for a reply.
“Yeah, I’ll be alright.” Shiro hesitated for a moment longer before nodding his head firmly. “Ok. I’ll be back soon.” Keith turned to follow Marcus, who was waiting for him a little ways ahead.
“Take your time Shiro, just don’t forget about my sword while you’re flirting with Allura!” He didn’t have to see Shiro to know his brother’s face had turned beet red. Keith smiled to himself. Payback was sweet.

Keith followed behind Marcus, who pointed out several areas as they walked passed. “That’s the climbing wall over there, and beyond that hill is the lake, where the swimming competitions are held.” Keith was amazed at the amount of equipment the camp had available. He had never been to a place that allowed kids to run around with actual weapons before, much less use them in combat.
training. It was surreal, and Keith found himself wanting to try all the obstacles.

They came to a flat area near the arena where Kate and Ben were arguing over which bow was better. The range was comprised of several targets, lined up in a neat row along the tree-line. There was a net set up behind them, to prevent any fly-away arrows from doing any damage, but aside from that, there weren’t any further safety measures.

Keith watched as a small child, maybe a year or two older than Joel, ran passed him with a bow drawn back, the arrow bouncing ominously on the string. He gulped, suddenly grateful for the breast plate and helmet, no matter how unflattering it was.

“Tony! Put that thing away you aren’t allowed to use it yet!” Marcus called after him, and the boy stuck his tongue out in reply. Ben stepped in front of him and snatched the weapon away.

“You heard the man, now learn some respect!” The boy, Tony, made a face at him and ran off, nearly knocking over a group of campers who were walking by.

Marcus rolled his eyes.

“That kid. Child of Hermes. Absolute trouble maker. I’ll have to let Coran know he’s messing around with bows again.”

“Why can’t he use them? He looked old enough.” Keith asked, turning back towards the range and Marcus, who shrugged.

“We’ve tried to teach him, but he doesn’t listen. At all. He’s more of a hazard than anything, so he’s only allowed to use blunt weapons until he smartens up.” Marcus folded his arms pensively.

“Could be a while though. He’s more interested in pulling pranks and causing mayhem in camp. Oh well.” Marcus walked over to a table, where several bows were laid out.

“Take your pick and start practicing. You have a few minutes before the other team gets here, then the competition begins.”

“Wait, competition? I thought this was just training?” Keith said, his hand hovering over a long bow decorated with purple markings. Marcus chuckled lightly.

“Keith, we’re children of Ares. Everything is a competition.” And with that he was off, picking his own weapon and taking up stance a few targets down.

Keith looked down at the bow in his hand, then shrugged and gathered up a quiver of arrows.

He hadn’t used a bow in, well, years really. The last time was during a gym class way back when his life was still normal. Still, he remembered the basics, and nocked an arrow, pulling back the string with ease as he aimed down range.

He took a deep breath to calm himself, in, out.

Keith closed one eye to aim, and with a quick inhale, let the arrow loose. It propelled away from the bow, shaking slightly at the force. The string struck Keith’s lower arm, but he didn’t feel it, instead watching to see where the arrow would land.

There was a distant ‘thud’ and Keith could see the tail end of the arrow poking out of the target. Cool! He had hit it!

It was near the edge, nowhere close to the center, but Keith still felt pride in his work. He smiled to himself, and someone whistled behind him.

“Pretty sure the goal is to hit that red dot in the middle.”

Keith whirled, recognizing the voice immediately. Sure enough, there was Lance, standing with one hand on his hip, Hunk, Pidge and Joel standing behind him.

He wore very little in terms of armour, favouring a leather arm piece that protected his skin from the bow string, as well as leather shin guards.
Keith forced his eyes back up to Lance’s face, which was twisted in an amused grin. He had a few lines of blue face paint on his cheeks, resembling whiskers, but before Keith could ask about them Lance spoke.

“Woah, sick dome piece!” He said with a chuckle, and behind him Hunk’s mouth dropped open in shock.
Keith felt his face flush red, having completely forgotten about the outlandish helmet. This was too embarrassing!
Keith reached up to touch it self-consciously, hoping to hide his face in the process.

“So...archery eh?”
Joel ran up to them then, saving Keith from having to reply.
“Woah!” he exclaimed, examining the weapons on the table behind Lance. “Which one should I pick Lancey?”
Lance turned and plucked up a large crossbow and handed it to the boy, who tipped over slightly at its weight.
“Crossbow. Definitely crossbow.”
“Woah! Cool!”
Hunk approached then, and pulled the weapon gently from Joel’s grasp. He had face paint similar to Lance’s, though his whiskers were yellow.

“I don’t think so. Try something a bit easier first.” He exchanged the crossbow for a smaller, standard bow that looked like a toy in Hunk’s grasp. Joel pouted as he took it.
“But I want the crossbow!”
“Too bad Rover.” Pidge said, joining the group. “Here, I’ll show you how to aim.”
“I know how to use a bow and arrow Pidge! Geez.” The boy huffed and turned, noticing Keith for the first time.
“Oh! Hey Quiche!”
Keith felt his face drop.
Lance and Hunk burst out laughing, and even Pidge cracked a smile.
Keith was mortified.

“Did you just call me ‘Quiche’?”
Joel looked confused. “Yeah?”
“Joel-oh my gods,” Lance wheezed, “his name is Keith! With a ‘K’!” He succumbed to another bout of laughter, and Keith could feel his anger begin to bubble.
He didn’t like being laughed at. And it was worse when it was by a cute boy.
Joel wasn’t helping matters.
“Oh, that makes more sense actually. Well, I’m still going to call you Quiche. I did meet you at
breakfast time this morning. It’s going to stick.” He trotted off, pulling Pidge down range to an empty target. Keith watched them go, trying to maintain a steady composure. At least Shiro hadn’t been there to hear that.

Hunk sighed happily, adjusting his headband as he took up the crossbow he had confiscated from Joel and walked off to join Pidge. He muttered “Quiche” as he walked by, giggling to himself. Keith heaved a deep breath, turning back to Lance, who was watching him with delight.

“Quiche. That’s the best thing I’ve ever heard.” He said, chuckling.

“Shut up.” Keith grumbled, turning his attention back to his target. Lance watched him nock another arrow.

“Your stance is all wrong.”
Keith forced himself not to throw one of his daggers at him.
He took a deep breath, trying to ignore the feeling of Lance’s gaze.
He drew the string back, and Lance tisked.
Keith let the arrow fly, and it hit the back net, causing the whole thing to shake and rattle.
Lance walked over to him, holding his own bow in hand.

“Wow. That was great. Nothing but net, oh wait...that’s basketball.”
Keith glared at him.
“You distracted me!”
“Who me? A distraction? Never.” Lance winked at him, and Keith felt his heart go up in gear. He focused on notching another arrow, hoping his hands weren’t shaking noticeably.

“I did say your stance was wrong, if only you had listened-”
“If you’re so good then you do it.” Keith interrupted, and Lance grinned.
“Thought you’d never ask.”

He made a shooing motion at Keith, who begrudgingly obliged, stepping back so Lance could take aim. He notched an arrow, and in one fluid motion, brought the bow up and drew back the string. Keith counted one second of absolute stillness, then Lance released the string, sending the arrow shooting forward. It landed with a soft thud in the very middle of the target. Keith was too shocked to formulate a proper remark.

Lance grinned at him, shrugging like it was no big deal.
“They don’t call me ‘sharpshooter’ for nothing.”
“They don’t call you ‘sharpshooter’ at all!” Pidge called out a few feet away, and Lance frowned.
“Well they should!” He called back, and turned his attention back towards Keith.

Keith looked away quickly, focusing on things like the sting in his lower arm, or the small pebble near his left shoe. Anything but the way Lance’s face lit up when he smiled. Or the way his eyebrows crooked so easily.

And speaking of eyebrows, that scar, and how it made Lance look so rugged. And HELL NO LOOK AT THAT PEBBLE WOW IT IS SO GREY AND ROUND WOW FOCUS ON THAT INSTEAD.

Keith kicked it, sending it flying down range. He pretended it was Lance’s face, and that somehow made him feel better.

“Beginners luck.” He mumbled, and Lance scoffed.
“You think? Let’s make it more interesting then.” Keith looked up at that, and Lance had his arms
folded across his chest, his bow hanging loosely in his grasp. “I’ll give you three shots to hit the center. If you can do it, I’ll convince Joel not to call you Quiche.”

Keith considered, then folded his own arms, mimicking Lance. He recalled what Marcus had said.

“Fine. But that’s not really a competition.”
“Competition?” Lance chuckled. “You really are a son of Ares aren’t you. Fine. What are your terms?”

Keith thought for a moment, then smiled wickedly to himself. There was no way Lance could do it.
“You have three shots to hit the center, but you have to Robin Hood it.”
“English please?”
“Robin Hood? You’ve never seen Robin Ho-, you know what, never mind. Basically you have to split the arrow already in the target. Right down the middle.”

Lance looked down range towards the target, where two arrows stuck out of it. He deliberated for a few moments, then nodded.
“If I do it then I get to draw on your face.”
Keith blanked.
“What?”
Lance reached in his pocket and pulled out a set of face paints, shaking them gently for Keith to see.
“You heard me. So, deal?”
Keith wondered if it was worth it. Sure, he could hit the center in three shots, probably. And there was no way Lance was going to be able to split an arrow in half. That was movie stuff. Hollywood magic.
So what did he have to lose?

Keith nodded, holding out his hand, which Lance shook firmly.
“Deal.”
“Wicked,” Lance said, “I’ll do it in one.”
“Excuse me?”
“I’ll only take one shot, to Robin Hood it or whatever.”
Keith couldn’t believe the nerve of this guy! How arrogant could you be?

He chuckled, shaking his head as he did.
Ridiculous.

“Whatever you say.” Keith stepped up to the target and adjusted the arrow he had previously nocked. He took his stance, copying what he had seen Lance do, and took a few steadying breaths. He could do this.
No problem.

He let the arrow fly, and it landed in the second ring, not far from the center.
He beamed.

“What!”
Lance had his eyebrows quirked, a smile playing at his lips. He didn’t say anything, instead gesturing for Keith to continue.

Keith huffed and repeated the process, but a sudden breeze came up that he didn’t compensate for, so his second arrow landed in the white of the target, opposite his very first shot. He didn’t risk looking at Lance after that one, choosing instead to focus on getting his last arrow in the center of the target.
Alright, he thought. You can do this. Just breathe and aim. Nothing to it.
He drew the string back and let the arrow loose. There was a moment of absolute silence where Keith held his breath as the arrow struck its mark.
It had hit red!

Though not dead center, it still counted.
Keith smiled to himself and turned back to Lance, who was holding his hands up to his eyes like binoculars.
Keith frowned.
“What are you doing?”
Lance didn’t look at him, and instead began to walk towards the target.

“Woah! Wait! Shouldn’t we close the range or something? There are people still practicing!”
Lance just shrugged.
“If I get hit then Hunk will avenge me.”

Keith gaped after him, then, after checking to see that the others were firing at their own targets and not all aiming at Lance, followed hesitantly behind.
They approached the target, and Lance let out a little ‘a-ha’!

“Looks like you didn’t hit center.”
Keith couldn’t believe it. From a distance it had looked like his arrow had been in the red, but upon closer inspection it was obvious that it was stuck in the second ring, mere centimeters from the middle ring.

“What the heck!”
Lance chuckled and removed the arrow from the target, returning it to Keith’s quiver.
“Quiche it is.” He said, turning back the way they had come.
Keith was fuming. Stupid target. Stupid nickname. Stupid Lance!

He removed the rest of his arrows, leaving Lance’s, and grumbled as he made his way back down range, no longer caring if he got hit by an arrow.

Was he being melodramatic?
Yes.
Did he care?
Not at all.

Lance was waiting with his arms crossed, an insufferable smirk plastered on his dumb face.
Keith put his hands on his hips and pouted. At least he wouldn’t be the only loser. There was no way Lance was going to win.
Absolutely no way.

“Your turn Robin Hood.”
Lance bowed slightly, which made Keith groan and roll his eyes, then took up stance.
“You ready to have your mind blown?” he asked, glancing back at Keith over his shoulder.
“You ready to eat your words?”
Lance stuck his tongue out at him and drew back the string. Keith watched the muscles in his arms and back tense from the strain; his legs locking into position as he aimed.
Good lord he had a nice back.

Keith shook his head of the thoughts, or tried to at least. Lance wasn’t helping at all. Keith watched as the boy shifted his hips gently as he aimed, the curve of his ass outlined against his jeans. Keith
swallowed hard, his face burning.

“Any day now!” He called out, and Lance let the arrow fly.

It was as if time slowed. Keith could track the arrow as it made its way towards the target; the air seeming to bend around it visibly, like mist guiding it towards its mark. Everything was silent, the only noise coming from Keith’s own heart as it drummed loudly in his ears. No way.

Keith must have blinked, because the moment was over before he knew it, everything coming back into focus as his mouth fell open. If he hadn’t known better, he would have thought there was only a single arrow in the center of the target. But he did know better.

Lance’s first arrow had been split right down the center, the edges curling backwards and bits of feather from its tail drifting slowly to the ground. The second arrow was lodged firmly in the center of the target, in the middle of the other arrow. It wasn’t possible. There was no way! Keith couldn’t help himself and sprinted towards the target.

Lance followed him lazily.

“Cool,” he said nonchalantly. “It worked.” Keith gaped, looking frantically between Lance and the target. He couldn’t wrap his head around it. Lance shouldn’t have been able to make that shot. It was impossible. It was inhumane.

It was totally awesome!

“How-that doesn’t, you-you...what!” Keith managed to say, and Lance chuckled lightly. He bent and regarded the arrows with disinterest, and shrugged.

“I’m not just a pretty face.” He winked. Keith gulped, his cheeks reddening, but Lance didn’t notice, instead reaching a hand into his pocket and withdrawing a small plastic box. “Time to pay up.” He said menacingly, and Keith realized it was face paint he was holding.

“Wait, seriously? I thought you were joking about that!” Lance put a hand to his chest in mock hurt. “Who me? Joke? Never!”

An arrow whizzed by them suddenly, causing Keith to jump forward out of the way, right into Lance’s chest. Lance let out a little ‘oof’ and stepped back, tripping over his own feet and falling backwards, bringing Keith with him.

Keith’s stomach dropped, and he may or may not have yelped as they tumbled over. At least his landing had been soft. Lance on the other hand, let out a grunt of pain. He opened his eyes and they locked onto Keith’s. For a moment they didn’t move, both entranced by the others gaze, but then someone called out,
and they suddenly became very aware of the position they were in.

“Oooo, love on the battlefield!”
Keith’s face felt like it was going to burst into flames. He hastily jumped back off of Lance, standing so quickly his vision blackened momentarily. Lance scampered back at the same time, rising more slowly and dusting off his clothes as he bent to retrieve the face paints. They avoided each-other’s eyes, and quickly made their way back down range. Pidge was waiting for them back at their spot.

“Gotta watch out for stray arrows.”
Lance huffed.
“If only some,” he emphasized the word, “of us could learn how to aim, then there wouldn’t be a problem.”
Pidge smirked, and Hunk ran up to them, worry etched on his face.

“Are you two okay?” They nodded, Keith not trusting his voice to work properly yet. Hunk went on.
“Thank gods. Joel got distracted and ended up firing his arrow at you guys by mistake.”
Joel emerged behind Hunk, his face sheepish as he looked between Lance and Keith.

“Whoops.” was all he said.
Lance ruffled the boys’ hair.
“No harm done. I was just showing Quiche here my skills.” He pointed towards Keith, and upon hearing the godawful name, Keith’s mind was able to focus.

“It’s Keith!” He said sternly, crossing his arms as they all turned to look at him.
Lance shrugged.
“That’s what I said. Now, sit down and pay up.”

Hunk’s eyebrows shot up at that.
“Say what now?”
“We made a deal. I get to draw on Keith’s face since I,” he turned back to Keith, “what did you call it?”
Keith glared back.
“A fluke.”
Lance shook his head.
“No, no. It was-” His eyes lit up. “Robin Hood! I Robin Hooded it!”

Hunk looked more confused than ever, and Lance elaborated.
“I split the arrow down the middle.”
Understanding dawned on Hunk’s face, and Pidge looked bored.
“We’ve seen you do that tons of times. No big deal.”
Keith couldn’t believe it.

“You what?!” He moved to stand by Lance. “You never told me you’ve done it before!”
Lance shrugged.
“You never asked.”
“That’s cheating!”
“No, it’s called you being rude.”
“How was I being rude?!”
“By assuming I couldn’t do it!”
“No one can do it! It’s an impossible shot!”
“Oh so you were trying to set me up? Not cool Quiche!”
Hunk moved to stand between them.  
“Oh, ok, calm down.” He turned to Keith. “Hate to break it to you, but a deal’s a deal.”  
Keith glared up at him, and behind him Lance grinned.  
Thankfully Marcus showed up then.  

“What seems to be the problem here?” His words were calm, but the expression he wore was fierce. Keith wondered if it was because he was a head councillor, or if it was due to his connection to Ares, but everyone in the group grew silent, making room for him to pass.  
Well, everyone except Lance.  

“Your boy here made a deal with me. He’s trying to back out.”  
Marcus regarded Lance for a moment, his face expressionless, then he turned to Keith.  
“This true?”  
Keith nodded hesitantly. There was no use denying it.  

Marcus groaned, putting a hand to his forehead as he did so.  
“Oh Keith,” he said, “poor, poor Keith.”  
Keith was startled by the reaction, and glanced nervously between the group.  
Marcus clapped a hand on Keith’s shoulder, his expression solemn.  

“This is my fault. I should have warned you.”  
Keith gulped.  
“Warned me about what?”  
Marcus pointed at Lance.  
“About him! He’s a monster! No one beats Lance when it comes to archery! Hades, even the Apollo kids are intimidated by him.”  

Lance was smirking, his arms folded across his chest confidently. Marcus went on.  
“Sorry buddy, I should have told you sooner. No one ever makes bets against Lance, except Sabrina. They’re both insane.”  

Lance cleared his throat loudly.  
“Ahem, I happen to be standing right here!”  
Marcus ignored him, and clapped Keith’s shoulder once more.  
“Sorry Keith, but it’s like Hunk said: a deal’s a deal. Besides, it can’t be that bad right?”  

It was, in fact, that bad.  
After Marcus left to resume his own training, Lance made Keith sit on the table that held the various bows, and set to work painting his face. Keith had insisted the others not watch, but they didn’t listen, and were all gathered around, waiting patiently as Lance drew.  

It had been hard at first to focus on anything when Lance’s face was so close to his own, and he had to dig his nails into his palm whenever Lance touched him, either to tilt his head or move a piece of hair out of the way.  
But it was easier after Keith had forced himself to make conversation.  

“Just don’t draw anything dirty.” He told Lance, whose only reply was a wicked grin. Keith didn’t like that, but Hunk had been there to save the day.  

“Don’t worry Keith, I’ll keep him in check.”  
Keith nodded, which had earned him a gentle smack on the arm from Lance.  
“Quit moving!”  

Keith held his head still, but didn’t stop talking.
“What’s with your face paint anyways? Are they whiskers?”
Lance and Hunk both scoffed, looking wounded and outraged all at the same time.
“Whiskers!”
“I can’t believe he just said that.”
“Hunk hold me!”
“I can’t! I’m too distraught!

Pidge had been the one to answer.
“Great, you just managed to offend the biggest nerds in camp.”
Joel pipped up as well.
“It’s from Naruto! Have you seen it Quiche?”

Keith ignored that last part, but he was familiar with the anime. Sure enough, Hunk’s headband had the same symbol on it as the main character from the show, and Keith rolled his eyes. Figures he would befriend the weirdo group.

He paused, having realized he considered this group of people friends.
Did he though?
He didn’t know them that well after all.

But Keith decided he could accept this group of strangers into his life.
“There! Done!” Lance said, and Keith decided he should have waited to see the damage to his face before making that decision.
Lance was beaming with pride, but Hunk, Pidge and Joel all wore uncertain expressions. Keith tried for a smile.

“How bad is it?”
Joel began to giggle.
“Lancey what is it?”
Lance made an impatient sound.
“You can’t tell?”
They all shook their heads.

Pidge began to laugh.
“Looks like a big red-”
“Blob!” Hunk interrupted, and Keith frowned. Great. He knew what Pidge had been about to say.

“Lance I said nothing dirty! Hunk you were supposed to be watching him!”
“I was! It’s nothing bad...I think. Actually I think it’s supposed to be a cat.” Hunk said, squinting his eyes and tilting his head as he regarded Keith’s face.
Lance pouted.

“It’s a lion! To match his helmet!”
Pidge frowned.
“What part of it is lion exactly?”
“Don’t lions have manes?” Joel asked.
Lance threw his hands in the air dramatically.
“Honestly, now you’re all art critics? Here’s the tail,” He jabbed Keith in the cheek.
“Ow!”
“And here’s the head,” Lance continued. “Look, it’s roaring.”

“I see it better now. Sort of.” Hunk offered. “But here,” he took the face paint from Lance and began to work on Keith’s face, not bothering to ask him if he was ok with it.
He wasn’t, for the record.
Hunk stepped back and admired his work. “There, I added little paw prints so you can tell it’s a kitty.” Lance narrowed his eyes at him. “Lion paws don’t look like that! You forgot the claws and everything!” “Well I didn’t have much to go on!” Pidge took the paint next. “Here, what it needs is some outlining.” “Now it looks like a robot!” Lance complained, and Joel rushed forward to see. “Woah! Pidge make it have a sword in its mouth!” Keith couldn’t take it anymore. “Hey, I’m not a canvas!” He said, and stood to avoid Joel’s reach. They all stared at him. “Actually,” Hunk began. “It doesn’t look half bad now.” Pidge finished. Lance was still pouting. “It was perfect before. Yeah, I’ll admit the sword looks kinda cool, but Keith was mine to paint. Go get your own.” Keith wasn’t entirely sure why, but he blushed furiously upon hearing that. He bent to grab his helmet as cover, hoping the others hadn’t seen his cheeks burn red. Thankfully Marcus returned then, followed by Kate and Ben. They took one look at Keith and burst out laughing, but Keith was beyond caring at this point. So he had a red robot lion on his cheek. So what. He would own it. “It’s time to switch stations.” Marcus said, his eyes alight as he spoke his next words. “Next up is the arena.”

Chapter End Notes

Yikes sorry for the longer wait!
Kind of a fun chapter, nothing too serious.

Hope you all like the nerdy references to multiple fandoms, including the red lion lol.

Also season 2 came out so I have some new material to draw inspiration from yay!!
What did you guys think of the new season btw? I would love to talk about it :) 

I'm also thinking of maybe doing a little character sheet, seeing as I have so many rando's now. Idk, we'll see if I have time :)
As always, hope you enjoy. I love getting feedback from you guys, it really helps to motivate me to finish each chapter.
Mistakes have been made

Chapter Summary

Some petty jealousy makes itself known, and Lance finds himself battling not only his opponents, but his own insecurities as well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lance didn’t know what he had been expecting. Usually he was pretty good at reading not only situations, but people as well, and often prided himself in his abilities. Maybe it was an Aphrodite thing; to feel certain...vibes. Or maybe it wasn’t. Lance hadn’t really thought much into it. Like the other aspects of himself, he just accepted whatever gifts he had, and worked hard on the ones he didn’t. Not that there were many in the latter. He was, after all, a spectacular specimen.

But that was beside the point. What had Lance perplexed was something he thought he knew pretty well: boys. Or rather, one boy in particular. Sure, maybe he wasn’t as experienced as someone like Sabrina, himself having a strong affiliation for women over men for the most part, but Lance had had his fair share of vitamin D. He knew how to read the signs, the body language. Hades, he was ninety-five percent certain he had turned some guys from the straight and narrow just by walking into the room and dropping a few well-rehearsed lines. Lance was a professional.

Or so he had thought. There was something about the boy in the hideous mullet that had Lance’s wits up in arms. He just couldn’t read him. And it was frustrating as all Hades!

Seeing Keith at the archery range that morning had put Lance in high spirits, knowing he had the opportunity to show off in front of the new guy. Maybe learn a thing or two about him. You know, for educational purposes. No ulterior motives whatsoever. And it had worked for the most part, up until Keith had accepted his challenge. That had been something of a shock, seeing as everyone in camp knew about Lance’s proficiency with the bow. But Keith didn’t, and Lance had sent up a quiet prayer of thanks to his godly mother.

Sure, maybe he should have warned Keith, but the wager had been too good. And some sick part of Lance really wanted to show up this guy. Put him in his place. See his arms tense under the strain of the bow; his eyebrows lower in concentration over those deep blue eyes...or maybe they were indigo. Lance really wanted to know. And oh gods, the way his tongue sticks out a little when he takes aim! Um...right. Educational.

Needless to say, watching Keith take his three shots had been the hardest thing Lance had ever been subjected to.
Mainly because the guy was terrible; his stance was all wrong, his aim was lackluster, and the string kept hitting his lower arm, which Lance knew hurt like Hades. But despite all this, Keith still managed to get in two decent shots, which really ticked Lance off. Like, how dare he.

But on the opposite end of the spectrum, Keith looked damn fine holding a bow, and Lance had had to bite his tongue a few times to keep his mind in check.

And don’t even mention the way his face lit up after his final shot. Lance had been forced to remove himself from the situation entirely, choosing to walk down the range while it was still live instead of be near Keith in that moment, lest he do something drastic.

So yeah, let’s go with the death-by-arrow scenario.

Lance had almost been disappointed to learn that Keith’s arrows had all missed their mark, seeing as Proud Keith was such a heartwarming sight.

But if Lance thought Proud Keith was something to lose his mind over, he was nowhere near prepared for Pouty Keith.

Pouty Keith took the cake.

Any thoughts of throwing the competition for the sake of seeing this guy smile again were immediately cast aside after Lance saw the little jut of Keith’s lip, his face set in reluctant acceptance.

Lance would win this, easily, for no other reason than to see Keith make that same expression again.

Alright, so maybe he liked Keith.

Just a little.

Lance could admit that, to himself at least. But Keith was damn near impossible to read, and Lance had never met someone he couldn’t have pegged within five minutes of conversation.

He went through his mental notes on mullet boy once again:

First he was a standoffish jerk.

Then an apologetic jerk.

And then a rude jerk within seconds of being an apologetic jerk.

And then apologetic again...but more sincere this time. And now this?

This Keith, who was almost...dare he say, flirty?

Lance was certain that Keith had been in awe of him splitting that arrow. He could see it etched all over the other boys’ face, which had done things to Lance’s stomach that he hadn’t known where possible to feel.

And, oh gods, any inclination of a crush was solidified when Keith came tumbling down on top of him.

It was in that moment that Lance realized several things.

The first thought was “Wow, he smells really nice”, which wasn’t at all what he had been expecting, seeing as the day was already hot, and both of them were sweaty from training.

The second thought was “There’s no way his eyes are violet. It’s just the lighting. It has to be the lighting.”

The third thought was “How is his hair this luscious?” Lance had been very tempted to reach up and touch it, but his arms were pinned to his sides, which led to the fourth and final thought of: “This guy is surprisingly heavy, and there’s a rock poking into my back.”

That last one sort of ruined the mood, not that it lasted all that long to begin with. Keith was up and off of him in a matter of seconds, with Lance following suit.

His face was flushed, he could feel it, and Keith was avoiding his eyes, which had really thrown Lance for a loop.
If Keith liked him at all, wouldn’t he be thrilled to find himself sprawled on top of the hottest guy in camp? Maybe Lance had misread the situation. Maybe Flirty Keith didn’t exist.

Not that he minded too much. Lance had had unreciprocated crushes before, though not often, seeing as children of Aphrodite are rarely turned down.

And really, mullet boy was not the typical guy Lance would usually go for anyways. He liked taller men. Muscular men. Guys with hair that didn’t fall to their shoulders, smelling like worn leather and cinnamon, their eyes lined with the longest set of black eyelashes that Lance was totally not jealous of at all thank you very much. Lance preferred guys who weren’t blessed with full lips and the softest and naturally fair skin that was just begging to be marked up in more ways than one and GODS Lance was SO SCREWED.

There was a reason his lion drawing had turned out so poorly. And yes, he could admit that it wasn’t his best work, not out loud of course, but Hades Keith was a distracting canvas. It wasn’t fair. Even with that godawful helmet on, Keith was a pedestal of attractiveness, and Lance had to force himself not to Charmspeak the stupid mullet into a steamy make-out session right then and there.

But no, Lance wasn’t that kind of guy. He wouldn’t force someone to like him just because he could. That went against his entire being.

Still, it was frustrating beyond belief, so Lance decided there was really no harm in amping up his flirtatious tactics. Merely for educational purposes.

Both teams were making their way to the arena, which was where the real action happened. The events always changed, ranging from capture the flag to dodgeball to something similar to Nerf tag except with blunt arrows. You know, typical camp stuff.

Anyways, the purpose of the arena was to mimic real-world scenarios; preparing the campers for life outside the borders. It was also pretty entertaining to watch, and today looked like it was going to be no exception. From what Lance had heard, the arena was set up as a sort of ring, where members of each team would face off in different challenges. There was team vs team, pairs, and one on one, with the winners of each round continuing on to fight the next contenders. Apparently there was a prize this time around, which really had Lance interested. Nothing better than having something to fight for.

He was hoping to get the team option though, seeing as ranged weapons weren’t allowed in this particular event, so that put him at a bit of a disadvantage.

He also hoped he would face off against Keith’s team, if only to get the opportunity to fight with him-them, again. Lance shook his head. Gods, when had Keith become such a distraction?

He sauntered up to the boy in question, his hands resting casually on the back of his head as he walked, which Lance knew would extenuate his lean figure. Keith didn’t seem to notice.

“So Keith.”

The boy eyed him suspiciously, his face partially obscured by the ridiculous helmet. It was entirely unfair that he still managed to look endearing in it. The painted lion on his cheek only added to the overall effect. Red was a really great colour on him.

“Yeah?”

Lance realized he had been staring, and quickly went back to his original plan. He dropped his voice a few pitches and waggled his eyebrows.

“Did it hurt?”

Keith looked mildly perplexed, so Lance went on before he could respond.
“When you fell from Elysium?” He smiled crookedly, and behind him Hunk groaned.
Keith was staring.

“I don’t know what that is.”
Lance blanked, and Pidge began to chuckle. Keith was looking at him expectantly, one eyebrow quirked upward in confusion.

“It’s like heaven,” Lance explained, dropping his hands as he did so. “Where you go when you die and all that stuff. Except Greek style.”
Keith gave him a look.

“But I’m not dead.”
Was this guy for real!?

Pidge’s chuckles morphed into full-fledged laughter, and even Hunk hid a smile. Keith looked around at them, his confusion becoming more evident. Lance shook his head, baffled.

“Ugh, nevermind.” He would just have to try something else. Maybe less subtle? Or maybe more subtle.... Gods why was this so hard!

Keith stared at him for a moment longer, then shrugged, jogging to catch up with the other Ares kids, who were registering at a desk just outside the arena. Lance watched him go, his mind wheeling.

“What are you up to?”
Hunk’s warm hand landed heavily on Lance’s shoulder, a looked of humour etched on his face. Lance decided it would be best not to reveal his hopeless crush too soon and shrugged nonchalantly.

“Just trying to make conversation.”
Hunk hummed to himself, not wholly believing Lance, but didn’t pursue the topic. Pidge and Joel, who had gone to register their team as well, came back then.

“So it looks like we’ve got a bit of a wait. The Ares team got the last open spot and are up next, so we get to verse the winners of that round.”
Lance pouted.

“What! Pidge waiting sucks!”
Pidge gave him a look through heavily lidded eyes.

“Well if someone hadn’t been flirting we would have gotten here sooner.”

“I wasn’t flirting. I was making conversation.”
Hunk rolled his eyes.

“It’s fine Lance. This way we get to see how the other team fights, you know, scope out potential strategies and exploit certain weaknesses.” He nudged Lance’s side and wiggled his eyebrows, knowing Lance would pick up on his hidden message.

This would give him a chance to watch Keith fight.

Oh Hunk. There’s a reason you’re my best friend, Lance thought to himself. He nodded, and together their team went to find a spot on the bleachers.

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Watching Keith fight was a mistake.
Lance had been hoping to see the same awkwardness Keith had displayed at the range. Like, the weird stance and all that. 
What he got instead was a nosebleed.

Or well, he would have, had he been a character out of one of the animes he and Hunk loved to torrent. But Lance had more control over his body, though just barely.

Keith fighting was something he hadn’t been prepared to see, let alone enjoy. He moved like nothing Lance had ever known. It was like watching a flame; graceful and deadly at the same time, and Lance was torn between being turned on and being scared for his life. Not the most agreeable of feelings.

The battle was team vs. team, so it was the Ares group against the Athena group; four on four. The rules were simple: if you step outside of the ring, you’re out, and if you get knocked out, well...you don’t really have much of an option with that last one.

It had started off relatively normal, with both teams circling each other slowly, picking out weak links and formulating plans of attack. The latter was seen more in the Athena group, seeing as they tended to use strategy more, as well as the muscle in their heads rather than the muscles in their bodies, which the Ares kids liked to favour.

As per usual, Ares attacked first.

Kate leapt forward, swinging her spear in a large arc as she aimed at a girl Lance knew as Nyma; an older camper he had once asked out. She was exotic and tall and had laughed at all of his jokes, but ended up being more of a tease, leading him on for a few weeks before finally ditching him for someone else.

That had been years ago, but Lance was still bitter. Children of Aphrodite weren’t usually on the receiving end of that stick.

He watched their fight, routing, secretly, for Kate to clobber her.

Nyma countered Kate’s attack, but that left her other side open, which Ben moved to take advantage of.

Their dynamic was always interesting to watch. With Ben and Kate being a rare case of real-life siblings, their bond was a lot stronger than the rest of the campers, which made them fierce contenders, if not a little predictable.

The Athena group must have known Ben would attack after his sister, and as he lunged forward, a guy named Rolo rose to meet him, which caught Ben by surprise. He was pushed back forcefully, and ended up tripping, landing with a hand just outside of the ring.

A bell was rung, manned by Coran, signalling that Ben was out.

A loud string of curses rose up from the arena, gaining a bout of laughter from the crowd as Coran’s face turned a bright shade of pink.

“Language young man!” He called out, and Ben made a rude gesture before slumping off to sit on the sidelines.

“That was to be expected,” Hunk mumbled to Lance, his eyes not leaving the ring. “The Athena group is really hard to beat, and everyone knows that when Kate attacks, Ben attacks.” He tisked.

“I really don’t want to fight either of these teams though.”

Lance only nodded in reply. His attention was on Keith, who had yet to do much of anything.

He had been given a shield and short sword, which he was eyeing with some distain, and that
coupled with his breastplate and helmet, made him look like an actual soldier. If soldiers really liked cats.

Keith still had the lion painted on his face, as well as the terrible headpiece, and it would have all been very comical had his expression not been so intense. Lance felt a chill run down his spine as Keith watched the proceedings, his body settling into a ready stance as he spun his sword a few times, testing its’ weight. He ignored when Ben was pushed out of the ring, moving instead to flank one of the kids on the Athena team as they were all distracted. With a flurry of motion he attacked, an audible gasp from the crowd emanating up as he did so, their attention shifting from Ben and Coran to the new guy in camp.

Had the person Keith singled out not been as experienced as they were, Lance was sure they would have been knocked out cold. As it was, Shay countered him easily, and a loud clang rang out as the blades met. Beside him, Hunk stiffened. Lance glanced over to make sure he was alright, but smiled when he noticed the look of pride on his best friends’ face.

Shay was sort of Hunk’s girlfriend, though the two had yet to make things official. It was cute, the way he watched her and talked about her and gushed about how awesome and smart and pretty she was. He was completely head over heels for the girl, and she was pretty much in the same boat. Lance adored Shay. She was kind-hearted and friendly and she made Hunk happy, so that was really all that mattered. Plus Shay was tough. Like, scary tough. But you wouldn’t know it unless you had to fight her, and even then you’d probably welcome her to mash your brains in, because she was just that awesome.

Lance felt bad for Keith for choosing Shay as his first opponent. He had hoped to get more of a show out of the boy. But as the seconds ticked on, Keith held his own. He countered her strikes, and dodged where he needed to. Though he was fighting more defensively now, Keith was managing to stay within the ring, and it was becoming more and more clear that Shay was tiring. Lance was on the edge of his seat as he watched, and Hunk was growing more and more anxious by the minute, seeing how Shay’s movements were coming less energetically, and she shifted into a defensive stance to catch her breath.

That was all Keith needed, and as the others continued to fight; Marcus fending off two of the Athena kids and Kate still battling with Nyma, he made his move. He sprinted forward; his sword raised as he moved to strike. Hunk inhaled sharply as the weapon came down, but Shay was able to get her shield up in time.

“C’mon c’mon c’mon...” Hunk whispered to himself, his fingers drumming nervously against the seat. Lance watched as Shay tossed Keith back in a surge of strength, but he rolled out of it, getting to his feet mere inches from the edge of the ring. Shay was on in him before he could react, and had he not been so nimble, he would have been split in half as her sword came down. Keith rolled to the side, his fatigue more evident now.

The bell sounded again, and this time it was Nyma, who had been pushed out by Kate. Lance hadn’t been watching their fight, but neither girl had a weapon, and apparently had been wrestling each other for the past several minutes. Kate was smiling wickedly, and charged to help Marcus without even stopping to grab a weapon. She barreled right into Rolo’s side, and the two of them were flung outside of the ring.

“And there goes Kate, daughter of Ares, and Rolo, son of Athena! Interesting tactic from the Ares
team!” Coran’s voice bellowed over the cheers of the crowd, and Ben was chanting his sisters’ name.

Pidge scoffed beside Lance.

“Stupid. Typical Ares kid, getting themselves all worked up and forgetting reason.”

Lance chuckled at that, and turned his attention back to the fight.

It was two against two now, and in the commotion the teams had been able to regroup, which meant Keith was no longer alone in facing Shay.

Marcus whispered something to Keith, who nodded and stooped to pick up Kate’s spear, dropping his shield in the process. Lance gasped alongside the crowd. Marcus looked confused, and spoke to Keith again, who only shrugged in reply.

“A dual wielder hey? Interesting indeed!” Coran’s cheery voice resonated over the arena, voicing the thoughts of everyone gathered there. Dual wielding wasn’t uncommon among campers, just not favoured. It was more practical to have a shield in one hand, especially for close range combat. Lance wondered what Keith was up to.

But then the battle was on again, and Shay and her teammate were charged by Marcus head-on, who was able to counter both of their attacks as Keith sprinted behind them. Shay must have figured out what his plan was, and detached from Marcus, letting the other member of her team fight him as she turned to face Keith once again.

She had her shield raised and was approaching Keith warily, keeping an eye on his weapons. He struck out with his sword, and as she moved to parry, spun so he was beside her; her shield no longer between them. She quickly made to change positions, and as she did, Keith let his spear drop in front of her leg, which she proceeded to trip over.

Hunk’s knuckles were white from gripping the edge of his seat, but his expression was blank.

Lance reached over and put a hand on his shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

Shay was able to roll to the side, but Keith was unrelenting, landing strike after strike in front of her, forcing her to dodge out of the way or else be hit. And then the bell sounded, and Coran was announcing that Shay was out.

She had rolled beyond the ring, and stared up at Keith in surprise.

“What was that all about-” Lance began, but stopped when he saw Keith reach out a hand to help Shay up. It was a kind gesture, but not one you want to do in the middle of battle. Another bell sounded, and Marcus was bellowing something from where he was knocked on the ground, his own leg just outside of the ring. The final member of the Athena group was charging Keith head on, and Keith was standing right on the edge of the ring.

He didn’t have time to roll out of the way, and he had no shield to parry.

Lance watched unblinkingly as the Athena camper narrowed in on Keith, knowing the battle was about to end.

But then Keith did something no one had been expecting. He dropped both weapons, lowered himself into a ready stance, and just as the Athena camper was about to make contact, leapt over him.

Well, leapt is a bit of an exaggeration. What Keith did was more of a martial arts move, where he used the momentum of his charging opponent to re-direct it and avoid being hit.

It all happened too fast for Lance to understand fully, but Keith had been able to dodge the charging camper, who proceeded to run straight out of the ring, unable to stop himself in time.

There was an entire three seconds of absolute silence, and then the crowd erupted in cheers. Lance
was slower to react, his mind still trying to process what it was he had just seen.
Where had Keith learned to move like that!?

“Looks like we have a winner! Team Ares will move on to the next round!” Coran shouted
joyfully, though he was barely audible over the yells from the Ares cabin. Ben and Kate ran up and
engulfed Keith in a bone-shattering hug that he looked incredibly uncomfortable in. Marcus patted
him on the back, and was speaking to him with a large grin on his face, no doubt asking where
Keith had learned to fight like that.

Lance felt his own heartbeat quicken, and his eyes were starting to water. He realized he hadn’t
blinked in a good two minutes, and shook his head to try and focus.
His team was up next after all.

Hunk was already up and moving through the crowd to see if Shay was alright, and Lance
followed behind; Pidge and Joel on his tail.
They met up with her just outside the ring, and Hunk hugged her.
She looked taken aback, but then smiled warmly and returned the embrace. Lance wished he had a
camera with him.

When they broke apart Hunk was red in the face, and Lance winked at him, which only made
Hunk’s blush deepen. What else are best friends for, right?
He turned his attention back to Shay.
“Are you alright? That was a crazy fight!”
Shay nodded, still beaming.
“Definitely not my finest moment, that’s for sure. I should have been looking where I was going.”
Hunk frowned.
“Well Keith shouldn’t have been singling you out so much either. That wasn’t fair~”
Shay cut him off by placing a hand to his arm.
“She was following the rules, just like everyone else.” She stopped to consider for a moment. “Actually, if anything, he was going easy on me. I should get him to
Teach me some moves.”
Hunk began to protest but Shay’s laughing stopped him short.
“Hunk it’s ok, you don’t have to stick up for me. I know when I’ve been bested. And now I know
What I need to work on. It’s a win-win.”
Hunk crossed his arms and looked away from her.

“Still think it was unfair.”
“Aw Hunk, are you pouting?” Shay moved to stand in front of him, her voice sing-songy and soft.
Hunk didn’t reply, his bottom lip jutting out in an attempt to look more cross.
It didn’t work.

Shay giggled and whispered something in his ear, which made Hunk’s ears burn red and his
resolve broke. He smiled and the two hugged again.
Lance turned away, allowing them a private moment as he searched the crowd.
They would have a few minutes before the next round began, mostly so that the previous team
could get some water or ambrosia should they need it. Luckily no one was hurt too badly.

Lance wasn’t sure what he was looking for exactly, and as his eyes roamed the many faces around
them, he spotted Shiro making his way through the throng, towards Keith.
Lance’s heart did a little skip upon seeing Keith’s face, which was stretched into a wide grin as he
saw Shiro, who handed him something that Lance couldn’t make out. The two exchanged a few
words, and Keith was chatting amiably with his older brother.
Lance hadn’t noticed how expressive Keith was with his hands. It was cute. Not like, that cute. Actually it was more annoying. Distracting really. And then Lance noticed the fingerless gloves Keith had dawned, and suddenly he couldn’t deny it anymore.

Yeah.

Keith was cute as fuck.

And Lance was totally screwed.

Pidge knocked into the back of Lance’s legs, making his knees jut out and pulling him back to reality as he tumbled forward. “Ah! Pidge what have I told you about doing that to me!” Pidge only smirked in reply. “Time to get your head in the game sharpshooter. We have a fight to win.” Lance beamed, thoughts of Keith momentarily forgotten.

“Aw! You called me sharpshooter!” Pidge shrugged. “Don’t make me regret it.” “Yes Boss!” Lance saluted, and Joel giggled. “But you do realize this isn’t a ranged competition,” he continued. “I won’t be able to prove my worth to you in that manner.” He performed a mock bow, eliciting a groan from Pidge.

“Lancey you’re good at a bunch of stuff. I’m sure you’ll do just fine.” Joel piped up, and Lance bent to pat the boys head. “Thanks champ. Now, let’s head over to the ring and suit up yeah?”

Joel cheered, and dragged Pidge along behind him as he barreled over to the equipment room.

It was true that Lance would be at a disadvantage in the ring, what with ranged weapons being his specialty, but that didn’t mean he was completely useless. He had been working on hand to hand combat with Hunk for a while now, and though not the greatest, he was able to hold his own. Still, Lance would choose string over steel any day.

He made his way around the crowd, back to the secluded area behind the ring where the teams congregated after a match. Pidge and Joel were sorting through various weapons and armour at the small stand of equipment that had been provided, but Lance didn’t want to join them just yet. His eyes began to search the crowd again, hoping maybe he would be able to spot Keith and ask him where he had learned to fight like that.

You know, just as friendly conversation. Not like he was impressed or anything.

He was scanning the area near Hunk and Shay when his gaze fell upon a shock of white hair; the crowd parting respectfully as the figure moved through. Lance’s mouth fell open slightly.

Allura was always stunning to watch, especially when she donned her battle armour, like now. But that wasn’t what had Lance so surprised. Their fearless leader; badass to the extreme, beauty beyond words, and scary as all Hades, was smiling.

It wasn’t like she never smiled, but Lance didn’t think he had ever seen her so openly enthused. Allura was full on beaming, and Lance saw a couple other campers openly gape as she moved passed them.
His eyes followed her as she made her way down to the ring, across from where he was standing. She was carrying a number of weapons, which wasn’t unusual for her, and stopped in front of a group of campers Lance recognized as the Ares team.

And then there was Keith.

Keith, his helmet removed and his hair sticking up in random places, looking endearing as all Hades. Shiro was beside him, patting his back and looking like the proud older brother he was. How had he not seen them sooner? Shiro was taller than most of the people around him, and his own white fringe was pretty easy to identify from across the way, but Lance supposed he hadn’t really been looking for that particular brother. He was about to call out when Allura approached the pair, and his faced dropped as he watched her engulf Keith in a hug.

Something began to ache in the pit of Lance’s stomach as he watched the exchange. It was just a quick embrace, and Keith looked pretty uncomfortable with the whole thing, so it shouldn’t have been that big of a deal.

And yet it was.

Allura had only hugged Lance a few times in his many years at camp, and her face had never looked like it did now.

Like she was happy to do it, and not obliged.

The ache rose up into his chest, where it settled just below his heart as he continued to watch.

Allura broke apart, smiling up at a flustered Keith, and turning to chat amiably with Shiro. Lance couldn’t hear them, but he could tell from her body language that Allura was excited.

Excited about Keith, who she was talking with again.

Who suddenly looked just as excited to be talking with her.

And then Lance was turning away, because the ache in his chest was beginning to throb, and he suddenly wished very much that he could just leave.

There had been very few times in his life, that he could remember, where Lance had gotten jealous. It wasn’t a feeling he really endorsed.

And green was not his colour.

But seeing Allura show so much affection to the new guys made it a difficult emotion to ignore. How was it fair? Allura had never actively sought him out in a group of people just to give him a hug. Even when he had done something impressive, like Keith just had in the ring.

Maybe she liked him.

Lance would be a fool to deny that he had tried asking Allura out on several occasions, but had always been turned down. Not that he minded too much, seeing as Allura didn’t really show an interest in anyone, so it wasn’t just him. And he figured their relationship was maybe more platonic anyways. But seeing her be so open about her feelings now, with Keith, made Lance re-evaluate things. Maybe she didn’t think of them as friends at all. Maybe Lance was more of a hindrance. Hades, he had gotten in trouble enough times to endorse the latter point.

What if, what Lance had been calling friendship, Allura had been calling tolerance?

And liking Keith? He didn’t blame her honestly. Keith was good-looking and cool and obviously a great fighter, so why shouldn’t Allura want to hug him.

Lance wasn’t competition at all.

“Hey buddy,” a voice said behind him, and when he turned, Hunk gasped. “Woah...are you okay?”

Concern was etched all over his best friends’ features, and Lance quickly slapped a smile on his face as he replied.
“I’m great! Just getting into the zone before we kick these guys butts.” He grinned up at Hunk, hoping the crinkles by his eyes would mask the sadness he knew was there. Hunk was hard to fool, and as he opened his mouth to say something else Lance quickly changed the subject. “So how’s Shay?” He winked, and thankfully Hunk blushed, his expression shifting from worry to embarrassment as Lance nudged his side teasingly.

“She’s fine. Perfect. Great I mean...um...” He broke off as Lance chuckled. “Dude, you have to ask her out. Make it official. You’re like everyone’s favourite couple. Or you would be, if you plucked up the courage to ask her.”

Hunks blush deepened as he nervously ran a hand through his hair. “Actually...about that...”

“Oh my GODS! YOU DID IT?!” Lance felt his face light up in a genuine smile as he grabbed hold of Hunk’s shoulders. “HUNK TELL ME EVERYTHING!”

Hunk glanced around awkwardly as nearby people stopped to stare, wondering what Lance was yelling about.

“Shh Lance keep it down!” He clamped a hand over the lanky boys’ mouth as Lance made an attempt to speak. “I didn’t ask her out.”

Lance felt his face drop as Hunk stepped back. “Hunk why-”

“She asked me.” He interrupted, and Lance took a moment to process before squealing loudly. “Lance! What did I say!”

But the other boy barely heard; dancing around Hunk and clapping his hands gleefully.

Pidge came up to them then.

“Can you two maybe chill for two seconds? People are staring!”

“Pidge! Oh my gods Pidge you won’t believe it!”

“Lance-” Hunk started, but was quickly cut off.

“Shunk is happening!” Lance practically cheered, and Pidge looked between him and Hunk with a widening smile.

“Shunk?!” Hunk asked with a look of horror. Lance ignored him. “You owe me twenty bucks Pidgeypoo!”

Pidge frowned. “She asked him? Damn it Hunk I was really counting on you!”

Hunk glanced between the two of them dumbfounded.

“You guys made a bet?!”

“Of course.” Pidge replied, handing over a folded bill to Lance begrudgingly.

“Lance you bet against me? I’m hurt!” Hunk folded his arms and pouted, and Lance felt a pang of guilt.

“Aw c’mon Hunk...you know how I hate to lose.”

“I would have asked her!” he protested. “...eventually. But still, I’m betrayed. By my best friend. For money.”

“It’s not betrayal! It’s an investment! I knew Shay was going to ask you first, because that’s just the kind of girl she is. Plus it’s been weeks of mutual pinning.” Hunk didn’t look convinced, so Lance continued.

“Let’s celebrate after this. I’ll use my winnings,” he smirked at Pidge, who replied with a rude hand gesture, “to buy a bunch of snacks later on. How’s that?”

Hunk was silent for a moment, then turned towards Lance, a grin slowly creeping across his face. “Fine. Forgiven. But you better bring all my favourites. I’m still wounded.”

“Nothing but the best for you my dear.”
Pidge groaned beside them.

“Oh, and what’s with Shunk?!” Hunk was frowning, but it was a comical expression on the big guy, so Lance allowed himself to chuckle. “It’s your guy’s power couple name.”

“Okay, but Shunk?”

Lance shrugged lazily. “It was that or Hay.” He gestured to himself and Pidge. “We took a vote.”

“I voted for Shunk!” Joel piped up, wedging his way into the circle, laden with clunky armour and a small dagger. Hunk looked appalled.

“Just how many of you were in on this!”

Lance made a show of counting his fingers, and Hunk whined. “You two are such drama queens. Can we please start this thing already?” Pidge interrupted, gesturing to the ring.

They nodded, following their tiny friend back towards the equipment shelf.

“So, you guys make plans for a date?” Lance asked as he sorted through several short swords, testing their weight and balance. Hunk blushed again.

“Sort of. We’re going to meet up later and hang out. She wanted to stay for our match but has to finish some projects Allura has her working on apparently.”

“Projects?”

“Yeah. Something about designing some security towers. I didn’t really ask.” That was an odd request, even from Allura, but Lance decided not to dwell on it. Hunk merely shrugged. “She also wants to officially meet Keith. His fight was amazing to watch wasn’t it? Shay kept gushing over it.” Hunk paused, “Should I be worried?!”

“Dude. She literally asked you out.”

“Oh...right, yeah. Anyways, can you ask Keith if he would be cool with teaching her some stuff? And maybe me to? The guy is incredible.”

There was that pang again, and Lance nodded, forcing a smile on his face. Hunk beamed, then moved away from the shelf to adjust his armour and stretch.

Something about hearing his best friend so openly admire Keith made Lance’s pulse begin to rise. Sure his fight had been cool, but for Shay to want lessons from him? That was insane.

And Hunk?

Hunk had never asked Lance to teach him something, mainly because Hunk wasn’t fond of archery, and was better at the other fighting styles than Lance...but still.

It hurt.

What if his friends decided that Keith was better than him? What if they liked him more, and wanted to spend time with him instead.

No.

They wouldn’t do that...

Would they?

A bell sounded, and the crowd slowly quieted, allowing Coran’s voice to be heard loud and clear. “The next event is between the winners of the previous round, team Ares, and Pidge’s Bitc-” Coran stopped suddenly, his face turning bright red. “Pidge! What did I say about language! This is not a proper team name.”

Pidge was smirking wickedly behind them.

“Sorry Coran!”

Lance high-fived Pidge as Hunk looked between them, horrified. Joel was giggling.
The older man huffed, before smoothing his mustache and continuing. “Right, well. Team Ares against team Coran.” The audience chuckled, and Pidge shrugged. “The match will be one vs one, with the team scoring the most wins advancing on to the next round. Should the event of a tie occur-” Coran went on to explain the rules, but Lance stopped listening.

One vs one was the worst outcome. That meant he wouldn’t have his team to back him up. Though he would never admit it out loud, Lance was nervous. He wanted to do well, to help his friends win, and to impress certain individuals. But he was less confident in his abilities to do that if it was one against one.

“-first match will be Lance, son of Aphrodite, against Keith, son of Ares.” Coran finished, and Lance’s head snapped up at the sound of his name. Say what now?! There was no way he could beat Keith! He had just watched him fight! The guy was a monster! He felt someone watching him, and turned just in time to catch the other boys’ eyes staring at him from across the ring. They locked gazes for just a moment, before Keith quickly looked away, turning to Shiro instead. Allura was watching him as well, her face expressionless.

Lance huffed. Right. He could do this. He just needed to focus. He had seen Keith move, watched how he fought. He had the advantage here. He would play it cool, like he always did, and just go with the flow. Lance took a deep breath, feeling his confidence slowly come back.

“You ready buddy?” Hunk asked as he patted him on the back, placing a helmet on his head. Lance nodded, then turned to the rest of his team. “Alright guys, you’re hereby formally invited to the best gun show in town.” He posed with his arms up, flexing, and a groan went up from his team. “Watch and learn.”

“Great speech. Really inspiring.” Pidge muttered sarcastically, but Lance only winked, holding up his hands as finger guns. “You can do it Lancey! Beat Quiche!” Joel cheered as Lance walked out onto the ring, seeing Keith do the same. The other boy was still sporting the same armour, but had swapped out the spear. His new weapon was a shorter, wide piece of steel that Keith held in a firm grip. The sword was decorated with several markings Lance couldn’t make out, and the blade itself looked to be tempered steel, reflecting the light and displaying an array of colours, like it had been dipped in gasoline. Lance had never seen anything like it before at camp, and wondered where he had gotten it.

He himself had chosen a shield and rapier, preferring the extra length the blade provided. He had noticed he had a few inches on Keith in terms of height, which would hopefully provide him with some advantage, though after watching the others’ fight, he was not optimistic. He sent a silent prayer up to his godly mother, though he wasn’t sure what Aphrodite would do in this sort of situation. Seduce the opponent maybe. Which was actually not that bad of an idea. Lance figured he could at least try.

They met in the center of the ring, a few feet apart, and Lance grinned crookedly. “Where’d you get that sword samurai?”
Keith blinked, looking down at the new weapon in his hand, a ghost of a smile playing at his lips. “Allura.”

Lance had to force himself to breathe. Why had Allura given Keith such a weapon? It looked even
more impressive up close, and Lance was positive that it was valuable. So why?

He didn’t ask, instead choosing to ignore the pang in his chest as the twisting tentacles of envy tightened their grip.

The bell sounded, and the two circled each other slowly. After about a minute of no action Lance straightened. “Are you going to attack or just stare at me.” Keith’s eyebrows lowered as he scowled. “Ladies first.” Lance snorted at the retort. “Age before beauty.” “You don’t even know how old I am!” Keith started, but Lance was already moving, using the distraction to lurch forward and swing at Keith. The audience cheered behind him, but Keith was able to clue in quick enough to jump backwards out of the way.

“Cheap move.” He snarled as he settled back into his fighting stance. Lance merely chuckled. “Not my fault you got distracted by my gorgeous face.” He blew a kiss for good measure.

Something flickered in Keith’s eyes, and Lance would have pondered it more had the other boy not suddenly come charging at him, his body twisting as he moved to attack. Lance was able to get his shield up in time, but the force of the dual blades knocked him backwards, and he had to roll to escape, losing his helmet in the process. He jumped up, already winded, but Keith wasn’t slowing down. He rushed forward, but feinted at the last moment, forcing Lance to shift his weight at the last second to block a blow to his side. Keith’s fancy broadsword bounced off his shield with a loud clang, and Lance was knocked off balance, tumbling down onto his back.

Keith hovered a few feet away. “You okay?” he asked, and Lance hated the concern he could hear in the other boy’s voice. He didn’t want pity. Not from Keith. He slowly rose to his feet, feeling the bruises already begin to form on his tailbone. “I’m fine.” The words came out a harsher than Lance was wanting, and Keith stiffened.

“I was hoping for more of a fight.” Keith’s voice was even, but there was a hint of malice in his tone that would have normally worried Lance, had he not been battling with his own demons. As it was there was a growling jealousy towards the other boy that had Lance looking for trouble, and that coupled with his previous feelings of fondness towards the mullet head had his mind running in circles.

“Didn’t I just kick your ass in archery?” Keith shrugged, the concern that had been there just moments before eradicated. “Maybe. How’s yours feeling by the way?”

Lance would have been impressed with Keith’s trash talking had it not been at his expense. As it was, everyone from camp was watching them fight, and he had just been knocked down within five minutes. Not really the best impression to make, especially with Keith being the new guy. Time to think like a child of Aphrodite.

“Why? You worried about it?” He swayed his hips purposefully, and Keith’s faced flushed, much to Lance’s pleasure. Riling up a child of Ares wasn’t the ideal plan, but it seemed to be working for
the most part. Lance just had to keep talking as he sought out a weak point. Maybe he could also do a little digging while he was at it.

“I don’t blame you. It is a nice ass.” Lance lowered his voice so only Keith would hear him. “Not as nice as say, Allura’s, but a close second.”

“What?” Keith looked perplexed, and it was difficult to tell if his cheeks were red from underneath the helmet, not to mention the robot lion decorating his face. Lance used the opportunity to attack again, lunging forward as he swung out at Keith. Had his opponent not been some superhuman freak of nature, the strike would have landed. But as it was, Keith jumped to the side, falling into a side-roll as he dodged. His own helm came off, and the sight nearly knocked the breath out of Lance’s lungs.

It wasn’t fair. How can someone look so amazing while fighting! No wonder Allura had taken a liking to him...
The thought only added to the icy feeling that was settling in his gut. If only he hadn’t disobeyed Allura. If only he hadn’t rushed out in that clearing, to face off giants of all things.
If only he hadn’t saved-

No.
Lance shook his head slightly, trying desperately to shake the intrusive thoughts. He didn’t regret his actions. And he hated himself for even thinking about not saving the two brothers.
But jealousy was a devious thing, and it had its’ claws embedded deep within Lance, prying out insecurities that had been buried deep down.

He advanced on Keith, who was getting up from his roll. Upon seeing Lance, he rotated with exceptional speed, his foot catching the back of Lance’s knees and sweeping out his legs. Lance was knocked on his rear again, and Keith stood over him menacingly, both swords pointing ominously down over his chest.

“That’s a dirty trick, but it’s not working too well for you. You know, I was expecting a bit more from the guy who apparently fought giants.”
The audience chuckled, which made Lance’s cheeks burn in embarrassment. He knew it was just a jest, a counter to Lance’s own taunts, but the words resonated around inside him.
He performed a back-roll, getting up on his feet in a fluid motion. If Keith wanted to bring up the giants, Lance would not hold back.

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“Says the guy who got knocked out by them.”
Keith was quick to retort, his own voice rising with anger.
“I wouldn’t brag. You were knocked out worse than me.”
“Yeah, after saving you. And last time I checked three giants was more than two.”
“I killed two! And from what I’ve heard, you didn’t even kill one! You just danced around uselessly until help came!”

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The crowd had gone silent, all attention on the argument in the ring. Lance didn’t care. His mind was whirling. How dare Keith downplay his actions.
But try as he might, Lance couldn’t ignore the truth of the words. He hadn’t defeated those giants.
He had barely done anything, and people were calling him a hero for it.
But Keith had just called him out, and even if he didn’t know the full story, about his Charmspeak and whatnot, it didn’t matter.
Because what Keith had said was true; Lance had been utterly useless against the giants. It was something that had plagued the back of his mind for a while, but he had been ignoring it with all the other things that had happened in the past few days. Hearing his own thoughts voiced by someone else was alarming.
It made him vulnerable.

He wasn’t about to give Keith the satisfaction of knowing that though, and the stubborn side of Lance kicked in as he continued to argue.

“Yeah, maybe I didn’t defeat those giants. But at least none of my friends were hurt in the process. You couldn’t even protect your own brother.”

Lance knew as soon as he spoke the words that he had made a mistake. Keith’s breathing grew ragged; his brows lowered and his mouth a thin line as he glared back at Lance. There was something flickering in his eyes, as if he was fighting to keep himself steady, and Lance was almost feeling like he should apologize, when Keith spoke in a hushed tone.

“At least my brothers’ wounds will heal. You’ll always be marred.”

Lance’s breath hitched in his throat, his hand shooting up self-consciously to the scar on his head, and he heard Hunk inhale sharply from across the ring.

And then Keith was attacking again, knocking the sword from Lance’s hand as he was distracted, leaving him with only his shield for protection.

It was all Lance could do to keep within the ring boundary, as well as not get beheaded by Keith’s double blades, and Coran’s voice was loud and commanding as he spoke up.

“Alright, Keith maybe allow Lance to retrieve his weapon, or else let up a bit so he can retreat from the ring.”

But Keith wasn’t listening. A red glow was starting to form around him as he continued to pummel Lance’s shield.

Each blow was like punching a rock wall, the vibrations jarring the bones in his arms and shoulder, but Lance held tight. At one point he was able to get his shield up in such a way that one of Keith’s swords, not the fancy one, was thrown from his grasp.

He hadn’t relented though, as Lance had been hoping, instead using the lighter weight of only one weapon to increase his already terrifying speed.

The red glow was rapidly becoming brighter, and people around the outside of the ring were beginning to notice. Lance heard Shiro call out at one point, followed by several other voices shortly after, but he didn’t hear what they said. It was taking everything he had to keep Keith from obliterating him.

And then it happened.

Lance’s shield broke. Somehow Keith’s broadsword, the one Allura had given him, had cleaved his only defense in two. A loud gasp went up from the crowd, and Lance jumped back, using the force of throwing the broken shield at Keith to propel himself away.

It wasn’t enough though, and Keith took the legs out from under him, again.

He was moving his sword in a wide arc, over his head, ready to bring it down with all his might. And Lance was sure he was going to die.

Time seemed to slow. Lance became hyperaware of everything around him; the crowd, which was now moving forward to try and stop the fight, the way the sun glinted off the angry coloured steel of Keith’s sword. And Keith himself, who wore an expression of pure loathing; his expression dark and menacing, and his skin glowing red as he glared down at the child of Aphrodite.

As much as he wanted to look away, Lance found himself drawn in by Keith’s eyes. Where he had been anticipating blind hatred, he instead saw rage, pain, confusion, and even something like grief, all perfectly displayed in the stunning indigo orbs that were Keith’s eyes.

Why was he so hard to read?
Though he knew he probably deserved it, Lance couldn’t allow himself to die without first figuring out the boy with the lion on his cheek.

He opened his mouth, and a single word escaped.

And then, mere inches from his chest, the sword halted. Lance watched as Keith’s face slowly changed; his expression going from utter rage to confusion. He didn’t say anything, and his eyes slowly met Lance’s. They were lighter now, still flickering with various emotions, and the red glow on his skin was slowly ebbing away. Lance waited for something to happen; a word to be spoken, a muscle to move...but there was nothing.
And he realized what it was he had said.

Stop.

Lance had inadvertently used his gift of Charmspeak on Keith, who was now frozen in a stance that had been ready to kill him mere seconds prior. But as Lance looked around, he realized that Keith hadn’t been the only one affected.

All around him, people were still; unmoving.

Stopped.

It was eerie, and Lance felt his vision grow blurry at the sight of his fellow campers all staring down at him in their suspended states.

He saw Allura, who wore a look of dread on her face. Shiro was beside her, mid stride, his own face terrified by his new condition.

And then his gaze wandered back up to Keith, who was staring down at him with wide glassy eyes; confusion, grief and guilt written all over his face. What had happened? What had he done? Why had he willingly hurt Keith? Out of jealously?! Since when was he that petty! Since when was he such a jerk.

Lance felt the ground begin to spin, and whilst maintaining eye-contact with the raven-haired boy, he smiled softly. Apologetically.

A plea for forgiveness, which was selfish he knew, but something he now yearned for.
Gravity seemed to be pulling him down into the underworld; his limbs heavy and numb...

And then the world went dark.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to start out by apologizing for the long wait on this one.
I had lost motivation with this fic, but some of you were kind enough to send me support and I just really want to thank you guys for that (especially you triwizard-tardis) :)

I'm not a huge fan of this chapter, and some parts of it are really rough and rushed, but I wanted to get it over with so I could work on the next part, which will hopefully
come sooner and tie up more loose ends.
As always, feedback is welcomed and encouraged :)

I also have some art on my Tumblr
Here
Here
Here

(also don't worry, I don't ship Keith and Allura, I just wanted to incorporate some of Lance's insecurities into this chapter. This is still a klance fic, and I'll eventually get to more of their relationship.)
Allura sent up a silent prayer to her godly mother, asking for the day to go by uneventfully.

Athena didn’t seem to hear.

But when had the gods ever listened?

This chapter kind of overlaps with the previous one, just with Allura's point of view. It explains a bit of what happened in the last chapter as well, mainly the whole "are Keith and Allura a thing?" that was plaguing Lance, and Keith's little rampage.

Enjoy :)

The last thing Allura needed was to oversee the Godly games. Making sure her campers didn’t end up dead or injured as they battled it out was just another item to add to her already long list, but as camp leader, she felt obligated to show up.

Not like she actually had to be there, but Coran was stubborn, and he had made a few valid points. Like the fact her entire cabin would be there, fighting in the name of Athena, and she had to support that. Allura had countered with, as camp leader, she had no bias when it came to who won or lost, but Coran was relentless.

He had been adamant about her taking some time to relax after the events of the past few days, and seeing Coran worry about her only made her feel guilty, so Allura had reluctantly agreed. Nothing like watching demigod children try and obliterate each other for the sake of glory and honour to unwind.

But now that she was here, Allura found herself almost enjoying the activities. Sure, she had a number of other things on her mind, like the many projects she had underway, as well as the ongoing investigation into the giant attack, but as the day progressed, her ever-present headache was slowly ebbing away.

Maybe Coran had been right. Besides, this would also give her the opportunity to see how their newest camper fought.

Allura had been impressed with the feats of the two brothers, and from what Shiro had told her, Keith had been the one to deal the most damage to the giants during the first attack. So needless to say she was a bit eager to see how he handled his opponents in the ring. She didn’t
allow her hopes up though, knowing full well how children of Ares liked to fight. But still, taking down two giants was a big deal, pun intended.

Thinking back on it, Allura had been mildly disappointed when Ares had claimed the boy, knowing that her own cabin could have used another member, but Keith had an attitude problem as well as a temper, so having the God of War as a father made a lot of sense. There was also a small, very well hidden part of her that was relieved.

If Keith had been a son of Athena then Shiro, by extension, would have been as well, meaning they would all be related. Well, not technically, seeing as Shiro shared no blood with her personally, but the idea would remain. Needless to say Allura was content with the way things had turned out.

There was also the matter of Lance, who Allura had yet to properly converse with. She wondered how he was handling things, knowing full well that the wound on his head would have left a mark, and that Lance would have issues with that. But that wasn’t what concerned her. What Allura was worried about was Lance’s incredibly powerful, and seemingly uncontrollable gift of Charmspeak.

She had given him permission to use it under close supervision in an effort to gain more knowledge of the ability, but hadn’t had the opportunity to set up the sessions. The Godly games had come at a very inconvenient time, but she knew cancelling them would have caused a riot, and that was the last thing she needed right now.

So Lance would have to wait until after the event to start practicing. She just hoped he wouldn’t do something rash, but of course this was Lance she was talking about. Allura sent up a silent prayer to her godly mother, asking for the day to go by uneventfully.

Athena didn’t seem to hear.

But when had the gods ever listened?

Allura had been conversing with Shay about any updates on the project she had her working on when someone cleared their throat behind them. She hadn’t heard at first, and it wasn’t until Shay had made a pointed gesture with her head that Allura had turned to see who it was.

She came eye-level with a spectacular pair of pecks. They were attached to a muscled chest, complete with broad shoulders and sturdy neck. Her eyes made their way up, noticing the well-defined jaw line, the shy smile, the faint but still noticeable scar across the nose, and a shock of white bangs.

“Shiro!” her voice was a lot breathier than she expected, and she quickly averted her gaze. “You startled me.”

“Sorry...”

His face was slightly pink, and Allura thought maybe he had been running, but he didn’t look out of breath. He put a hand to the back of his neck nervously, and her mood dropped slightly. She was used to people acting this way around her; anxious, edgy...scared. It was normal by now, but something in her had been hoping that maybe Shiro would be an exception.

He must have noticed her change in demeanor, and quickly dropped his hand, standing up taller and looking altogether more stoic.

“I was looking for you actually.”

“Really?” Allura cringed at her reply, and the way her own voice sounded; high pitched and
unfamiliar. She cleared her throat, hoping Shiro hadn’t noticed, and added quickly: “Anything I can help you with?”

He smiled then, and Allura had to double check to make sure her feet were still firmly planted on the ground. She was glad her skin was darker, so that any trace of a blush would be difficult to see. How was a smile having this effect on her!?

“I wanted to ask you something.”
Anything, she thought, then reprimanded herself.
“What is it? I’m a bit busy...” she trailed off, not wanting to deter Shiro in any way, but also wanting her brain to quit focusing on his features, like his eyelashes, and get back to the tasks at hand.

Someone knocked into him from behind before he could answer, and he was pushed up against her for a brief moment. Allura held her breath, but not before noticing how nice he smelled. Like pine trees and lemons. Her mind, for the first time in a long while, went absolutely blank, her only thoughts on how tight his muscles felt against her hands, which had risen instinctively as he was pushed forward.

Shiro, thankfully, regrettably, stepped back a few paces, mumbling a few quick apologies as he did so. His faced was flushed, and Allura pretended to adjust her weapons belt to allow him to compose himself before continuing.

“I, um...was wondering if,” he was stammering, and Allura’s heart sped up unexpectedly as her mind whirled with possibilities. What was he wondering? Was it about her?

“If we could have our weapons back. Keith and I that is.” He finished.
Oh.
Allura blinked, processing his words, then shook her head slightly. Why was she acting this way? She was the head of the Athena cabin for crying out loud! She was the leader of this camp, not some love struck child of Aphrodite!
“Was that a no?” Shiro’s voice brought her out of her thoughts, and Allura realized he must have seen her shake her head, and assumed she was denying his request.
She mentally slapped herself.

“No! It wasn’t, sorry. I just have a lot on my mind.”
Shiro’s face brightened, the corners of his mouth lifting into a smile.
“Oh, okay, no problem.” He was silent for a moment, and then: “So...can you tell me where they are or...”

Allura realized she had been staring, and blinked a few more times to try and clear her mind. This was getting out of hand. She had never been affected in such a way by anyone, and it was disorientating.
And not at all like her.
What would Athena have to say about her drooling over some guy? Allura shuddered at the thought.

“Sorry, yes. Please follow me, I have them stored in the main cabin.” She turned abruptly, avoiding his eyes, and noticed Shay giving her a knowing look. The other girl made a point of looking between her and Shiro, then winked subtly before turning away from them, heading into the arena. Perfect. The last thing she needed was rumours about her liking the new guy. No matter how much truth they held.
Shay wouldn’t do that though. It just wasn’t in her nature. She was too wholesome; too good. Still, Allura would make a point of addressing the situation with her later on.
Shiro walked behind her as they made their way back to the main cabin, which had Allura wondering if her pace was too fast, or if he was too intimidated to walk with her...or if the armour she was wearing was doing her any favours. Her face burned at that last thought, and she slowed, turning to face him.

“You can walk beside me you know. I don’t bite.”
Shiro froze; his face going blank for a moment before flushing red.
“Oh-right. Yes...sorry.” He coughed awkwardly, and Allura felt a strong urge to giggle. Luckily she refrained.
Shiro fell into pace alongside her, and they continued on, the silence stretching on until finally Allura decided that uncomfortable small talk would have to suffice.

“So, how are the Ares children treating you?”
Shiro glanced down at her, then shrugged.
“They’re a good group. And Keith seems to be happy so that’s all that really matters.”
Allura quirked an eyebrow, noticing the fond expression he dawned whenever he spoke about his brother. But there was something else there too; something sadder, almost acrimonious.
“But?”
Shiro blinked, confused. “But what?”
“I’m a child of Athena Shiro. I know when there’s more to a story.” She wondered briefly if maybe she was prying too much; curiosity was a dangerous thing, but answers were something every child with Athena’s blood craved.
And Shiro was an interesting subject.

He was silent for a few moments, and Allura was about to apologize when he sighed heavily, staring down at the ground as he spoke.
“When my mom passed away, I vowed that I would protect Keith.” He paused, smiling to himself as he went on. “Not like that was anything new. I am his older brother. But when she died it was like the world had gotten darker; heavier. And suddenly I was bearing all the weight of it by myself.” He looked down at Allura, and her breath hitched as their eyes locked. The tenderness in his voice only added to the spell he seemed to have on her. “I never thought I could do it,” he went on. “It seemed like an impossible task, getting Keith here. We almost died so many times, but he kept fighting, so I kept fighting as well, and now we’re safe. Finally safe.”

There was a pause where she thought he would continue, but Shiro had fallen silent. Allura’s voice was a soft whisper, worried that if her words were spoken too harshly that the moment would break.
“So what’s the problem?”
Shiro stopped, and Allura chastised herself for being so blunt, but when he smiled down at her there was nothing unfriendly or guarded about it. Just bittersweet.

“I don’t belong here Allura. Keith does, with his other brothers and sisters, where he’ll be safe. But I don’t.”
Allura, for once in her life, didn’t have a reply. She stared up at the man in front her; tall, sturdy and imposing, and felt the strongest desire to wrap him in a hug. To protect him. But she didn’t; couldn’t, knowing that Shiro was not looking for her pity, and would probably not want a hug from her anyways. So instead she did what she knew best, and analyzed the situation.

“It’s true that you aren’t a demigod. This camp is not meant for humans.”
Shiro’s face fell, as if he had been hoping for a different reply, and Allura continued, struggling to remain unfazed. “However, you have been welcomed here, not only by the other campers, but by myself. It was I who invited you in, remember?”
Shiro nodded, resigned.

“You only did that because I was unconscious. You had no choice.”

“Incorrect.” Shiro’s head snapped up at that, and Allura leaned in, dropping her voice to barely a whisper. “Do not overestimate my merit Shiro. Had I deemed you a threat, I would have left you behind.”

Shiro’s eyes were wide with shock as Allura stepped back, his mouth hanging open slightly as he gaped down at her.

“I-uh..”

Allura couldn’t hold it, and broke out laughing. Shiro’s horror quickly turned to confusion, his cheeks flushing pink as she smiled up at him.

“I’m teasing Shiro.”

“Oh..right of course..” Allura wasn’t one for teasing, but she liked the way he grew flustered so easily. She stored that bit of information away in the back of her mind.

“But I mean it. You are welcome at this camp, now and in the future, should you decide to leave. As for belonging, that’s up for you to decide. Keith would want you to stay,” she glanced down at the ground, suddenly embarrassed at the smile Shiro was giving her, “and I’m sure others would feel the same.”

“Others?” he asked coyly, “such as?”

Allura looked up, and regretted it immediately. Shiro was sporting a lopsided grin, his arms crossed over his chest as he watched her with one eyebrow raised. It was altogether too much to handle, and she quickly averted her gaze as she cleared her throat.

“Others like Coran!”

“Really? Coran would want me to stay?” His voice was low and teasing, and it took everything in her power to prevent herself from confessing all of her deepest secrets.

“Yes, Coran. He’s told me that you would make a fine addition to the camp, seeing as you don’t possess the same odour demigods do that attracts monsters. You could help organize missions and the like.” She was rambling now, and lying to be completely honest. Coran hadn’t been the one to mention any of those things. Allura had really only thought of them now, on the spot. She thanked her quick wit, hoping that Shiro would be convinced.

He hummed to himself; his eyes watching her, but there was no way Allura was going to risk a glance in his direction again. Not yet anyways.

“Well, you can tell Coran,” he emphasized the name, as if hinting that he knew Allura wasn’t being completely truthful, “that I appreciate his offer...”

She couldn’t help herself, turning to face him as he trailed off.

“And?”

He smirked, and she felt herself blush once again. Damn this guy. Damn him straight to Hades!

“And that I graciously accept. Remind me to thank him in person later.”

Allura gulped at the idea, but was too overjoyed to worry much. She hadn’t wanted Shiro to leave, and he looked to be in a much better mood now that the situation had been addressed. And, from a logical standpoint, it made sense for him to stay here. It was true that Shiro was fully human, and that monsters wouldn’t actively hunt him down should he leave the borders. Plus he possessed the Sight, which allowed him to see through the mist.

All-in-all, Shiro was a valuable asset to her camp, and her mind was already whirling with possible tasks she could have him do.
But that could wait. For the moment she allowed herself this small victory, and reveled in the idea of having him around for a bit longer.

Allura was pulled out her thoughts at the sound of his voice.
“I do, however, have one small request.”
She nodded.
“And what would that be?”
“The Ares cabin is great, and I really appreciate them letting me stay there, but if this is to be a long term thing...Is it possible to have a bunk that’s not surrounded by weapons and armour? I feel like I’m going to be impaled in my sleep.”
Allura chuckled, which made Shiro’s smile widen angelically.

“And what’s wrong with that?” She asked as she composed herself.
“Oh, well, as much as I love the thought of waking up a human pincushion, I personally think I would look better without the added bling.”
Allura was chuckling again, and the two of them continued on their way to the main cabin.

“I’ll see what I can do. But for me, personally,” she emphasized the word in an attempt to keep the playful banter going, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having a little bling. I like shiny things.” She didn’t know why she added that last bit, and shut her mouth promptly, hoping that Shiro maybe hadn’t heard the strange confession. When she turned to look however, his eyes were downcast; a small smile on his lips adding to an overall bittersweet expression. Allura paused.

“What is it?”
Shiro’s eyes darted over her face as if searching for something, then dropped to his right arm. Allura followed his gaze, trailing down the sleeve of his sweater before coming to a sudden halt at the wrist. It was then that she noticed the odd texture of the skin there; the way it folded too smoothly at each crease, and how the colour was just a bit too fair to match Shiro’s complexion.

It was fake.
Allura dropped her eyebrows in confusion, reaching out to take a hold of it in two hands. She heard Shiro’s sharp intake of breath, and felt a pang of guilt for not asking his permission first, but the Athena blood that ran through her veins was too powerful. She needed to know.

The texture of the prosthetic was cool to the touch, and her fingers ran smoothly over the skin-like material. She could feel the metal beneath, and turned it over in her hands to examine it further. Shiro was still; holding his breath as she brought the hand up to her face. It was only when she made to move his sweater sleeve up that he spoke.

“Allura...”
She froze for a moment, then clued in to how rude she was being. She dropped his hand, feeling the blood rush into her cheeks as she took a few steps backwards.
“I-I’m sorry,” she managed to get out, the shame of her actions making her wish she could crawl into the soil beneath them and decompose. She didn’t dare look him in the eyes, the awkwardness of the situation settling over them like a wet blanket.

“I shouldn’t have done that, I’m sorry-” she heard him take a few steps forward, and finally lifted her eyes to his face. Shiro was smiling softly; no sign of contempt in his expression, like she had been anticipating. He held his arm out in front of him, and slowly peeled back the sleeve, revealing a complex of metal and wires that she longed to understand; to touch.

“What are you-” she started, but Shiro shook his head.
“I don’t mind. I just get self-conscious sometimes. It’s not the nicest thing to look at.”
It was Allura’s turn to shake her head, and she took the hand in both of hers again, folding her fingers around the prosthetic and staring up into his eyes. “I disagree. I think it’s wonderful. Plus,” she smiled, “it’s shiny.” Shiro blushed, his eyes going wide, and Allura bit the inside of her mouth in an effort to keep herself from kissing his gorgeous face.

She turned her attention back to the hand, examining the newly exposed section.

“How far up does it go?” She glanced up at Shiro again, who pointed with his other hand to the area just above his right elbow. “It happened a few years ago. My mom and I were—” He broke off, and Allura watched him take a few deep breaths, as if to steady himself.

“Shiro, you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to.” He looked back down at her, smiling slightly as he did.

“No, it’s okay. I feel...safe, around you.” He grinned sheepishly, his ears turning pink as his eyes bore into her.

Allura was once again grateful for her darker skin tone, which was hopefully hiding the ferocious blush in her cheeks.

“Besides,” he continued, “it’s kind of an impressive story.” Allura giggled, startling herself with the noise, and sent up a silent prayer to the gods that no one else had heard. Children of Athena did not giggle.

But she could make an exception for Shiro.

“Well in that case, do tell.” She realized she was still holding his hand, and released it, much to Shiro’s disappointment, and motioned for them to keep walking. She fell into step beside him as he went on with his story.

“Well, my mom and I use to make nightly rounds in our car, following any routes Keith may have taken that day. The idea was to confuse his scent with our own, and take down any monsters we came across that looked like might cause trouble.”

Allura nodded as he spoke. The idea was sound enough, but in reality a demigod’s scent was strong, and two humans in a vehicle would do little to cover it up. She didn’t dare mention that though, sensing where the story was heading.

“It was before I had my license, and my mom had just come off a long shift at work. She was driving, and it was late. Looking back on it I should have made more of a fuss over the whole situation, but I was younger, and the week had been pretty quiet. I wasn’t expecting to run into a minotaur.” Allura inhaled sharply, but Shiro didn’t notice.

“My mom wasn’t either, but run into one we did. Literally. The thing jumped out at us on a back road, and she swerved to avoid it, sending our car down a steep ravine.”

“Oh my gods...Shiro...” He turned to look at her, and seeing the look of horror on her face, quickly amended. “We were fine! Really. I mean, my mom was knocked out, and we both had a few nasty gashes, but it could have been much worse. I managed to crawl out of the vehicle, and was in the process of getting my mom out, when the minotaur attacked.”

“What happened then?” Allura realized they had stopped again, and were now standing outside the main cabin. She didn’t make a move to go in though, too engrossed in Shiro’s story to contemplate the idea. He rubbed the back of his neck with a pained expression, as if remembering an old wound.
“Well, long story short, I was able to fend it off for a while. My arm...” he flexed the prosthetic fingers and frowned. “The minotaur really did a number on it at one point, pinning it to the vehicle with its horns as it charged. I nearly blacked out from the pain.”

Allura put a hand on his arm, above the metal part so he would be able to feel it. His expression softened, and he smiled down at her appreciatively.

“When my mom came to she was able to kill it. Our car was totalled though, and the wait for the ambulance was long. When we finally got to the hospital they figured it would be easier, and less painful, to remove my arm altogether.”

Allura wasn’t sure what to say, so instead she took his hand and kissed the back of it, feeling the smooth material on her lips. Shiro watched her in surprise, before a shy smile broke out on his face. She thoroughly enjoyed the way his eyes lit up; his cheeks rosy and flushed.

He cleared his throat.

“It works well enough. I’m able to use my sword still, and no one really notices it if I wear a long sleeve shirt, but there are times when I really hate having it. The fingers can be stiff, and repairs are brutal.”

Allura’s eyes widened as an idea struck her. She beamed up at him.

“Do you want a new one?”

Shiro’s eyebrows rose questioningly.

“A new...what?”

“A new arm!” Allura lifted his hand up to his face, but his gaze remained focused on her. “The Hephaestus cabin could make you one! Pidge would be up for it I’m sure. And Hunk could help.”

Shiro’s mouth opened and closed a few times as he processed her words.

“A new...arm? Really?”

Allura nodded. “We have some very skilled engineers at this camp. And the technology is advanced, at least, much more advanced than this.” She motioned to his hand again. “We could make the joints more motile...maybe add a few modifications here...and here...” she trailed off, mind whirling with new designs. This was a project she would be eager to begin.

Shiro was watching her with a fond expression, and when she finally looked up, she nearly fainted as all the blood rushed into her face.

“I-that is if you want...um...” She cursed herself. Why was this boy, this magnificent man, having such an effect on her? And why could she no longer formulate proper sentences! Athena was going to kill her.

“That would amazing Allura. Thank you.” His words were soft and soothing, and she had to focus on keeping her feet firmly planted on the ground. She nodded, not trusting her voice enough to speak, and turned towards the main cabin.

She climbed the steps and opened the front door, trusting that Shiro had followed. She quickly retrieved the weapons from a cabinet in the back of the room, took a few deep breaths to calm herself, and returned just as he entered the cabin.

“You know,” she began, handing the two swords to Shiro, “these weapons are incredible. Especially this one.” She pointed to the broadsword in Shiro’s arms, the scabbard a deep violet embroidered with strange designs she didn’t recognize. Shiro fastened his own weapon to his hip, adjusting the belt rather smoothly considering he had the second weapon tucked under his arm. He examined it more closely once he was finished.

“This one was my mom’s.” He unsheathed it a few inches, displaying the odd hue of the metal. Allura had never seen such a weapon, the colours shifting fluidly in the dim light of the cabin,
reminding her a pool of water reflecting a sunset of deep purples and reds.

“She never spoke about it much, believe me I asked,” he added, seeing Allura’s questioning look, “but I always knew it was special. I think maybe Keith’s dad…” he trailed off, his face an unreadable mask. “I think Ares gave it to her.”

Allura’s face hardened. It wasn’t uncharacteristic for gods and goddesses to leave mementos to lovers, especially if they were left with children, but the blade Shiro now held was no common item. It was rare; valuable. Incredibly powerful, and incredibly dangerous.

“It’s a blade of Marmora.”

Shiro opened his mouth to ask what that was, but upon seeing the expression on Allura’s face, fell silent.

She had known that the sword was unusual, and that it held magic beyond her comprehension, but she had been avoiding the idea of it belonging to Ares.

It was implausible.

It was obscene!

And yet, there it was.

Shiro’s concern was beginning to show; his eyebrows furrowed in worry.

“There are legends, dating back to millennia ago, where the gods roamed this world freely, all-powerful and revered. There was also darkness; monsters and beasts beyond our imaginations capability.” The room seemed to grow colder as she spoke, and Shiro visibly shuddered at her words.

“One beast in particular, its name lost to the ages, had a rivalry with Ares unlike any other. The two were in a constant war, their battles oftentimes lasting years, if not centuries.”

“How is that possible?” Shiro interrupted, and Allura sighed.

“It was a different time. This world is a mystery, and science can only explain so much.”

She could tell her answer had done little to appease him, but it was the best she could offer. Some things were beyond human comprehension, and even with godly blood, demigods were no better off.

“Ares had no problem with his rival; welcoming the quarrels and oftentimes initiating them himself. But his rival took it too far, and killed a woman Ares had been smitten with at the time. Ares was furious, but the beast taunted, stating that Ares had plenty of lovers, and losing one was hardly worth his anger. It was half true…” She took a deep breath, trying to recall the specifics of the tale. “See, Ares was known to wander from woman to woman, but it was different with this one. She was a warrior; bold, relentless, fierce beyond words. Ares had been in love. And she had been carrying his child.”

She paused, letting Shiro absorb the information. He studied the blade in his hands, and understanding dawned on his face.

“Her name was Marmora, wasn’t it.”

Allura nodded.

“Ares was grief stricken, and went a bit insane for a while, killing at random and causing decades of war and strife on Earth. He fed off the anger, the violence, and from the blood of those killed he fashioned the first blade of Marmora. It’s not that one.” She added, seeing the way Shiro suddenly held the weapon away from himself in shock. She would have laughed under different circumstances.

“The blade was created in hate, and was fueled by anger, which Ares had in abundance. It magnified those emotions a hundred fold, and sent Ares into a blind rage. He sought out his rival,
and he obliterated them. You see, usually monsters respawn, but years passed. Decades, centuries, millennia. No one knows what happened to the beast; it simply vanished from existence, such was the power of the blade of Marmora.”

They were both silent for several moments, and then Shiro spoke.
“So, what happened?”
“Well,” Allura sighed, “the blade was destroyed. Zeus decided the weapon was too great a threat should it fall into the wrong hands, and feared what it would do to a God. Ares was less than impressed, as you can imagine, but managed to salvage a handful of shards before they were lost to the ages. From those he created lesser blades, their power diluted compared to the original, but still potent. It was said he would give them to warriors he deemed fit enough to carry them; his closest allies and friends. But those were just legends...until now.”

Shiro pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed heavily, a gesture Allura found endearing.
“So...you’re telling me that Keith, my baby brother, angsty hormonal teenager and son of the god of war, owns a sword made from anger? Literal hate?”
Allura yearned to comfort him, to tell him that no, this was just a pretty sword, and no, don’t worry about it at all.
But she couldn’t lie to him.

“There’s no way to be absolutely sure Shiro, but I have never seen a weapon like this. And if Ares gave it to your mother then...” she trailed off, and Shiro huffed. He smiled at her, but it didn’t hold the same warmth as before.

“Thanks for giving them back Allura. It means a lot.” She could hear the worry in his voice, despite him trying to cover it up, and struggled to comfort him.
“Listen Shiro. I’m sure it means nothing. The power these blades once held has long since dissipated. Any residual magic it once held is nothing to worry over. And Keith is strong.”

Shiro was hesitant for a moment, deliberating her words, then nodded firmly.
“You’re right. But I’m his older brother, it’s my job to worry. It’s my job to look out for him.”
Allura smiled.
“I know. It’s a very attractive quality.”

She hadn’t realized she had said it out loud until she noticed the blush creeping up Shiro’s neck; a shy smile on his face.
“I mean—that you care! It’s nice. That’s what I meant. Not attractive. Not that you aren’t, you are. I mean—” She bit her tongue, forcing herself to quit yammering, but Shiro was grinning now, and her she could feel her own face heating up.
Goddammit.

“We should head back to the arena.”
Shiro was still beaming, but didn’t tease, for which she was grateful.
Great. So he was attractive, caring, AND considerate?!
Athena help me, she prayed.

But when had the gods ever listened?

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They spent the walk back in easy conversation, focusing on topics that didn’t involve the blade. Allura even offered to carry it, saying she would personally like to give it back to Keith. In reality she just didn’t want Shiro having to hold it and worry, and when she had offered he had graciously accepted.

Cheers could be heard as they drew closer to the arena, the events having already started. “I wonder who is fighting first.” Allura pondered out loud, and Shiro tilted his head in question. “There are several different events that take place in the arena, but it would be easier to just show you instead of explain.”

“Does that mean you’ll watch them with me?” Shiro asked, his voice rising a little in hope. The corners of Allura’s mouth lifted into a small smile. She had been planning on watching the events anyways, but more as a safety measure than for entertainment. Still, Coran had said he wanted her to relax, and what better way to do that than with a cute boy?

“Well, as leader of this camp, I do get the best seats.” She added a teasing edge to her words, and side-eyed him. “Perfect. That’s the only reason I wanted to sit with you anyways.”

Allura froze, all teasing tones tossed aside, and stared up at him in shock. Shiro looked startled by her sudden reaction, his face changing from humorous to concerned in a matter of seconds. “That was a joke...” he said quickly, his hands raised in front of him as if in surrender.

Allura’s mouth dropped open in understanding, and she put her face in her hands in embarrassment. “Oh silly me. Of course.”

“I’m sorry,” Shiro began, but Allura beamed up at him, and he trailed off. “No really, I know better than that. I’m just not used to people actually wanting to spend time with me. Usually they only approach me with problems or concerns or ‘Allura the bathrooms aren’t working again’.” Shiro chuckled, which made her smile broaden. “I’m used to it of course; it’s part of being the leader of this camp. People come to me seeking answers, I provide them, and they leave. Such is life.”

She was being purposefully vague, but Shiro didn’t need to know how the tolls of leadership affected her. He didn’t need to know about how lonely it was sleeping in the main cabin by herself, how boring it was with only Coran to provide any form of conversation most days, or that she had even stooped so low as to talk to the mice that frequented the kitchens. But Shiro wasn’t easily fooled; his eyes saddened by what she had said.

“Well it’s a good thing I’m going to be around then. I can help you answer some of those questions, and though I’m not the best with godly stuff, I do know a thing or two about plumbing.” He winked, and Allura once again found herself floating; thanking whatever strange twists of fate that had brought this man to her.

She didn’t have a reply to his kind words, but felt that Shiro wasn’t seeking one anyways, so she settled for a soft smile. They made their way into the arena and found their seats, nearby to where Coran was actively commentating the current match. Allura recognized the fighters right away.

“Shiro! Keith is fighting, look!”

But his attention was already on the boy down in the ring, who was currently engaged in combat with Shay. Allura watched closely, following their movements with a trained eye. She was impressed that Keith appeared to be holding his own, especially against Shay, but was dumbfounded when he defeated her.
He had used a manner of fighting Allura had not yet seen from a child of Ares, reminding her of how her own cabin fought. Like he was thinking. Planning. She was almost jealous.

It wasn’t until the final moments of the battle that Allura really allowed herself to get caught up in the action. She usually preferred to keep unbiased when it came to cheering, but watching Keith pull off that final move and win the first round had her rooting for the children of the God of war. Besides, it would be a humbling experience for her own cabin-mates to lose so early on.

Shiro was beaming with pride, and rushed down ahead of her to congratulate his little brother on the fight. Allura hung back, briefly checking in with Coran before making her own way down to the ring where the Ares kids had congregated. She approached the two brothers, and seeing the grin on Keith’s face as he spoke with Shiro made her heart fill with joy. She was so excited about their newest recruit, and ached to know how he had learned to fight like that. She found herself hugging him, too enthused to care who saw, and noticed the gleam in Shiro’s eyes as he beamed down at them.

“Keith that was amazing!” she turned to Shiro, the grin on her face beginning to hurt her cheeks. “Can you fight like that as well? Why didn’t you tell me you boys were so highly trained?!” Both Shiro and Keith’s cheeks reddened, and Allura laughed. Becoming easily flustered must be a family trait.

She remembered Keith’s sword, which was slung across her back, and spoke before the other two could reply. “Oh Keith, I have something for you.” She handed him the weapon, and Keith’s eyes lit up. “My sword! Finally!”

Shiro cleared his throat, and Keith frowned. “What. She’s been hoarding it for days!”

“Keith!”

But Allura was chuckling again, which gained her several strange glances from the crowd around them. “It’s fine Shiro,” she said, placing a hand on his arm reassuringly. Keith noticed, and he smirked wickedly at Shiro. She turned to him, choosing to ignore the look he was giving his brother. “I apologize for keeping your weapon from you for so long. I hope you understand that it was nothing personal, and merely protocol.” Keith grunted in reply, but amended when Shiro nudged his side with a disapproving scowl. “Thanks. For giving it back I mean.” He turned back to his older sibling and muttered under his breath: “There, happy now?”

Shiro beamed, before pulling his younger brother into a headlock and ruffling his mane of black hair. “Ack! Shiro stop!” Keith managed to get away by shoving at Shiro’s side, who gasped suddenly and wrapped his arms around his mid-section. Allura’s face dropped at the sudden response, but it was Keith who reacted first. “I forgot I’m sorry!” Shiro took a few steadying breaths before answering his little brother with a strained smile.
“It’s ok, I’m ok.” He dropped one hand and patted Keith’s shoulder reassuringly. “It was my own fault anyways.” Allura was only momentarily confused before recalling Shiro’s own injuries from the giant attack. It was unfortunate that ambrosia wouldn’t work on humans, and seeing Shiro in pain did things to her insides that had her wishing she could re-kill the monsters who had damaged him.

Despite his words, Keith looked unconvinced.

“Shiro you should be resting. What if you get pushed or something down here!” He turned to Allura, eyes intense. “Promise me you’ll watch out for him. He’s stubborn and stupid when it comes to taking care of himself.”

“Oh, like you’re one to talk.” Shiro scoffed, but Keith ignored him.

“He’ll pretend he’s fine and then push himself too hard and end up even worse than before.”

“I’m right here you know!”

Keith finally acknowledged him.

“It’s true. Mom and I used to talk about it all the time.”

Shiro’s face fell, all humor gone.

“Nope?” his voice was low, and Keith smiled softly in reply.

“Yeah. I asked a few times why you were always coming home injured and sore, and she would say that you had been pushing yourself too hard again at practice.” He trailed off, staring at the ground. “Though, I guess she had been lying about that part. I know now that you were off fighting monsters. Protecting me...”

“Keith-” Shiro started, but Keith cut him off with another smile, though Allura thought it seemed forced.

“It’s okay. Just, take it easy for a bit alright?” He turned back to Allura, who had felt like she was imposing on a brotherly bonding moment and hadn’t been sure if she should leave or not. “Make sure he does.”

The demand in his voice sent an unprecedented chill up her spine, but she nodded nonetheless.

“No of course.”

Coran’s voice rang out loudly across the arena, making them all jump. He was explaining the next event, which Allura was already tuning out, eager to just sit down beside Shiro after witnessing the tender moment and offer him comfort. It wasn’t until Coran announced who would be fighting that her mind snapped back to reality.

Oh no.

Her eyes sought him out from across the ring, and she noticed the look of apprehension that crossed the child of Aphrodite’s face as he processed Coran’s words. She saw his gaze pass briefly to Keith before snapping to her own.

She had been expecting the natural good-humour that Lance so easily wore to be expressed in a lopsided grin on his face, but instead was met with something similar to resignation...or maybe dejection? It was entirely uncharacteristic of Lance.

She held his gaze, her face blank as possible outcomes and scenarios sprang up in her mind. Would he have enough control not to use his charmspeak? And what about Keith? She knew for a fact that he was more experienced at this sort of fighting than Lance, especially with Lance having only woken up from his mini coma recently.
What was going to happen?

She turned back towards Shiro and Keith, who were exchanging a few words before Keith stepped onto the ring. Shiro looked apprehensive, and she knew better than to distract him with the idea of returning to their original seats. Besides, it would be easier for her to watch over the match so close to the ring, especially if Lance decided to do anything rash.

And it was a good thing she did.

About three minutes into the fight Allura was thanking her decision to stay put. The two boys were tense, and though she couldn’t hear what it was they were saying, she knew it couldn’t be good. Keith was growing more and more agitated, and Lance wasn’t relenting with the taunts she knew he was making.

She jerked when Lance fell, and after the second time she was beginning to worry. She knew Keith was a decent fighter, and that he was going relatively easy on Lance, but at one point his entire demeanor changed. His comment about the giants had earned a chuckle from the audience, but Allura knew how sensitive Lance could get with those things, and, though he hid it well, he hated being the butt of a joke.

Things only got worse from there.

Keith was no longer holding back, even after Lance lost his weapon. He ignored Coran’s advice as he continued to attack, pushing Lance back until he was at the edge of the ring. When he fell again, Allura was positive that Keith would let up, like he had with Shay, but then she noticed the red glow begin to surround Keith, and heard the sharp inhale from Shiro beside her.

“Oh no...it’s happening again...” He whispered; eyes wide as he took in the scene. Allura wasn’t sure what he meant by that, but knew that Keith was showing no signs of relenting. Even when he drew back his sword, the blade of Marmora seemingly on fire as it reacted and amplified its’ owners anger. She should have known.

She shouldn’t have given it back, knowing what it was; where it had come from. What it could do.

She began to run forward, Shiro right beside her, in hopes that she could stop Keith in time. And then an eerily familiar feeling began to tingle her skin; crawling deep into her bones and cementing them in place.

Lance.

She hadn’t heard what he had said, but knew from past experience what was going on. She was under the power of charmspeak.

Panic seized her, but there was absolutely nothing she could do. Her body just wouldn’t move. Her eyes settled on Lance, who was staring up at Keith in wonder, as if he wasn’t entirely sure why he had stopped his attack.

This was all her fault. She shouldn’t have given that blade back to Keith. She shouldn’t have let Lance compete. She shouldn’t have been with Shiro, distracted and foolish, when she had an entire camp to look after.

And now they were all frozen in place, trapped by Lance’s words.

Again.

Lance was looking at her now, his eyes rimmed with exhaustion, before passing to Shiro and then back up at Keith. She wasn’t entirely sure how Charmspeak worked, but knew that it was draining his strength, and fast. But if he passed out then the spell would break.
She would have approximately two and a half seconds to cross the ring and prevent Keith from impaling the son of Aphrodite.

Lance was smiling up at his attacker now, which Allura would have found odd if not a bit endearing had the circumstances been different. As it was, the moment Lance’s eyes slid shut, she was fighting against the hold Charmspeak had over her. Everything moved as if in slow motion. Her muscles pulsed under the strain, and even the thought of moving her leg forward was physically taxing.

And then all at once the spell broke, and she saw the arc of Keith’s sword begin its decent down. There was a flurry of motion beside her as Shiro barreled past, tumbling into Keith’s side with such force that the two went flying across the ring.

She was at Lance’s side in a matter of seconds, the commotion of the campers around her rising and filling her ears as they began to panic. Coran’s voice rang out, loud and demanding.

“Everyone settle down. Please remain in your seats. Keep calm.”
Allura tuned him out.
She tuned everyone out.

She checked Lance’s vitals, ensuring that he was still breathing, and sat by his side as her mind whirled. It had been too close...and it was her fault. Again.

She didn’t know when Hunk had gotten there, checking over his friend before lifting him in his strong arms and carrying him away. Pidge and the others were following behind, worry etched on their faces as they regarded their teammate.

She watched as the other campers stopped to stare, giving the group a wide berth as they made their way out of the arena. She sensed their alarm; their fear. They were scared of Lance, and what he could do. And Allura would be lying if she said she wasn’t feeling the same thing.

She stood and approached Shiro, who still had Keith pinned to the ground.

“-don’t know what happened! Is he ok?! Shiro please you have to believe me!” Keith’s eyes were wide with panic, but he didn’t struggle in his brothers’ grasp.

“Shiro,” Allura said quietly as she came up behind him. He didn’t look at her, instead keeping his gaze on Keith, who looked up at her with wild eyes.

“Allura please I didn’t mean it. I lost control...I couldn’t think properly-”

“Keith.” Shiro’s stern voice pierced through the air, and Keith fell silent. “Just stop.”

Keith looked on the verge of tears, and Allura crouched beside Shiro, placing a hand on his arm to let him know she was there.

“Shiro, you can release him.” Shiro eyed her then, opening his mouth as if to argue, but Allura was unyielding. “Shiro. It wasn’t his fault.”

“But-”
“No. It’s the blade.” She reached over to where Keith had dropped his weapon after Shiro had collided with him, and picked it up, eyeing it warily.
“I was wrong.” She said, locking eyes with Shiro, who looked startled, then alarmed, and finally guilty. He released Keith, who immediately sat up and turned to her.

“Allura I didn’t mean to hurt Lance. I need to know if he’s ok. Please...” Allura sighed, breaking their eye contact to stare down at the sword in her hands.

“It wasn’t your fault Keith. This weapon...it feeds off anger, and hate.”
“But I don’t hate him! I didn’t-”
She cut him off.

“I know that. And Shiro will explain it later.” She felt Shiro’s eyes on her as she spoke, but didn’t dare look over, knowing what sort of expression he would be wearing.

Anger.
Fear.
Betrayal.

This was her fault, and Shiro would know that. She had told him the blade was fine, knowing full well that it may not be. She had gone against her better judgement to what...impress him? And look where it had gotten her.

But self-pity had never been something Allura condoned, so she donned her leaders’ face and stood, keeping the blade of Marmora at her side.

“Allura, please take Keith away from here. I have to settle the camp down before I do anything else.”
Shiro stood as well, but she turned away to avoid his gaze.

“Allura I can help-”
The plea in his voice made her hesitate for just a moment, and she was tempted to accept his offer, but she had done enough damage already. She had been selfish, and it had resulted in this.

“Shiro...please, do as I ask.” She could hear the resignation in her own voice, and knew that Shiro was staring at her. But he didn’t say anything, and after a moment, grabbed Keith by the arm and led him out of the arena.

She turned just as they were exiting; catching Shiro’s eye seconds before he was out of view. She wasn’t sure what she had seen there, and hoped that it hadn’t been loathing. Not like she deserved anything less. It was her fault his brother had nearly killed another camper.
She wasn’t expecting forgiveness anytime soon.

Allura heaved a deep sigh, before turning to face the crowd.

It was time to do her job.

It was time be a leader.

Chapter End Notes

Hi again!

Hope you guys liked the Shallura...figured I better start developing that one since I
have it tagged in the fic. I actually really like their dynamic. Also hoping for more Klance in the next chapter, now that I pretty much have everything explained.

I hope you all liked my interpretation of the Blade of Marmora. I wanted to incorporate that bit of Voltron into this fic, especially with it impacting Keith so much.

Did you all notice that I totally forgot to mention Shiro's arm this whole fic? That was not on purpose. I literally forgot about his arm. Shame on me. (dishonor on me, dishonor on my family, dishonor on my cow!) Plez forgive me!

As always, leave comments, recommendations, and/or critiques. I'm open to all :)
Nightmare, memory, or dream come true?

Chapter Summary

“Keith, buddy,” he raised one eyebrow as he looked from the article of clothing to Keith and back again. “What is this.”

Keith frowned.

“It’s my jacket. I literally just told you that.”

Lance turned it around a few times theatrically, in case Keith wasn’t seeing the same thing he was.

“This is a crop top with sleeves.”

Chapter Notes

Some Klance finally?

I think YES

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Lance!”
A voice called to him from somewhere in the distance, deep and decidedly male. The ground he stood on was warm and welcoming, and Lance felt no desire to acknowledge whoever it was that was calling his name.

“Lance where are you?”

There was more urgency in the words this time, but when he finally turned to see who it was speaking, the ground shifted, pulling him down.

Swallowing him whole.

It was then he realized he was standing on a beach, the sand swarming around his toes and growing hotter by the second.

He forced his feet to move, sluggish and heavy as they were, towards the sound of the voice.

“Lance!”

He knew this voice. He felt the love in it. The concern.

The fear.

“Papa!”

His own voice was much younger than he was expecting, and when he looked down he noticed his childish features: the short stubby legs, clad in bright blue rubber boots; meaty fingers clasping a bucket in one hand and a fistful of sand in the other.

“Lance get away from the water!”
The warning echoed around in his head, but instead of heed the advice, he turned to look out at the expanse of ocean that now stood before him. A section of seafloor had been freshly revealed, the sand still damp from the receding waves.

He had always loved the ocean.

“Lance run!”

It wasn’t until the sky grew dark that he realized what it was he should be running from. A massive wave was building; the crest arching threateningly towards him in a thunder of white foam.

Lance couldn’t scream, and his feet wouldn’t move.

He looked down, noticing how they were encased in sand. It was piling around his legs like the castles he had been building mere moments before.

“LANCE!”

The voice screamed, and then there was only water. Loud, rushing, cold, endless water.

Everything went dark, and his eyes opened slowly, expecting to be wet.

But he wasn’t, and as he looked around small white dots began to form in the space above his head.

“And that one there is the Dolphin.”

He was laying on his back, and turned his head to see who it was that had spoken.

But part of him already knew.

“What’s the story behind that one papa?”

“Well Lance, Poseidon wished to marry a beautiful woman, and so he sent a dolphin to convince her to be his bride. She eventually said yes, and Poseidon gave the dolphin a place in the sky as a reward.”

“That’s dumb!”

The third voice was feminine; bossy and loud and Lance loved hearing it. He sat up, looking past the figure of his father to glare down at his sister.

“It’s romantic!” he argued.

“Nuh-uh. If he really liked her he wouldn’t have sent a dumb fish to tell her.”

“Dolphins aren’t fish Pragma! Duh!”

“Still dumb. And gross.”

Their father chuckled.

“Alright you two that’s enough. Let’s just enjoy the stars.”

Lance settled the argument with his sister by sticking out his tongue; a gesture she mimicked right back at him.

“I still think it’s romantic. But was she really that pretty? Was she prettier than mom?”

Lance’s father smiled. His eyes holding a great deal of fondness as he replied.

“No, my dear boy. No one was prettier than your mom.”

“Do I look like her?” his sister asked, and their father chuckled.

“My beautiful Pragma, you are the only woman more beautiful than your mother in my eyes.”

She smiled at that, but Lance was frowning.

“Am I beautiful too papa?”

Their father laughed heartily, the sound filling the night sky with warmth.

“My beautiful babies, my darlings, there is nothing more precious on Earth to me than you two. But remember that looks aren’t everything. Beauty is on the inside. It’s not what people see, it’s
what you show them. So yes. You are both beautiful, inside and out. And you will brighten the world by showing it your beauty.”

Lance was silent for a moment.
“But am I as beautiful as Pragma?”
His sister spoke up.
“We’re twins you dummy. If papa says I’m pretty then that means you are to.”
Lance grinned, before laying back down to resume watching the stars.

Except the stars were gone. And he was running. His father and sister were at his side, holding his hands as they barreled toward something. Or was it away from something?
It was too dark to tell, and the ground was rough beneath his feet.
Branches smacked against the side of his face, bringing tears to his eyes, but he dared not stop.
His father was tugging on his arm; hard, urging him forward.
“We’re close, we’re so close I can feel it!”

Lance didn’t ask what he meant.
All he knew was the monsters were back, and they were after them.
There were too many this time. His father couldn’t hold them off.
They stopped suddenly, and his father turned to them both.
“I need you to stay here. Do not make a sound. Do not follow me. Wait until I come get you do you understand?”
Lance nodded, but his sister wasn’t as compliant.
“Papa I can help! Let me help!”
Pragma I need you to look after Lance. You have to promise papa ok?”
“But-”
“Promise me.”
She nodded, eyes filling with tears.
“I love you both. Never forget that. Stay safe until I return,”
And then he was gone, running back the way they had come.
Lance fell to the ground, panting as he struggled with the fear of being chased and the pain he felt in his limbs. His sister remained standing; vigilant as always.
She was older than him by a few minutes he knew, and had always taken the role of older sister very seriously. Besides, she was powerful, and could talk people into doing whatever she wanted.
Lance had always been a little jealous of her gift.
A yell broke through the still air, causing both of them to jump.
“What was that-”
She cut him off.
“He needs help.”

The second yell was louder, and Lance had to convince himself that it wasn’t really a scream he was hearing.
“He needs help!”
“Wait, Pragma!”
But she was already gone, sprinting in the same direction their father had gone. Lance wanted to follow.
He did.
But his limbs were tired.
And he was scared.
It wasn’t until he heard the screaming that he took off, ignoring the burning in his lungs and the
fear in his mind as he ran after his family. Then he heard it. “Run!” It was his dad. “Run!” Lance couldn’t see them. He was getting close. “Run away!”

It was his sister this time, her voice loud and pained, and as much as Lance wanted to ignore her words, his body was already acting. She was powerful. And he had no choice. “No!” His legs were already changing direction, carrying him away from the voices of his family. “Lance run as far away as you can! Don’t stop!” “I don’t want to!” “Run!” And that’s what he did. Tears streamed from his eyes as he tried to fight his own body. His sisters’ voice faded, but the screams that followed pierced through his soul like the knife his dad always carried. He wanted to stop. But her command had been clear. Lance ran. And ran. He collapsed after a few hours, his legs having worn themselves out, and that’s when they found him. But it wasn’t his family. It was the monsters. He couldn’t scream. He couldn’t cry.

And when he tried to run his legs gave out, sending him tumbling down a steep embankment. Pain shot through his head, making his vision blurry. The woods around him grew darker. Colder. Quiet. The only sound was a single word, but even that was fading as his eyes drooped shut. “Run...” And then everything went black.

There was something about waking up in hospitals that really puts a damper on the day. Or night? Lance couldn’t tell what hour it was when he awoke from the nightmare, his heart still pounding with residual panic. The darkness of the room was disorientating, and for a moment he feared he was still within the dream.

But as his heart-rate settled, Lance realized what he had seen were not just random images his brain had concocted for his viewing pleasure, but rather memories. Horrible, aching, painfully realistic memories.

He remembered everything.
Lance jumped out of the cot he had been laying on and silently exited the cabin. No one was around thankfully, and he figured it must either be very late at night, or incredibly early in the morning. Either way, he had no intention of going back to sleep.

He needed to clear his head, and found himself heading in the direction of his tree house. The air was colder than he would normally have liked, but he welcomed the stiff breeze that ruffled his hair and clothing, raising goose bumps along any exposed skin.

He hadn’t been able to feel much in the dream world, drowning in memories and the horrors of his past, and though being cold was not the most enjoyable feelings, he preferred it to feeling nothing at all.

He tried to ignore the darkness of the forest as he entered, his feet seeking out the smoothest path as he made his way to his sanctuary. He tried to forget about the sounds he had heard. The voices that had called to him.

Ever since he had come to camp he had been desperate to know about his past. To remember something.

Anything.

But now that he was able to, he wished for nothing else but the ability to pretend it had all really been a dream.

He arrived at the old oak and wasted no time in climbing the ladder to the first platform, where he settled himself into a hovel the bark had created many years ago. It blocked some of the wind, and Lance tucked his legs up to his chest to help warm his core.

Now that he was sitting, the pent up anxiety that had been briefly preoccupied during the commute began to creep into his chest, squeezing his lungs and making his breathing erratic. His legs began to shake, and Lance knew it wasn’t because of the cold. He bounced his feet up and down, hoping to distract himself long enough to calm his breathing. The last thing he needed right now was a panic attack.

Usually whenever he dreamt, the images would fade away after a while, and he would realize that it hadn’t been as frightening as he had thought. He would shake his head, wonder why he had been scared, and forget all about it.

But this hadn’t been a dream. This had been a nightmare.

No.

Worse than a nightmare.

This had been a memory.

Several of them it seemed.
Lance could still hear the voices echoing in his head; the voices of his dad, his sister. His family! He remembered who they were, what they looked and sounded like. This should be a joyous occasion!

And yet Lance had never felt this way before, his mind in turmoil as he fought to process what it was he had seen.

That night in the woods. The monsters. His dad running to protect them. His sister doing the same. She...
Lance shut his eyes, and tears he hadn’t known were there beginning to spill out.

She had told him to run away, and he had. He remembered how much he hadn’t wanted to. His family was back there. They needed his help.

But her voice had been compelling, and his body had betrayed him. She had had Charmspeak, just like him, though Lance hadn’t known about his own gifts at the time.

He cursed himself, digging his nails into the palms of his hands until the pain made him gasp. If he hadn’t of hesitated.... If he had been braver, like his sister, like his papa...

He could have saved them. But instead he ran.

A part of him knew that hadn’t been his fault; that Pragma’s power had been too strong, but Lance ignored that part. He wanted to feel the guilt. The pain. The sense of loss the memories he had been struggling to recall brought.

It was ironic really. He had always wondered about his past; always felt a bit empty, as if his cup had been knocked over and some of the liquid had spilled out. But having his memory back now....well, it was like someone had taken that cup and smashed it to pieces.

There were so many questions he didn’t know how to answer. Where had they been running to in the first place? Was it the camp? Had they almost been near the border when the attack had happened? How had he survived? And what about his family? Were they alive? Were they...not?

His breath hitched at the last thought, the panic washing over him like the wave in his first dream; pulling him under. Drowning him. He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t feel. Dark spots began to dance in his eyes, and Lance tried to calm himself by counting the stars.

Like he had been taught. Taught by his... His dad.

Who was probably dead.

His vision was growing blurry, but there was nothing he could do. This was just like his dream. So what was the point in fighting it?

Something heavy landed on his shoulders, but he didn’t look up. He was back in his nightmare; the weight of the waves crushing him as he lost control.

And then he was being shaken, his head knocking back and forth uncomfortably until finally he was able to lift it and look around. There was someone in front of him, their figure dark and bearing down on him, though he was too in shock to feel any fear.

They were saying something, but the words wouldn’t stick. The pulse of his own racing heart was thundering in his ears, numbing his senses as the panic attack took full effect. His breathing was too shallow, his head growing dizzy and light.

And then a sharp sting on his cheek brought the world back into focus.

Lance froze, the thundering in his ears ebbing away as feeling came back into his limbs. His eyes
were wide as he stared at whoever it was that was in front of him.

“-Lance...”

He blinked upon hearing the voice, and as his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he was able to make out the crouched form of Keith kneeling before him. He blinked a few more times to make sure he wasn’t imagining it.

“Lance are you alright-”
“Did you just slap me?” He interrupted, his voice surprisingly clear. Keith looked momentarily taken aback.

“Well, yeah you weren’t listen-”
“You actually slapped me?”

Keith’s eyebrows tilted upwards, his mouth dropping open slightly as he regarded the wrecked, huddled form Lance knew he was. He was too exhausted to feel shame in his appearance, especially since it was Keith who had found him like this. But that didn’t matter to him at that moment. Maybe later, when his mind was more settled, but for now?

For now he was just grateful.

“I-I’m sorry-” Keith broke off as Lance took hold of the hands on his shoulders, sliding his fingers down Keith’s wrists and holding tightly as he smiled wearily up at him.

“Thank you, Keith.”

Keith gaped at him, his mouth opening and closing slightly as he fought for words. It was difficult to tell in the dark, but he was almost positive he saw a slight blush appear on the other boys’ cheeks. He settled for a shy smile after a moment, and released his grip on Lance’s shoulders as he leaned back.

Lance let his own hands fall, wrapping them around his legs with a shiver. Keith had been warm, and had been blocking a good majority of the wind, which Lance now felt piercing through him with cold brutality.

Keith must have noticed him tremble.

“Are you cold?”
“No I’m fine-wait, what are you doing...?” Keith had one arm out of his coat, and paused momentarily to stare at Lance.

“I’m giving you my jacket.” He spoke like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Lance shook his head.

“I said I’m fine! I don’t need it!”

But Keith wasn’t paying attention, and lazily handed it out for him to take. Lance frowned.

“Keith I told you, I’m-” he broke off as a sudden gust rocked the tree, raising a fresh set of goosebumps across his skin.
He shuddered, and noticed the smug look on Keith’s face as he shook the hand that held the jacket, like he was offering a bone to a stray dog.

Lance would have been offended if he had had the energy to spare. As it was, he had left the
infirmary without taking anything else with him. Hades, his feet were still bare.

And the jacket did look warm...

“...fine.” Lance grumbled, and snatched it from Keith. It unfolded in his grasp, and he held it up to examine.

“Keith, buddy,” he raised one eyebrow as he looked from the article of clothing to Keith and back again. “What is this.”

Keith frowned.

“It’s my jacket. I literally just told you that.”

Lance turned it around a few times theatrically, in case Keith wasn’t seeing the same thing he was.

“This is a crop top with sleeves.”

Keith crossed his arms grumpily, his bottom lip jutting out in a pout. Lance recognized it from before, when he had won in archery. It seemed so long ago...

“It said ‘jacket’ on the tag when I bought it.” He turned his face away partially as he defended himself, and Lance was better able to see the blush creeping up his neck, which was clearly visible now that he was only sporting a light t-shirt.

“What, when you were five?”

Keith rolled his eyes.

“This looks like something Naruto would wear. You sure you’ve never seen it?” Lance was greeted by a very amusing image of Keith running at full speed with his arms flailing behind him in the iconic anime sprint. He almost laughed.

Keith gave him a look through heavily lidded eyes and huffed.

“Listen, do you want it or not?” He held out his hand again, but Lance jerked away instinctively, pulling the jacket to his chest to protect it from Keith. He hadn’t meant to, but the thought of losing the extra warmth was currently unbearable.

What was even more unbearable, however, was the self-righteous look that Keith now sported.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” He smiled wickedly, and Lance felt his face flush. Stupid mullet head.

He wrapped the coat around his legs instead of putting it on, since they were more exposed to the wind, and thus more likely to freeze first. Keith watched him, his mouth dropping open as he finally noticed Lance’s lack of shoes.

“Why are you barefoot?!?”

Lance shrugged, the warmth from Keith’s coat already seeping into his bones. He had about two solid seconds of comfort before Keith was suddenly moving, shifting to sit beside Lance.

“Scooch.”
Lance gaped at him.

“What? No! What are you-” he was cut off by Keith gently nudging him over, making enough room in the hovel of the tree for them to both be somewhat sheltered from the wind. Lance felt the heat radiating off Keith in the close proximity...or maybe that was due to the fact that his cheeks were burning.

What was this guy doing?!

But Keith wasn’t finished, and leaned forward, grabbing hold of Lance’s legs and hoisting them into his lap in one fluid motion. Lance barely had time to react, letting out a small yelp at the sudden change in position.

“Keith!”

The boy paused, finally looking at Lance with a sheepish yet stern expression.

“Your toes will freeze off. Quit being stupid and trust me.”

Lance gulped, wanting to argue but struck silent by Keith’s forceful tone. Instead he nodded, holding his breath as Keith took his jacket from off of Lance’s legs and began to wrap it around his feet. Lance was still throughout the entire procedure, and when Keith finished, tying both ends of the sleeves together and leaving Lance with an odd blanket-sock style bundle in place of feet, Lance slowly exhaled.

“Thanks...” he murmured, not fully trusting his voice. Keith nodded, and Lance expected him to drop his feet now that they were properly cared for, but Keith merely let them settle in his lap, raising his own legs to form a sort of cradle.

Lance wasn’t entirely sure what to make of the whole situation, and several minutes of awkward silence passed between them. Still, as the time went on, Lance found himself relaxing into Keith’s side, relishing in the warmth he gave off, and eventually found the courage to speak.

“Keith...thanks again.”

He felt more than saw Keith look down at him; his muscles tensing briefly as he stared at Lance.

“No worries...” Keith trailed off, noticing the look on Lance’s face. “Are you ok?” he asked after a moment, and Lance sighed heavily.

“I just...Keith?” he raised his head to look up at the boy. “Can I ask you something?”

Keith nodded, his eyebrows lowered in concern.

“Have you ever done something...something awful, that you had no control over?”

Lance watched Keith’s face, noticing the way it immediately grew remorseful; his eyebrows knitting together as if he was recalling a painful memory.

“Yeah,” he spoke softly, almost a whisper, and Lance noticed the way he was avoiding direct eye contact.

Lance sighed again, staring out beyond the edge of the platform into the dark expanse of woods; the shifting shadows reminding him of his dream.

His memories.
“I think my family is dead.” He said after a while, his voice hushed. “And I think it’s because of me.”

Keith stiffened beside him, but Lance barely noticed. He hadn’t wanted to openly confess such a thing, but the guilt was eating away at him, and he worried that the panic would surface again and swallow him whole if he continued to let it stew.

He didn’t wait for Keith to reply, the words suddenly flowing out of him like they had broken through a wall; the weight of them too much for the floodgates.

“I should have gone with Pragma when she left. I shouldn’t have hesitated. I could have helped them. I could have saved them! Or I could have drawn the monsters off. It was me they were after anyways. Me and Pragma...but I should have protected her. I could have put up more of a fight. But I didn’t! I was selfish and scared and stupid and I wasn’t strong enough to fight her words. All I did was run away. Selfishly leave them behind, and then selfishly forget all about them. My family...my dad and sister. My only family....and I-I...” The tears were back in his eyes, and his lower lip was trembling so badly that Lance was hardly able to get out the last sentence. “It’s all my fault Keith...they’re both dead and it’s all because of me.”

He was shaking again, but he couldn’t blame the wind this time. His nerves were jittery with panic, and his pulse was beginning to rise once again.

And then suddenly there were strong arms around him, holding him tightly and rocking him back and forth ever so gently. Lance went stiff for a split second, but when his body realized it was not under attack, it completely dissolved in the embrace.

Lance fell forward into Keith’s chest, no longer able to support his own weight as large wet tears cascaded down his cheeks. He sobbed, not able to control his breathing as the burden of his guilt washed over him, tossing him back and forth like waves against a cliff.

Keith didn’t say anything besides the occasional coo of reassurance, all the while moving his hands in small circular motions across Lance’s back. Eventually he was able to calm himself enough to stop crying, but his breathing was still laboured, hitching every now and again whenever he took deeper breaths.

He let his eyes fall shut as he focused on calming himself down. Small things at first, like the feeling of Keith’s hands on his back, leaving trails of warmth wherever they went. Or the way Keith smelled this close up...like soil and sap and sunshine, which Lance found a bit odd considering the boys’ outwardly dark appearance.

When he was able to breathe without much residual shaking, Lance found himself noticing the bigger things. Like the fact that he had just had a meltdown in front of Keith, which was almost as embarrassing as being found in pajamas in a tree in the middle of the night. Really not doing so hot in the cool kid department.

And speaking of hot....Lance’s face flushed as he realized just how close he was to the longer haired boy. Hades, he was practically sitting in his lap!

Not that Keith was protesting, though Lance just assumed it was because he didn’t want to be rude. He sighed as he leaned back slightly, letting Keith know that he could stop, fully expecting him to pull away now that Lance had settled down.

Except that he didn’t.
Keith’s arms remained tightly woven around Lance’s upper body, and he showed no sign of letting
go anytime soon.
Lance cleared his throat softly, figuring that the other boy must have missed his previous hint.
Keith looked down at him then, and the smile he gave Lance made his breath hitch once again,
though maybe that was just a residual effect from before.
Right...

“You feeling better now?” he asked; tone soft and soothing. Lance nodded, not trusting his voice at
all in that moment. Keith smiled again, releasing his grip only slightly as he leaned back against
the tree, consequently pulling Lance with him.

So Keith wasn’t going to let go. Lance found himself not minding one bit.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Keith asked, and Lance shook his head this time. Keith hummed.

“Alright then. But just know that I’m here. I’m not going anywhere.”

Lance bit the inside of his mouth, his lips beginning to wobble ever so slightly upon hearing
Keith’s words. Since when was he so caring?

Hades.

If he was going to pour his heart and soul out to Keith, he was going to do it with some sort of
dignity.
He sighed, and despite the protests of his body and mind, Lance slowly sat up, untangling himself
from Keith’s arms and shifting so his legs were back in front of him.

Keith watched him, moving over to allow him more space, a detail Lance found himself incredibly
upset about. He tucked his legs up and looked away, most likely thinking Lance wanted to be left
alone.

He didn’t. Not at all.

“When I first came to this camp, I had no memories.” Keith’s head slowly turned back to stare at
him, and Lance focused on his hands as he went on, so as to keep from getting distracted.

“Coran found me, near dead, and killed off the monsters who had been hunting me.” Lance
squeezed his eyes shut at the thought of the beasts; their breath hot against his neck. He pushed the
memory away.

“Everyone was always asking me about where I had come from...who I was, that sort of thing. I
only knew my name, which had been printed on the label of my sweater. I was just a ten year old
boy with no recollection of his past.” He paused, waiting to see if Keith would tell him to stop, but
the boy was silent, and when Lance glanced over, he was greeted by a pair of bright eyes watching
him attentively. He continued.

“Allura had recently become camp leader, and my arrival was really frightening for everyone at
camp. She handled everything pretty well, but I think she got their hopes up about me being a child
of one of the big three, seeing as monsters of that caliber didn’t usually venture that close to camp
borders.”

“That sounds kind of familiar.” Keith said, and Lance smiled despite himself.

“Yeah, I guess it does.” His smile faded as he reminisced. “Anyways, when Aphrodite claimed me
everyone was pretty upset. They figured I was too powerful to be a son of the Goddess of love and beauty, but it wasn’t like I had any particularly powerful gifts, so eventually people just forgot about it and moved on with their lives, saying I was just a fluke. Another normal demigod with a tragic backstory. It wasn’t until a few years later that I discovered they were wrong.” Lance shrugged. “Well, not about the tragic backstory. That part was still true.”

Keith was watching him with sad eyes, and Lance could have sworn he had nearly reached out to touch him again, but held back at the last second. Lance hid his disappointment with another shrug.

“I discovered I could make people do what I wanted. I would ask for something, and they would give it. It only worked sometimes at first, but as I began to realize that it wasn’t normal, I got better at using it.”

“Using what?”

Lance twirled his thumbs, not daring to look over at Keith again.

“Charmspeak. It’s a power that some children of Aphrodite have. It’s rare, and not much is known about it except that you can force people to obey you.”

“Obey you how?” Keith asked, and Lance swallowed hard. He wasn’t keen on telling Keith the specifics, seeing as most people tended to react the same way. With fear. Then avoidance. He really didn’t want that.

Still, he was too far gone now not to tell him now. And if anyone deserved to know the truth, it was Keith.

“Like, if I were to tell you to do the Macarena right now, you would do it. You wouldn’t have any say in the matter.”

Keith was silent for a moment, and Lance held his breath, expecting him to grow defensive. But Keith surprised him yet again.

“Please don’t ask me to do the Macarena,” he said, and Lance swiveled to stare at him. Keith was smiling shyly back, no sign of fear in his eyes. Lance had not been expecting that at all, and found himself grinning in reply. He couldn’t help himself.

“But you would look so good!”

Keith’s face paled slightly, but when Lance began to chuckle he relaxed again.

“I mean, undoubtedly, but it’s a bit late for a tree top dance party.”

Lance barked out a laugh at that, then quickly covered his mouth as the sound echoed around the forest. Keith was grinning, but it faded as he regarded Lance.

“Is that what happened before? In the arena?” He voice was low, almost cautious, as if he it was a sensitive topic. And why wouldn’t it be? Lance had used his powers on him...on everyone really. Something he swore he would never do, unless absolutely necessary.

He nodded, not looking over.

Keith was silent for a moment, and then, in a softer tone:

“What about back with the giants? Did you...ask them not to attack?”

Lance was momentarily thrown by the change in subject, and glanced over at Keith again. He nodded once more, and Keith stared down at his hands in thought.
“That’s pretty cool.”

Lance wasn’t sure he had heard properly. Did he just say...cool? The corners of his lips twisted up and he quickly looked away lest Keith see how red his face was.

Damn.

“Yeah, well...” he decided to continue his story while he still had the momentum. “Allura forbade me from using it. Apparently people can sort of lose their minds if you Charmspeak them too frequently.” He noticed Keith shiver, and doubted that it was from the cold.

“So I didn’t, unless absolutely necessary, like with the giants. When I got hit in the head by that rock it must have jarred something in my brain, because I started to remember things.”

“What kinds of things?” Keith asked, and again Lance found himself smiling, warmed by the fact that Keith seemed genuinely interested in what he had to say. It was refreshing.

“Well, first it was just muddled images, and they mixed in with my dreams so I wasn’t absolutely positive that they were memories at all. But they felt different, you know? Like déja vu. It was as if my mind was trying to build a puzzle, and the pieces were all there and just not fitting properly.” He sighed, resting his chin on his hands and propping them against his raised knees.

“And then, back in the arena when I passed out...I don’t know. That was like having final piece click in. I woke up and now...I remember everything.”

Keith didn’t say anything for a minute, expecting Lance to elaborate, but when it became clear that he wasn’t going to, he shuffled a bit closer and leaned forward so Lance would be forced to look at him.

“What were they like? Your family.”

Lance stared back, his eyebrows rising in surprise. This guy...Hades, he was hard to read. Lance had been expecting him to ask about them dying...or why he thought it was his fault. Not what they were like. Lance himself had barely thought about that aspect of things.

Whatever Keith’s intentions, Lance decided he would stop trying to predict his actions. Maybe Keith wasn’t a book to be read, like most people. Maybe he was more of a piece of abstract art that required time and patience to understand. Or maybe Lance was over-analyzing the whole thing, and Keith was just....Keith.

Whatever the case, he found himself smiling as he dug around in his brain for the more pleasant memories of his family.

It was funny really, how he could now accurately see into his past and pick and choose certain recollections, which he hadn’t been able to do since coming to camp. But, like with most memories, they aged with time, and Lance found himself wondering how much faith he could put into them. Plus he had been much younger when these memories were fresh, and the mind of a child was more likely to distort or misinterpret certain things than that of an adult, which he practically was now.

And then there was the whole seven year time gap where he wasn’t actively remembering his childhood to account for.

So maybe the events of that night, the night his family died, weren’t entirely accurate. What if...

No.

Lance couldn’t allow himself to get his hopes up. He could feel that those memories were true.
And besides, if they had survived they would have come looking for him...right? Lance closed off that train of thought, knowing it would only end in heartache.

“My dad was tall. Like really tall. I remember him being able to reach into the highest branches of my favourite tree to help me down whenever I got too afraid to climb down. But then again, I was a lot shorter back then, so who knows. Also I think he spoke Spanish.”

“Hey wait, does that mean you can as well?” Keith asked, looking altogether too excited about the possibility.

Lance hummed to himself as he thought back. He could remember his dad singing to them in Spanish, teaching them the words and what they meant. He remembered when they would have company over, and the table would be flowing with the lively language. He was fairly certain that he and his sister would have quiet conversations late at night in their native tongue, talking about school or their mom.

Lance chuckled, surprising himself with the newfound knowledge; like he had just discovered piece to his puzzle he didn’t know was missing.

“Yeah, I guess I can.” He frowned then, realizing that no words were coming to mind. “Or, could anyways. I haven’t spoken it in years.”

Keith’s eyes were wide with excitement.

“You could learn it again! I could help! I’ve always wanted to learn another language! And Spanish would be really cool. I could make fun of Shiro to his face and he would have no clue—” Lance watched Keith as he spoke, his hands gesturing wildly as his enthusiasm grew. When Keith finally noticed, his face went a stunning shade of red, and he quickly composed himself.

“I mean,” he cleared his throat, “if you want.”

Lance bit back a grin as he watched Keith try and resume his previous demeanor. It was endearing, and Lance would normally have teased him for it, but the offer had been genuine, and Lance didn’t want to take away from it.

Besides, he found himself wanting to learn Spanish with Keith. It would be like their own thing. And as the night wore on, having a thing with Keith was exactly what Lance wanted most.

“Yeah, let’s do it.”

Keith was still staring at his hands when Lance spoke, but a smile crept across his face upon hearing his words.

He nodded, and Lance continued talking about his family, lest the situation grow awkward.

“My sister was really cool. I was always super jealous of her. She had Charmspeak as well, but it was much more powerful than mine. I didn’t know that at the time though, and just thought people liked her better than me.” He made a noise halfway between a laugh and a sigh. He hoped he wasn’t buming Keith out with his dismal story.

“The night we were attacked...she ran back to help my dad. And when I went to help as well she told me to run away. She used her power on me. I had no choice...” he trailed off, and Keith placed a hand on his arm in reassurance. Lance smiled sadly back at him, the mood from the previous conversation taking a depressing turn.

“You know it wasn’t your fault right?” Keith mumbled quietly, and Lance sighed.
“I know that her power was too strong to fight...but Keith,” he stared into those intense eyes; the
colours shifting around in the darkness. “I shouldn’t have run away. I could have plugged my ears
or—tried harder to awaken my own gifts! I could have saved them!”

“Lance.” His voice was firm, and the grip on his arm tightened. “You can’t live your life in what-
ifs. You’ll go insane. I know because...” a look of deep regret passed over his face that was quickly
pushed away, and Lance wondered if it had really been there in the first place. Keith sighed.

“The thing is, losing the ones you love is hard. Hell, it’s the worst feeling in the world. But you
can’t blame yourself. You can’t allow the guilt of the past to tarnish hope for a future.”

Lance was silent as Keith’s words washed over him.

“You know,” he said finally, “you’re pretty wise.”

Keith shrugged. “Well, it’s been known to happen—”

“For a child of Ares.”

Keith’s mouth fell open, before settling into an unamused frown.

“Feeling good enough to sass me are we? I’ll allow it, but just this once.”

Lance bit back a grin.

“You sure you weren’t supposed to be a child of Athena? Or maybe Hephaestus. I feel like he
would love the whole mullet thing going on here.” He gestured to Keith’s head, who swatted away
his hands.

“I feel like that’s supposed to be an insult, but fortunately I know next to nothing about Greek
gods. So jokes on you. Besides,” he tugged absently on a strand of dark hair. “I happen to like it.
Now quit trying to ruin our bonding moment!”

Lance couldn’t help himself. A lopsided grin erupted on his face as he stared as his hands. Hades.
He really liked Keith. And maybe...maybe Keith liked him to. The thought made him feel warmer
on the inside, like someone had lit a small candle and was feeding the flames. Lance had a pretty
good idea of who that someone was.

He was feeling better by the minute, the memories slowly fading back into just that; memories. He
snuggled closer to Keith as another gust of wind passed through the trees. Keith was warm, and
Lance sighed as the heat soaked into his core. He took a deep, calming breath, and rested his head
on the other boys shoulder.

Keith stiffened and Lance bit his tongue, waiting for him to protest. But Keith didn’t say anything,
and eventually relaxed, shifting to lean some of his own weight against Lance as they listened to
the wind howl through the branches. It was nice, and Lance found himself growing sleepy, his eyes
nearly closed when suddenly Keith spoke.

“Hey Lance?”

“Hmm?” Lance hummed, his head still resting comfortably on the other boys shoulder.

“I’m sorry.”

The exhaustion that had been tugging at him lifted as Lance raised his head to gawk at Keith.
“For what?”
Keith was staring at his hands.

“For almost killing you.”
Lance scoffed.

“You didn’t ‘almost’ kill me.”
Keith gave him a look like ‘dude you and I both know that’s a lie’, and Lance caved.

“Alright fine, you almost killed me.” Keith winced and turned away again, and Lance felt a stab of guilt.

“But you didn’t. See?” He patted himself as Keith side-eyed him. “Still here. If anything I should be apologising for using Charmspeak on you. That was...well it was self defense but also kind of rude.”

Keith was regarding his hands intensely, and Lance felt a strong urge to reach out and grab them. He resisted, though just barely, and shifted his legs up; Keith’s jacket still secured tightly around his feet.

“You know, I don’t blame you. Like at all. I was being a complete ass back there. I guess I was just...” he trailed off. It sounded so stupid and petty to admit it out loud, but Keith was looking at him now, so he really had no choice.

“I guess I was jealous of you.”
He could feel Keith’s eyes on him, and then a soft chuckle made him turn. Keith was rubbing his eyes with the heels of his palms, the corners of his mouth lifting up as he laughed. Lance frowned.

“Hey I’m just trying to tell you the truth. No need to laugh at me,” he grumbled, but Keith grabbed his hand before he could fully turn away.

“No wait,” he said, and Lance was caught in his eyes. “I wasn’t laughing at you. I was—” he broke off, searching for the right words. “You shouldn’t be jealous of me. It’s ridiculous. I mean look at you!” he gestured to Lance with his free hand, who felt his face flush. Keith’s words were kind, but still, he had to know.

“I guess...but what about you and Allura—”

“Really?! That’s what was bothering you?!” Keith interrupted, and started laughing again. “Lance, no. No way. Not even close.” He broke off in another fit of giggles, and Lance sulked.

“Then what! She doesn’t just go around hugging people! And she gave you that sword! She obviously likes you...and you seemed like you...” he trailed off as Keith’s face broke out into another wide smile. He sighed breathily, wiping at his eyes.

“Okay, three reasons why you’re absolutely wrong. First of all, I’m like, ninety-seven percent sure that Allura has a crush on Shiro. I mean, he’s totally head over heels for her and we’ve only just gotten here.” He shook his head.

“If I see one more unnoticed glance go between those two I swear to God I’ll lose my mind.” Lance blinked, suddenly feeling very stupid. How had he, a child of the goddess of love, been so
oblivious to Allura and Shiro? Granted, he hadn’t really been paying much attention, seeing as the past few days had been overly dramatic, even for him, but still.
Keith went on.

“Second, that sword she gave me was mine to begin with. It’s actually the reason I kind of lost it back in the arena.”

“How can a sword do that?” Lance asked, his previous jealously now totally unwarranted. Why had he been so engulfed by it?

Keith heaved a sigh, his hand still firmly clasped around Lance’s. He tried not to think about that too much.

“It’s a long story apparently. Shiro said he didn’t fully understand it either. But turns out my dad, Ares—” he spat out the word, and Lance made a mental note not to mention the God of war anytime soon.

“Ares made a sword out of hatred and loathing and every terrible thought, and the one I have was once part of it, like a shard or something.” He frowned slightly.

“Or, had. Allura confiscated it again after the match.” He brushed back the hair from his face with his free hand, and Lance felt his heart stutter.

He really very much wanted to run his own hands through the mess of black hair, mullet or not. Thank the gods it was as dark as it was; Lance wasn’t sure he would be able to handle seeing so much of Keith’s face in the daylight. As it was, the soft glow of skin on the newly exposed forehead was enough to send Lance’s thoughts straight out the back door.

And Keith had fantastic eyebrows, thick and expressive, that Lance hadn’t fully appreciated before.

When the shorter hair fell through Keith’s fingers and covered his face again, Lance almost moped. It was for the best though, seeing as the conversation they were having was fairly deep, and Lance shouldn’t be allowing his mind to wander so shamelessly.

“Long story short,” Keith continued, oblivious, “the sword feeds off anger and sends the user into a blind rage. I had no idea what I was doing...or well, I could see what I was doing, but I couldn’t stop it.” He paused, then turned to stare straight into Lance’s eyes. It was like being caught in a tractor beam, where the only thoughts running through his mind were ‘take me now’. Lance had to force himself to listen, and he was glad he did, because Keith’s next words were barely audible.

“I thought I was going to kill you, and there was nothing I could do to stop myself.”

Lance swallowed hard, but not out of fear. Keith looked so vulnerable; so remorseful, that Lance felt compelled to do everything in his power to make him smile again. He held no resentment towards Keith for what had happened in the arena, but something told him that the darker haired boy wouldn’t be open to hearing that, even if it was the truth. He decided to try a different tactic.

“I wasn’t going to do it you know,” he began slowly, “Charmspeak you that is.” Keith tilted his head in question, and Lance smiled gently.

“But I remember thinking that I didn’t want it to end like that. I wanted to get to know you better; to figure you out. And maybe that was selfish of me...but I’m really glad I did and—” he hesitated as the grip on his hand tightened, and then suddenly Keith was kissing him.

It was just a press of lips on lips, nothing spectacular as far as kisses could go, but that didn’t stop
Lance’s mind from going blank.

He had never fully understood why people said it was butterflies that caused the stomach to flip over and do somersaults. Butterflies couldn’t even begin to compare to the rollercoaster ride his body was currently experiencing. Keith’s lips were rough and chapped, the complete opposite of Lance’s, and he would have made a mental note to give him some chapstick later in the future had he not been so entirely engrossed by the kiss.

It was over much too quickly; Keith pulling away with a look of horror and making to stand. Lance recovered just in time to reach for his hand, holding him firmly in place. Keith paused, and spoke without looking at him.

“I-uh...sorry.”

Lance bit his lip, committing the kiss to memory and ignoring the heat in his face. Keith glanced at him, his own face a mask of red, unsure of what to do, much less say. Lance didn’t ease his grip on Keith’s hand, but decided to spare them both by bringing the focus back onto their previous conversation.

“What uh-“ he cleared his throat, “what was the third reason?” he asked quietly, all the while fighting the giant grin that was eager to make itself known.

Keith smiled, revealing a set of glorious dimples. Lance nearly choked.

“That was it.”

Lance couldn’t help it, and revealed a stunning set of teeth as he beamed at the boy beside him. Keith made a noise halfway between a giggle and cough, and leaned his head back against the tree, shutting his eyes as he did.

Lance was still beaming as he rested his head back on Keith’s shoulder, nuzzling into him shamelessly. Keith readjusted their grip so that their fingers were entwined, which only encouraged the erratic beating of his heart. This was by far the best thing that had ever happened to him at camp, and Lance was ecstatic to finally have some sort of clarity in his life. The past week had been brutal.

But finding out that Keith liked him...like, like liked him... That was the worth every bit of it.

“You know,” he said after a while, not wanting the conversation to end just yet, “they say that Aphrodite and Ares had one of the most romantic love affairs-”

“Don’t ruin it.” Keith interrupted gruffly, and Lance chuckled.

“Just sayin,” he continued. “It’s like destiny or something-”

Keith squeezed his hand, his voice drawn out and tired. “Do you ever stop talking?”

“What? You tired or something?” Lance asked, stifling his own yawn. He felt Keith’s shoulders rise and fall as he sighed deeply.

“Why would I be tired? It’s not like it’s three in the morning or anything.” His voice was growing softer, but Lance had a sudden realization that made him sit up once again. He stared down at Keith, who was watching him through half-lidded eyes.
“Speaking of which, how did you find me?”

Keith blinked a few times, processing the question, then grimaced. His eyes focused on their entwined fingers, brushing the back of Lance’s hand absentmindedly. Or maybe not absentmindedly, seeing as Keith was watching what he was doing. Maybe it was more of a distraction tactic, to try and divert Lance’s attention. If that was the case, it was working; Lance could hardly keep his mind on the topic at hand. He squeezed their fingers together as a sort of reminder, and watched Keith bite his lip nervously.

“I couldn’t sleep. Felt too guilty about almost stabbing you and all. And then I saw you come out of the infirmary and followed you here.”

Lance smirked, cocking one eyebrow in a teasing manner.

“Sneaking around camp at night? Creepy hobby.”

Keith leaned forward as he glared back, his lower lip jutting out in a pout. Lance felt a strong urge to kiss it.

“I wanted to make sure you were ok!” he huffed; those wonderfully expressive eyebrows low on his face. “And it’s a good thing I did. You would have frozen to death out here alone.”

Lance was still smirking, his voice bubbly and light. “Aweh you care about me, that’s so cute!”

Keith grumbled.

“Yeah, feeling less guilty now.” Lance was surprised to hear the sarcasm in his voice, and let his mouth fall open in a shock, enjoying the playful banter.

“Rude! And here I am letting you sleep in my tree fort. I should kick you out.”

“Should I just go then?” Keith asked, and Lance panicked, squeezing their hands together tightly to prevent Keith from getting up.

“No!” his voice was a little too loud; his reply too rushed, and he clapped his free hand over his mouth in embarrassment.

Gods.
He used to be good at flirting. What was happening?

Keith smiled in reply, letting his eyes close once again as he settled back against the trunk of the old oak.

“Don’t worry. Like I said before: I’m not going anywhere.”

Lance felt his insides flip, like that brief moment of weightlessness you get at the top of a swing. He hadn’t known how much he needed to hear those words. Being left alone had always been one of his biggest issues, and he had struggled with it for a long time.

Was still struggling apparently, judging from his reaction to Keith’s jest mere seconds ago.

But Keith seemed to understand that, and knew just how to reassure him without sounding annoyed. It was nice to have someone like that.

Sure, he had fantastic friends that tolerated his clinginess and constant need for attention; Hunk and Pidge and even Sabrina when they weren’t competing, but this was different.

Keith was different.
Lance made a mental note to offer a portion of his next meal to Ares in thanks for helping to create such a wonderful human.

He resumed his position at Keith’s shoulder after a moment of self-indulgence; taking advantage of memorizing the details of Keith’s face while he wasn’t looking. The slope of his nose, the sharpness of his cheeks...
The gentle curve of his lips.

Yeah, definitely committing that to memory.

Keith’s breathing grew deep and even after a short while, and Lance was soothed by the continuous motion of his shoulders rising and falling; like the gentle rocking of waves lulling him to sleep. He closed his eyes, feeling safe up in the unfinished tree house; the wind shifting the branches and making the platform sway every now and again. But Lance wasn’t afraid, so long as Keith was at his side.

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He must have dozed off at one point, slipping into a dreamless sleep, because the next thing he knew it was much too bright, and the sounds of birds chirping was making him hate the outdoors.

The first cognisant thought he had was ‘why am I outside?’
The second was more along the lines of ‘what’s on my feet?’

And the third thought was more of a string of startled curses than anything else; his heart racing in remembrance as he realized he was tangled up in Keith’s limbs, and that the two of them had slept together.
In his treehouse.

And...oh Hades....

They had kissed as well.

Lance moved to touch his lips, but was stopped by a muffled groan from beside him. He shifted his head slightly and realized he was tucked firmly in the crook of Keith’s arm, who was cradling him securely. Lance’s hands were pressed in close to his chest, and from what he could see, their legs were a jumbled heap.

It would have been the most fantastic way to wake up, and had definitely made it into his top three, except that his back was stiff, and his muscles yearned to be stretched out. Turns out sleeping on his tree house floor wasn’t as delightful as he had always imagined.

But on the other hand, waking up in Keith’s arms was something he could certainly get used to.

He shifted again, and this time Keith mumbled a blurry string of words that Lance could barely make out.

“Quit squirming...mm tired, warm...”

Lance bit back a laugh. So Keith wasn’t a morning person eh? And to think he couldn’t get any more adorable.

Still, his back was begging to be cracked; the joints having been in one position for too long.

“I have to get up,” he whispered, not wanting to startle him awake. “I can’t feel my legs.”
Keith’s chest rose slowly, and as he exhaled he let out a long, dramatic groan that had Lance giggling.

“I don’t want to,” he slurred, his arms tightening around Lance, pulling him in closer. Lance let out a muffled yelp.

“Keith! Can’t breath-hugging too tight!”

“Good. Maybe then you’ll be quiet.” Keith’s voice was growing stronger as he became more alert, and despite his rude words, Lance could sense the underlying humour. He managed to wiggle one of his hands free and used it to pinch Keith’s side.

“Ow!” The other boy yelped and immediately released Lance, who sat up slowly, relishing in the feeling of stretching his arms. Keith was glaring at him, his eyes wounded as he rolled onto his back.

“If that’s the kind of wake up I can expect from you then forget about it. Friends off.” He rubbed his side dramatically, and Lance rolled his eyes.

This guy’s an even bigger drama king than I am!

Still, he wasn’t about to let Keith win. It was time for some payback.

He leaned down and planted a kiss on those chapped lips before he could think much about it, and was pleased to hear the little squeak that escaped the other boys’ throat when they made contact.

The rigidity only lasted a moment; their lips sliding together more comfortably as they both fell into the kiss.

It didn’t last long. Lance couldn’t help himself, and began smiling wickedly against Keith’s mouth, which ruined the intimacy of the whole thing. Oh well.

He leaned back slightly and stared down into those gloriously dark eyes, a lopsided grin making his cheeks ache. Keith’s face was a lovely shade of crimson as he grinned back.

“Oh, okay,” he breathed out, his voice husky but soft. “That’s a bit better.”

Lance huffed. “Only a bit?”

Keith nodded, sitting up as Lance sat back. He cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders before shooting a wink at Lance.

“Needs some work. Nothing a little practice won’t fix.”

Lance felt his face flush, and was suddenly incredibly ruffled; mouth opening and closing a few times, like a fish out of water. Keith chuckled, and the sound sent little shivers down Lance’s spine.

“What’s this? A child of Aphrodite rendered mute by simple flirting? Is this their fatal flaw?” He chuckled again as Lance moved to swat his arm.

“I’m just shocked that a child of Ares even has the ability to say such things. Usually the only thing going on in their heads is ‘fight, fight, ooo look a sword, stabby stab stab!’”

Keith chuckled again, shaking his head slightly as he stood.

“I’m starving. We should head back.” He reached a hand down, which Lance eagerly took, and
helped him up. It was when he made to step forward that Lance remembered that his feet were still bound. He bent and removed the jacket, his toes curling under as they were met with the crisp morning air.
He held it up to Keith.

“You want this back now or...”
Keith grimaced.

“Gross, no. It’s been wrapped around your feet all night. At least wash it before giving it back to me.”

Lance crossed his arms, the jacket hanging loosely in his grasp.

“I’ll have you know that there is absolutely nothing gross about my feet. In fact you should be thanking me. This,” he held out Keith’s jacket, “thing of yours, has been blessed.”

Keith raised one eyebrow and tilted his head.

“Blessed hey? Well I guess I’ll take it back now then,” he moved to grab it, but Lance stepped back, suddenly defensive.

Keith paused, then put a hand to his hip and smirked. It was entirely too familiar a sight, and Lance got a sense of déjà vu.

“But...” Lance shook the coat out, all the while keeping it a safe distance from Keith. “It would be even more blessed if I were to wear it. At least back to camp.”

Keith’s composure shifted from smug to flustered in a matter of seconds, and Lance felt giddy, knowing he could have that effect on him.

“Sure,” Keith croaked out, and quickly turned to descend the ladder. Lance grinned and dawned the jacket, relishing in the warmth it still held. He would give it back once they got to camp. Or when he got to his own cabin...then he could wash it. Maybe.

It smelled an awful lot like Keith, and washing it right away would be a waste of water really. He should wait until he could do a proper load.
And that could take a week at least.

Yes. Perfect.

With that he made his way down the ladder, descending nearly all the way to the ground before pausing on the last rung.

“Say, Keith...”

The son of Ares, who had been investigating a nearby plant, turned to look at him.

“Yeah?”

Lance made a pointed look from him to the ground and back again, trying to look as pitiful as possible. Realization dawned on Keith’s face, and he folded his arms with a huff.

“Seriously?”

“I don’t have shoes on! And it’s a long walk back!”
“You walked here without shoes and it wasn’t a problem then.”

Lance pouted.

“I was in a fragile state of mind. Shoes weren’t really top priority. But now they are, and since I don’t have them...” he trailed off, hoping Keith wouldn’t just leave him there. To be honest he had no problem walking back barefoot; he knew the trail well enough to pick the best spots to step.

But Keith didn’t know that, and if he could get away with this then it would be the highlight of his day. Or week even.

Keith seemed to be considering, and was looking down the path in serious contemplation. The silence dragged on until finally Lance had enough.

“Keeeiittthhhhhh...” he whined, and the other boy heaved a sigh, rolling his eyes as he walked back towards the tree house.
Lance couldn’t believe his eyes. It had worked!

However, as soon as he had managed to clamber onto Keith’s back, wrapping his legs around the other boys’ midsection firmly and feeling the warmth seeping into him, Lance regretted his decision.

How in the ever living Hades was he supposed to keep himself composed all the way back to camp when he was literally being jostled around on Keith’s back. Plus it was the morning and...oh gods...please help.

Needless to say Lance thought a lot about butterflies on the way back, and less about the fact that he was so intimately entwined around the hottest guy in camp, mullet or not.

When they finally made it to the edge of camp Lance asked to be set down, and slid off Keith’s back easily, before taking a few quick steps backwards.

Keith stretched, groaning from the excursion, and turned to look at him.

“You want to go to breakfast with me?” he asked, and Lance bit his bottom lip. Everything had been fine and dandy in the privacy of woods, but now that he was back in camp, where prying eyes were always watching, Lance suddenly felt self-conscious.

Not because of Keith, but more because he knew he probably looked as gross as he felt, and he did have a reputation to maintain.

Speaking of, Keith was looking unfairly well put together considering they were both running on less than three hours of sleep. His hair was sticking up a bit in the back, but aside from that he looked like he usually did; which was insanely attractive.

So unfair.

“Can I meet you there in a bit? I kind of want to shower and put on some socks.”

He wasn’t sure what time it was exactly, but figured it was still relatively early judging from the continuous birdsong and lack of camp life. Relief washed over him as he realized the dining hall wouldn’t even be open yet, which lowered his chances of being seen in his state of disarray.

Keith nodded.

“Actually that’s a good idea. I have standards.”
It took a moment for Lance to grasp that Keith was referring to him, and his mouth fell open as he
scoffed, crossing his arms.
“How can a guy who thinks a mullet is fashionable in this day and age say he has standards?”
Keith took a few steps towards him, closing the remaining space between them as he leaned
forward.
“You know,” he said, letting his voice drop a few octaves as he slowly dragged a finger across
Lance’s jaw. “I’d normally be offended by that, but seeing you in my jacket is enough to make up
for your sass.”
He patted his cheek lightly, and Lance once again found himself not only speechless, but blushing
furiously at the suave charm this guy possessed.
Keith grinned devilishly, going so far as to wink at him before turning to make his way to the Ares
cabin. He raised a hand without turning back and called out: “See you in a few!”
And then Lance was alone, standing at the edge of the forest, completely head over heels for the
owner of the jacket he wore.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed some klance fluff after all the drama this fic has presented
(yeah...oops)
Silly boys are so in love, and they're finally starting to realize it :D
I'm thinking of only focusing on fluff between ships from this point on...more for
myself than anything.
Oh and Pragma's (Lance's twin sister) name is one of the 6 ancient Greek words for
love. It means "longstanding love", and is about making compromises to help the
relationship work over time, and showing patience and tolerance.
As always leave kudos and comments, even if it's just a smiley face. I welcome all,
and seeing notifications in my inbox is the best :)
I usually always reply, so if you have any questions about my story or the characters or
whatever, just send me a few lines.
Also if any of you want to make art for this fic I wholeheartedly support it! Just
message me, either on here or on my tumblr, (vulpes--vulpes) so I can link it to the fic
and credit you! and thank you of course :).

See you in the next chapter ;)


Oh my god oh my god oh my god-

The thought was on repeat inside of his head as he made his across camp.

OH my GOD.

He had done it. He had actually gone and done it!
Oh god...He had....

Kissed Lance.

Why had he kissed Lance?!

Because you like him you moron. A lot.

Oh yeah.

But it had been risky. Much riskier than Keith would normally have liked, but he wasn’t anything if not impulsive. And when had he really ever thought things through all the way?

But still. Kissing Lance was...well it was a lot of things. Keith blushed just thinking about it. Their heart-to-heart in the tree house really brought things into perspective, and Keith was still whirling from it, though that might also be due to the fact that he was running on a grand total of three and half hours of sleep.

A glorified nap really.
If you could even call sleeping outside on a plank in a tree that.

But he had been with Lance, cuddled with Lance, so that made up for it.

And then that morning...

Keith had been quietly dying inside the entire time after he had basically attacked Lance’s mouth, especially since Lance hadn’t said anything about it. Which was, in his experience thus far, entirely uncharacteristic.

Sure he had snuggled into him and made his jests and Keith had felt like Lance was feeling better, but it hadn’t been until that morning that he had truly known.

When Lance kissed him.

His morning breath hadn’t been the best, but Keith could have cared less, because it meant that
Lance felt the same way. Plus he had been flirting relentlessly, which Keith was more than happy to entertain. Seeing Lance get flustered with every compliment was probably the most pure thing in the world, and the best part was that Keith wasn’t even good at flirting. He just spoke his mind, which happened to have a lot of nice things to say about Lance. He would need to work on his pick-up lines later, seeing as Lance probably had a few up his sleeve he hadn’t gotten to use yet, seeing as he hadn’t exactly been in the right frame of mind for most of the night.

Keith would need to step up his game, but this was the sort of competition he could get behind.

And then the whole piggy-back affair...well, that was something else.

Keith had just been glad that his face was not visible the entire trip back, because he knew it was a bright, unflattering shade of red. He could feel the heat in his cheeks even now, thinking back to the way Lance felt wrapped around him like that.

**Oh. My. God.**

And what now? He had basically asked Lance out, even if it was just to breakfast, but he hadn’t thought much about it at the time.

What would people think if they saw them together? The last thing everyone had seen was Keith trying to kill the poor guy...what would they say if they saw them suddenly holding hands?

**OH GOD WHAT IF WE HOLD HANDS!**

Keith leaned against the side of the Ares cabin; his feet having carried him there without him noticing.

Sure, everything had been great in the woods, when it was just him and Lance. But if they were to go public...and really, were they even a thing to make public? What if Lance didn’t want a boyfr-

Keith couldn’t even bring himself to think the word. Considering Lance as such a thing was preposterous. They had only just gotten on the friend page.

*But friends don’t kiss each other.*

True...

Keith groaned, rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands to help clear his head. He had never been great at this sort of thing.

Sure, he had had significant others in his life, but none of them had ever made him feel this way. So sure and yet, so unsure. Like he was questioning all the facts, no matter how clear they were.

He knew Lance liked him. And he knew he liked Lance. So what was the problem?

Was he just nervous? Lance was nothing to be nervous about.

He was just another guy.

Another obscenely hot guy that he had kissed and slept with and, oh yeah. Nearly killed.

Why would he ever be nervous?

Maybe it was because he didn’t really know anyone else here; he was still the new guy. But everyone knew Lance. What if they hated Keith for what he had almost done? What if Keith wasn’t good enough for Lance in their eyes? But then again, when had he cared what other people thought about him?
Maybe because he really liked this guy...

Ugh overthinking was the WORST.

Keith pushed off the side of the cabin, intent on cleaning up a bit before telling Shiro what had happened, when something ran into him.

Or someone.

Keith heard a gruff ‘oof’, and when he looked down, was startled to find Tiffany standing there.

“Hey watch it—” she broke off when she realized who it was she had bumped into, and crossed her arms. Keith held his breath, knowing what Tiffany thought of him and his brother, anticipating a fight. She surprised him by grinning wickedly.

“Oh, if it isn’t wonder boy. Why didn’t you tell me you had such a hate on for the sissy?”

Keith frowned at that.

“What?” he asked, and she leaned forward, dropping her voice.

“You know, that pompous son of Aphrodite. I’ve been wanting to put him in his place for a while now. He thinks he’s so great and walks around like he owns the camp. It’s about time he was shown up.”

“What are you talking about?” Keith was growing agitated, but Tiffany didn’t seem to notice.

“You don’t have to play dumb with me Keith. I was routing for you the whole time.” She shrugged, “I mean, sure, I was pissed that my team asked you to fight with them over me, and seeing you win that first battle wasn’t the greatest thing for my ego, but I was thrilled when you were chosen to fight that jerk.”

Keith bristled.

“Lance isn’t a jerk.”

Tiffany gave him a strange look, then shrugged again.

“I mean sure, if you want to keep up appearances that’s fine. But you don’t have to pretend with me buddy.”

Buddy? Since when were they buddies?

“You almost had him to. If that brat hadn’t of used his powers you would have won.”

“I almost killed him!” Keith interrupted, but Tiffany was unfazed.

“He cheated, and of course Allura,” she said the name mockingly, drawing out the syllables, “was all up in arms over it. Lance has her wrapped around his finger. I bet he goes around using his powers on everyone in camp. Making them like him and his dumb sisters. He’s probably just waiting for the right moment to have Allura hand him the position of camp leader—”

“You’re wrong.” Keith said firmly, and Tiffany paused. One of her eyebrows quirked up in question.

“What, you think he wouldn’t do it? The only reason Lance hasn’t been kicked out of this camp yet is because he’s been using his power to manipulate everyone here. He-”
“Shut up.” Keith snarled, and Tiffany frowned.

“Excuse me?”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about. Lance wouldn’t use his powers on people like that.”

Tiffany put a hand on the sword at her hip in warning, but Keith was riled up now, and if so called ‘Tough Tiff’ was looking for a fight, then who was he to decline.

She watched him for a few moments, calculating possible places to strike, and he did the same. He didn’t have his sword, the Blade of Marmora still in Allura’s possession until further notice, but he wasn’t completely unarmed. If Tiffany tried anything he had a knife in one boot and a dagger at his hip, as well as his own extensive knowledge of martial arts to help him get by.

Besides, he was pissed with the way she was talking about Lance, and could feel his blood beginning to boil. Tiffany’s voice was low and hostile when she spoke.

“You’ve been here for how long again? And you think you know pretty boy Lance better than I do?”

Her tone was condescending, and Keith didn’t answer. She had made a valid point; he hadn’t known Lance for as long as her. But he felt in his gut that he knew Lance a whole hell of a lot better.

“My gods,” Tiffany said after a few moments of silence, “he’s already gotten to you hasn’t he!”

Despite himself, Keith felt his face begin to burn, thinking about the events of a few hours prior. That was all Tiffany needed.

She cursed loudly, and a few birds that had been nesting on the cabin roof flew off in a panic.

“Of course he has! That dirty conniving little brat of a love child!” She began pacing back and forth, and Keith forced himself to breathe.

*Don’t punch her in the face. She’s just jealous and scared and really goddamn annoying. But that doesn’t mean you can punch her. Shiro would have something to say about that.*

He took a deep breath to calm himself before speaking.

“I don’t know what you have against Lance, and if it’s anything personal then you don’t have to tell me,” he said, and Tiffany stopped to glare at him. Her eyes were intense, and Keith wondered absently if he ever looked like this when he was angry.

He hoped not. It was terrifying.

“But I won’t stand for you bad mouthing him. Lance didn’t do anything wrong. He was acting in self defense because I,” he gestured to himself in case she missed the point, “was attacking him. If he hadn’t of protected himself I probably would have ended up hurting him. Badly.”

Keith swallowed hard at the thought. He wouldn’t have been able to live with himself had he been the reason behind another injury, much less a death. Especially now that he knew how much he cared about Lance. The idea that he had almost...well, luckily it hadn’t come to that. Thankfully Lance had stopped him in time.
Still, there was a lot of guilt surrounding him as he locked eyes with Tiffany.

“I don’t know what your problem with Lance is, or if you’re just looking for someone to be mad at because you can, but it needs to stop. He already has enough to deal with without you spreading rumours about his powers. So lay off.”

Tiffany’s resolve broke for just a moment as Keith’s words washed over her, and for a brief second she almost looked guilty. Keith was expecting some sort of threat, or at least a swear word or two, but Tiffany remained silent, like a child who had been scolded.

He almost felt bad.
But then her eyebrows lowered almost comically over her eyes as she glared up at Keith, jabbing a finger up at him.

“You’re dumb and I hate you.” She said, and Keith raised both eyebrows in surprise. How old was she again?

And then Tiffany deflated, all the fight draining out of her as she stepped back.

“But fine. I’ll stop.”

Keith was speechless. Had he really just avoided a fight by talking out of it? Wow...wait till Shiro found out. But this was not the time for a celebration. Tiffany was staring at the ground, her demeanor suddenly much less threatening.

Keith found the strange desire to comfort her.

He couldn’t think of the proper words though, and an awkwardness descended upon him.

Tiffany didn’t seem to feel the same way however, and continued in a small voice.

“I guess I’m just jealous is all. Everyone is so much more powerful than I am. I try so hard to be good at what I do, but there’s always someone who’s better. And finding out that even a child of Aphrodite is more powerful than I am...” she trailed off.

Keith wasn’t sure how to respond. In fact, the entire situation was sort of throwing him for a loop.

First Lance and now Tiffany...did he have some sort of sign that said ‘great listener, please open up to me’ somewhere on his back?

Not that he really minded, it was just odd.

Tiffany went on.

“I thought I had this great connection with my dad; had always felt that I was closer with him than the others because of my anger, but I guess I was wrong. I mean, you were claimed right away, and have these great fighting abilities, so I just...I don’t know.”

Keith huffed, crossing his arms in front of him.

“I didn’t get my abilities from Ares, believe me.” Tiffany lifted her head at that, and Keith elaborated.

“My mom was the one who taught me to fight. She enrolled Shiro and me in martial arts and made sure we knew how to protect ourselves. The only thing Ares ever gave me were problems.”

Tiffany’s eyes widened and she glanced around nervously.
“Don’t say things like that so loudly! You’ll anger him!”

Keith scoffed.

“Ares is a prick.”

Tiffany moved to cover his mouth, but Keith jumped back, cupping his hands over his mouth to shout out.

“Ares come fight me you old bastard! You’re a rotten dad and you probably smell like goats-” he broke off as Tiffany yelped, looking around to see if the ground was going to split open and swallow them up in a ring of fire.

When nothing of that sort happened she slowly gazed up at Keith in awe; a small smile spreading across her face.

“Why goats?” she asked tentatively, and Keith shrugged.

“I don’t know, doesn’t he eat them for breakfast every day?”

Tiffany stifled a laugh, looking around cautiously to make sure Ares didn’t suddenly spring up and attack.

“No!” she paused, “well, I’m not sure actually...I don’t know him very well.” She looked crestfallen, but Keith could understand where she was coming from. Not having a father wasn’t the easiest, much less a god for one, but at least he had had his mom and Shiro. Keith wasn’t sure what Tiffany’s backstory was, and he didn’t get a chance to ask.

Shiro came around the corner then, and as soon as Tiffany saw him she was gone. Keith watched her go, not fully understanding the moment they had just shared.

Whatever the case, at least she wasn’t going to spread more rumours about Lance.

“Keith! I heard yelling what’s going on? Were you two fighting?”

Keith turned to stare at him.

“Why do you always assume I’m fighting?”

Shiro folded his arms, looking almost bored now that he knew Keith wasn’t in trouble.

“Because you’re you.”

Good point.

“Actually,” Keith said instead, “I just solved a problem using my words. No fighting at all. You should be proud.”

Shiro had the decency to look surprised, nodding slightly as he appraised his younger brother.

“If I had a gold star I’d give it to you.”

Keith rolled his eyes, walking past him and into the cabin to retrieve a sweater. Though the morning was warming up, there was still a slight bite to the wind, and without his jacket Keith felt more exposed than he would have liked. Shiro was waiting when he returned.

“Where were you by the way?”
Keith shrugged, turning away so his face wouldn’t betray him. He began to make his way to the dining hall, and Shiro followed.

“Just went for a walk.”

“Did you go to the infirmary? To see Lance?”

“No.” He replied a little too quickly, and hoped his voice sounded more convincing than it felt. Shiro seemed skeptical.

“Hmm...” he adjusted his pace to match Keith’s, and was silent for a few minutes. Keith could tell he was watching him, and made a point of staring straight ahead.

“Where’s your jacket?”

Keith felt his face flush, and shoved his hands into the front pocket of his hoodie to look more nonchalant. Shiro wasn’t having it.

“Keith...wait.” He paused, and Keith turned to see what had gotten his attention. “Is that Lance over there?”

Keith’s eyes widened, and he spun in the direction Shiro was looking.

“Where?”

And then Shiro was laughing, and Keith could feel his ears burning.

“I knew it!” the older boy said, clasping his side as he snickered. “Ouch stupid ribs, let me laugh at my hopeless little bro in peace.”

Keith would have punched him in the arm if he weren’t already in pain. As it was he shoved him lightly and continued walking, trying desperately to recover from the little leap his insides had done at the mention of Lance. He was in way too deep.

Shiro jogged to catch up with him, slapping a hand down on his shoulder and pulling him into a side embrace.

“Oooo Keith you have to tell me all the details!”

“Shut up.” Keith mumbled, missing the tall collar of his jacket that he would hide in during situations like this. The hoodie didn’t provide much in terms of that. Shiro sighed giddily.

“But seriously Keith, did you apologize?”

Keith grunted in reply.

“Was that a yes?”

Another grunt.

“Wow feeling suddenly shy are we? That’s fine, I’ll just ask Lance.”

Keith whirled, breaking Shiro’s grasp.

“Shiro I swear to God-”
“Which one? There’s like fifty now.”

“Why are you being so annoying!”

Shiro grinned, like he was proud of himself or something. Stupid.

“That’s my job. So...should I ask Lance or are you going to tell me.”

Keith frowned.
Fine. Two could play this game.

“How about I tell Allura you moan her name in your sleep.” Keith smirked, watching his brothers’ face pale in sudden fright. “Allura oh Allura your hair is almost as great as mine! Allura you’re so smart and pretty and I wanna kiss you oh Allura!”

Shiro’s face was a bright pink. “I do not say those things.”

“But she doesn’t know that.”

Shiro narrowed his eyes. “You would lie to the leader of this camp?” He placed a hand over his heart in mock injury. “And about your darling elder brother. Why Keith, I’m appalled. In fact, I should tell her about your fibs before they spread any further.”

Keith raised one eyebrow. Why were the people in his life so dramatic?

“Who do you think she would believe? I’m a pretty good liar. I convinced mom I was straight for like, fourteen years.”

Shiro chuckled at that, but not for the reason Keith was expecting.

“Mom never thought you were straight.”

Keith stopped and stared at his sibling.

“She so did! She was always asking me about Jan.”

“Jan? That girl you had over once to help with homework? You two sat on opposite ends of the couch and you kept ignoring her. Poor thing, I think she really liked you.”

Keith cringed at the memory. Jan had been in his grade at school, back when he was twelve or something, and had had a huge crush on him. It was annoying as all hell, but Keith had still been coming to terms with his sexuality, and figured it would be safer to just invite her over one day so his mom wouldn’t start questioning him.

It had been awful.

“Maybe so, but mom never knew. She was surprised when I told her the truth.”

Shiro hummed. “Was she though?”

Keith frowned, thinking back to when he had finally told his mom that he might be gay. She had been sitting on the couch reading when he sat down beside her, revealing his secret in hushed tones. He remembered her not saying much at first, then wrapping him up in a hug and telling him that she was proud of him.

Didn’t that count as surprised?
“She knew for a long time,” Shiro explained, “she was just waiting for you to realize.”

Keith was silent; a variety of emotions stirring in his gut. It all seemed so long ago, but in reality his mother’s passing had only been a month or so prior. They hadn’t really had time to grieve. Not properly anyways.

Shiro must have sensed his change in demeanor, for his own voice became thoughtful as he spoke again.

“I miss her. But this is what she wanted for you; us. To be safe, and happy. That was all she ever wanted.”

Keith nodded, not fully trusting his voice. His jaw was starting to hurt as well, which tended to happen when he was holding back tears.

And then Shiro was hugging him.

It only lasted a moment, but that was all Keith needed. Just a brief reassurance that they weren’t alone; that they had each other.
Keith was grateful for that.

“Also,” Shiro went on as they began to walk again, “I think she would have liked Lance.”

Keith opened his mouth to retort, but shut it after a moment. There was no use arguing about it anymore. Shiro knew, and Keith was apparently a terrible actor, but what else was new.

So instead he smiled.

“You think so?” he asked, and Shiro nodded.

“Yeah. He’s perfect for you. All smiles and good humour to your broody scowls. Good fashion sense, nice friends. He’s like the Forever 21 to your Hot Topic.”

“Shut up! I went in there once!”

“And I’ll never let you forget it.”

Keith wanted to defend himself further, but something about what Shiro had said was bothering him.

“Shiro...I know they say opposites attract and all, but what if you’re right? What if I’m too different from him?”

A hand rested firmly on his shoulder, and Keith raised his eyes to meet those of his brother’s.

“I think you and Lance have a lot in common, and you just need to figure those things out. I think that, behind the façade, Lance is actually pretty complex, and trying to read you is like asking a blind man to solve a rubix cube.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?!!”

Shiro chuckled. “My point is, you guys have the potential to balance each other out, and you just need to sort out your differences. The two of you would make a good team.”

Keith had always been amazed by Shiro’s ability to read people, and though he didn’t know that Keith and Lance had already had a bonding moment of sorts, it felt nice to hear his brother’s
thoughts on the matter. He would never admit it out loud, but Keith always took Shiro’s advice to heart.

“Plus, he could help you with your hair. It really needs some work.” Shiro ruffled it to make a point, and Keith shoved his hand away.

“Piss off,” he replied, smiling despite himself. They had come to a fork in the path, and Shiro paused. The dining hall was right up ahead, but the older boy was staring to the left, where the head cabin was located. Keith knew right away what his brother was thinking.

“Yes Shiro that’s a great idea, I’m sure Allura would love some breakfast.”

Shiro turned to him sharply, his eyebrows raised in confusion.

“How did you know-” he stopped, seeing the smirk in Keith’s face. “Oh. I get it. Touché.”

Keith was chuckling. Seeing Shiro get flustered over someone was hilarious, especially since he rarely lost his composure. “I wasn’t joking,” he went on, which was only partially true. Sure, teasing Shiro about his obvious crush on Allura was fun and all, but not when he had his own ammunition. The last thing Keith needed was his loud, obnoxious, annoyance of a brother to go up to Lance and start gushing over him.

Definitely no.

But Shiro deserved to be happy, and had been supportive enough about Keith’s own crush, so it was only fair to reciprocate. Besides, breakfast was an essential part of the day. How could Allura possibly say no?

Shiro looked from him to the path then back again, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“Wish me luck,” he said, and promptly turned to trot down the trail towards the head cabin.

Keith watched him go, noticing the slight spring to his brother’s step.

What a nerd.

It wasn’t until he reached the dining hall entrance that Keith realized that without Shiro with him, he was completely at the mercy of everyone’s stares.

Literally everyone.

The hall wasn’t full thankfully, but there was enough people to notice a sudden halt in conversation, which is exactly what happened as soon as Keith stepped foot inside. Every pair of eyes was suddenly upon him; some wide with either fear or shock, others narrowed in suspicion. Even the nymphs and satyrs stopped what they were doing to ogle him.

Keith really missed his jacket. He felt entirely too exposed and uncomfortable, and was about to turn and leave when he spotted him.

He was sitting near the wall, his back to him, with Hunk and Sabrina sitting on the other side of the table. He had changed into proper clothing, and his hair looked a bit wet, though it was difficult to tell from a distance. Keith also noted with some disappointment that Lance wasn’t wearing his jacket.

That was probably for the best though, judging from everyone’s reaction to him even being in the same room.

His pulse quickened, the sudden adrenaline of seeing Lance negating the nervous tension the
others were providing. Keith clenched his fists, not knowing what to do. Should he approach him? Say hey? Or would that be weird? Would it be weird if he didn’t do anything? Just grab some breakfast and sit somewhere quiet?

_Oh god people are starting to look at me funny...._

Keith was saved from his thoughts by that lopsided grin he was beginning to really enjoy seeing as Lance turned towards him. He made to stand when Sabrina suddenly tugged on the sleeve of his shirt and whispered something in his ear. Lance’s eyes went wide, but Keith couldn’t decipher from what. He saw Hunk start to shake his head as Sabrina leaned over and said something to him as well.

Keith gulped, much too uncomfortable.

Lance turned back to him, his face a bit red and eyes darting around the room before finally resting on Keith. He began to walk towards him, and Keith could feel his heart rate skyrocket. As much as he wanted to credit that all to Lance, it was also partially due to the fact that everyone in the room was now watching the two of them, and Hunk’s worried expression was making Keith feel sick to his stomach.

_Oh god...what is going on...is he going to break up with me? But we aren’t even dating so how could he? Is this where he tells me to leave...that it was a mistake? Oh god oh god oh god oh-

“Hey.”

Keith blinked, the sound of Lance’s voice grounding him.

“Hi-” he cleared his throat, appalled that the word had come out as more of a squeak. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Lance chuckled, his cheeks pink. He rubbed the back of his neck nervously, and Keith felt his stomach plummet.

This was it.

This was where Lance told him to get lost.

“Um...this is going to sound weird...”

Any second now...

“But I sort of lost a bet. And now I have to kiss you.”

There it was—wait. What?

“Um...”

“It was before you got here, and long story short I owe Sabrina. She’s decided to collect by daring me to kiss you.” Lance’s voice was low and hushed, so that people nearby wouldn’t be able to hear what he was saying easily. Keith could see Sabrina in the background, craning her head to see what they were up to, but he didn’t care.

He was over the moon.

Of course Lance wouldn’t ask him to leave. Their feelings were mutual; they had already established that. He felt like laughing at his own foolishness.
“A kiss?”

Lance’s face was turning redder by the minute, and he was avoiding eye contact with Keith still. Cute.

“Yeah...she gets pretty serious about these kinds of things so I just wanted to make sure it was ok first. Um,” he trailed off, sighing slowly and staring at the floor. “I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable or anything, or force you to do something you didn’t want to do.”

Keith stared at him. Why wouldn’t it be ok? Was Lance that insecure about himself? About them? Who had hurt this boy to make him doubt when someone showed feelings towards him?

Granted, Keith had been in the same boat mere moments before, but the way Lance was acting was almost like he was terrified of rejection, whereas Keith had been more scared of what others would think.

Sort of selfish now that he thought about it. Lance deserved to be showered in praise and love and all sorts of attention, and Keith was more than willing.

He smiled, crossing his arms nonchalantly.

“Does it have to be you that kisses me?”

Lance’s head snapped up at that, his eyes wide and panicked, and Keith cursed himself. He elaborated before Lance could say anything.

“Or can it be me that kisses you?”

That did the trick. Lance’s mouth dropped open, his ears and neck burning as he gaped at Keith. Wow, this guy really doesn’t know how to handle being flirted with. I’ll have to remember that.

“I, uh-” he broke off as Keith closed the space between them, grabbing hold of Lance’s shirt and pulling his face down. The silence was thick as their lips met, and Keith could feel the unblinking stares of everyone’s eyes as they watched the scene unfold.

But Keith didn’t care, because he was kissing Lance again.

Lance: who tasted like spearmint. Who smelled fresh and fruity and alive. Who felt like he just belonged in Keith’s arms, the warmth radiating off of him in pleasant waves that Keith could drown in.

Yeah, kissing Lance was amazing.

And what was even better was when Lance relaxed, allowing himself to be overcome by the feelings their lips were creating. His hands reached around the back of Keith’s neck; fingers entangling in the longer hair there. Keith bit back a groan, allowing his own arms to tighten around Lance’s torso.

Hell, if he was going to kiss in public, he was going to make it damn memorable.

In one fluid motion he pivoted, knocking Lance off balance and tipping him forward, his hold tightening around the other boy as gravity began to come into play. Lance let out a startled yelp at the motion, his own grip around Keith’s neck tensing in alarm as he was subjected to the dip. Keith could feel Lance trying to pull away out of startled confusion, but
didn’t allow the gap.

You wanted a kiss? Here it is.

Somewhere in the background someone whooped excitedly, the noise acting as encouragement, and Keith deepened the kiss. His own mind was already too far gone to be self-conscious of the people watching them anymore, and Lance was giving him the most incredible sensations.

When the child of Aphrodite’s lips parted slightly, either to catch a breath or to say something, Keith leapt at the opportunity, and slid his tongue into the other boy’s mouth. Lance squeaked, but didn’t oppose the intrusion, and after a moment his own tongue reached out tentatively to greet him.

Keith shivered, every nerve in his body on high alert and screaming one name: Lance.

He didn’t think he could stop.
Didn’t think he ever wanted to.

But then a very familiar voice broke through the haze in his mind, and Keith nearly choked.

“That’s my brother! Woo!”

Keith’s head jerked up, revealing a very dazed looking Lance, as well as two figures standing in the doorway. Shiro was beaming, but Allura’s face was unreadable.

Keith panicked, his grip loosening around Lance, who fell to the floor with a loud thud.

“Ack!”

Keith realized what he had done, and quickly bent to see if the guy he had just been passionately making out with was alright. His face flushed in embarrassment; the adrenaline from kissing Lance fading fast as the realization of what he just done made itself known.

“Sorry! Sorry, are you ok?”

Lance was rubbing his elbow, but grinned up at Keith in reply.

“I mean, not the most romantic way for that kiss to end, but,” he winked, “I guess we’ll just need to practice.”

And then Keith was blushing.
This guy!
How dare he use his own pickup line against him! Uncalled for!

He helped the child of Aphrodite to his feet, wanting to keep hold of his hand but releasing it once Lance was standing to glance up at Shiro nervously. His brother was still beaming, but Keith shot him a look that said ‘don’t say a word or else’.

Shiro was about to reply when a loud screech made them all turn abruptly towards the back of the building. Sabrina was barreling towards them, her arms spread wide as she collided with Lance in a hug.

“I KNEW IT! I SO CALLED THAT!” she turned to Keith then, wrapping her arms around him and squeezing tightly. “THAT WAS SO FREAKIN HOT OH MY GODS!”
She pulled away, looking between the two of them excitedly. Keith glanced around nervously, noticing how the other campers faces were going from confused to slightly amused. The atmosphere in the dining hall was shifting as well; the previous one, which was bordering hostility, was now lighter. Happier.

Leave it to Sabrina to change the minds of everyone in the room. Part of the reason Keith had initiated the kiss was to show the nearby campers that Lance wasn’t forcing him to do it. That this was his own choice; not the result of Charmspeak.

But having Sabrina so outwardly supportive, if not overwhelmingly ecstatic, just acted to further solidify his point.

That there was nothing to worry about. They were fine.

At least, that’s what he wanted to think.

“Keith you HAVE to tell me where you learned that move. That was,” she paused, gesturing around the room dramatically, “probably the smoothest shit this camp has ever witnessed. And that’s coming from a child of Aphrodite. Our specialty is romance.”

She smirked, flipping her hair over her shoulder as she appraised him, then punched Lance lightly in the arm.

“Hades, I’m almost jealous.”

Keith couldn’t help himself. A small smile broke out on his face, and he glanced nervously towards Lance, who was watching him with an expression akin to absolute adoration.

They made eye contact, and quickly looked away from each other, suddenly embarrassed.

Sabrina laughed.

“Aweh you guys are too cute!”

Lance shoved her gently, his face beet red as he bit back a grin. Hunk approached them then, a looked of bewilderment on his face.

“Yeah, um...what was that? Can someone please explain what just happened?! I thought you two hated each other!”

“As did I.”

Keith froze, turning slowly with the rest of them to look back at Allura. She was standing behind Shiro, and Keith had completely forgotten she was there.

Oh god. What was she going to think?!

Shiro’s smile faded as he looked from her to the rest of them and back.

“Allura~” he began, but she held up a hand to silence him.

“Allura, Keith,” her eyes pierced through both of them, and Keith swallowed hard. “May I speak with the two of you?”

It hadn’t been a request. Everyone was silent as they nodded quickly, not daring to look at each
other as they followed Allura out of the hall, back towards the main cabin. Shiro joined them after a moment’s hesitation.

He jogged to catch up to Allura, and began talking to her in hushed tones.

“Allura is there something wrong?”

Keith didn’t hear the reply, choosing instead to slow his own pace to allow a moment to speak with Lance. Were they in trouble? Had they done something wrong? The last thing he wanted was to make more problems for the boy.

Lance thankfully took note of what he was doing, shortening his own stride to fall back alongside Keith. Unfortunately they didn’t get the chance to speak, as Lance’s short friend, Pidge he recalled, ran up to them waving.

“Hey Lance, Keith, where you guys heading?”

Keith grumbled, not wanting another distraction, but Lance replied happily.

“Oh you know, in trouble with the big boss once again.”

“What? Why!”

“Not sure actually. Might have something to do with Keith kissing me but who knows.”

Pidge’s eyes widened in shock, looking from Lance to Keith and back.

“He WHAT!”

Lance smirked proudly, looking at Keith from the corner of his eye. Keith made a point of staring at the ground, the embarrassment of his actions overwhelming.

Oh god. So many people had seen him kiss Lance. So much for keeping a low profile. Now everyone knew.

Keith sighed.

Oh well.

“Why do I always miss all the action?!” Pidge was saying, and Lance chuckled.

“I’m sure Hunk and Sabrina will fill you in. We have to get going or else Allura will bite our heads off.”

Lance pointed in the direction the other two had gone, the gap between their groups growing larger. They would need to hurry to catch up. So much for getting the chance to talk.

“I’ll see you later Pidge,” Lance said, and motioned for Keith to join him as they jogged the rest of the way. Keith turned in time to see Pidge give him a very smug look, before shooting him a wink and heading into the dining hall.

Shiro and Allura were both waiting near the steps leading into the main cabin when they reached them, and Keith couldn’t tell how their conversation had gone. He was too worried about his own situation to ponder much.

They headed up to Allura’s office in relative silence, no one daring to speak.
She motioned for Lance and Keith to take the seats in front of her desk before sitting down across from them. Shiro hovered in the back.

“So,” she began, forming a steeple with her hands. “Would someone like to explain what it was that happened just then?”

Lance and Keith began to speak at the same time, their words overlapping.

“I lost a bet with Sabrina, you know how those go,”

“Lance said he had to kiss me,”

“-guessing it was payback for the whole daring her to kiss Coran situation a while ago-”

“-for some dare or something, but I didn’t want people thinking he was controlling me-”

“-wait, did you know about the Coran thing?-”

“-since the arena situation really put people on edge-”

“Forget everything I just said about Coran that was definitely not my doing-”

“-and I wanted to kiss him!”

Lance turned to him then, his eyebrows quirked.

“Really?”

Keith shrugged, feeling the blush on his face but paying it no mind.

“Obviously.”

Allura cleared her throat, regaining their attention. She rubbed her temples, and sighed heavily.

“Right, so what I got from that was Lance,” she pointed to him, “you were dared to kiss Keith,” the finger moved towards him, “by Sabrina, because you lost a bet.”

Lance nodded, opening his mouth to speak, but Allura was quicker.

“And Keith,” her eyes bore into his skull. “You took that opportunity to show everyone else in the room that Lance wasn’t forcing you to kiss him. To prove what exactly?”

Keith gulped, looking from Allura to Lance, who were both watching him expectantly.

“I uh...I know that a lot of people in this camp will be scared of his powers, and not understand them. And I figured if Lance kissed me they would think he was controlling me, or something.” He shrugged, hoping the nonchalant gesture would cover up his racing heart.

He could feel the blood rushing into his face as well; feel Lance’s eyes on him. He looked over after a moment, staring into those startlingly blue eyes.

“Also, I wanted to. Because I like him.”

Lance beamed, his cheeks a bright pink as he stared back at Keith in wonder.

“Aww Keith!”
It wasn’t Lance who spoke.
Keith froze, having completely forgotten that Shiro was in the room with them, and turned to glare at his older brother.

“Get out! Why are you even here!”

“Because I wanted to make sure you were ok?”

“I’d be a lot better if you would leave.” Keith could feel the heat in his face. Oh god why had Shiro been there to hear that!

“But I want to hear my baby brother talk about his feelings!”

“Shiro I swear to god I will cut off your bangs in your sleep.”

His brother gasped, a hand rising protectively to his forehead. He spoke his mock fear.

“You wouldn’t!”

Allura intervened before Keith could reply.

“Gentlemen, if we could get back to the matter at hand.”

Keith crossed his arms.

“I’m not saying anything else until Shiro leaves.”

Allura looked towards him, then to Shiro, and raised her eyebrows in a ‘you heard him’ sort of way.
Shiro pouted.

“Aw but I wanna stay!”

Keith turned to glare at him once again.

“What are you, six?”

“Technically, yes.” Shiro replied, a smug expression plastered on his face. Keith stuck his tongue out in reply, and beside him Lance chuckled. Even Allura was wearing a faint smile as she spoke.

“All right, Shiro,” her voice softened. “Could you please wait outside? I’ll join you for breakfast after this is done.”

Shiro beamed, nodding once before ruffling Keith’s hair and exiting the room. He closed the door behind him with a soft thud, and Keith heaved a sigh.

Good.

“Now then,” Allura continued, “I’m guessing you two have sorted things out between you, correct?”

They both nodded, Keith thinking back to the tree house and the cuddling and, yeah....Allura didn’t need to know about any of that please and thanks.

Unfortunately the daughter of Athena made it her business to know things, leading to a barrage of uncomfortable questions.
“When did this happen?”

“Last night,” said Lance, proceeding to answer the rest of her inquiries as vaguely as possible.

“He came to visit you in the infirmary?”

“No, I left.”

“Why?”

“Bad dream.”

“About what exactly?”

Lance hesitated for a moment, before slapping on a grin and winking.

“You wouldn’t go on a date with me. Flat out refused. It was dreadful.”

Keith looked over at him slowly, his eyes narrowed in disbelief. Allura wore a similar expression.

“You do realize this meeting is about your relationship with Keith here.” She gestured over to the boy in question, who felt his face burn.

Relationship...yikes. That was a mouthful of a word.

Lance smiled crookedly, shrugging offhandedly.

“I’ll always have time for you girl.”

Allura simply rolled her eyes in reply, but Keith could see the brief flash of relief that washed over Lance as she went on, topic dropped. Why didn’t he want to talk about his memory returning?

“Moving on then,” she turned to Keith. “Why were you up and about so late at night?”

Keith had been sitting on his hands to keep them from fidgeting, and could feel them grow clammy under Allura’s piercing gaze.

*Just keep your answers short and sweet.*

“Couldn’t sleep.” He managed to say, and Allura raised a delicate eyebrow.

“So you were walking around camp and ran into Lance? Then you two apologized?”

*No.*

“Yes.” Both Lance and Keith had spoken at the same time, which would normally have solidified their story with the mutual consensus, but Allura didn’t look convinced. She analyzed them for a few moments, probably debating if it was worth pursuing the topic, before finally sighing.

“Well, as long as you two won’t be at each other’s throats constantly-”

“Throats no, but I make no guarantee about the rest of him,” Lance interrupted, and Keith nearly choked. He managed to pass it off as a cough, but the smirk on Lance’s was dripping in triumph.

Damn.

This was the flirty Lance Keith had to be wary of.
Allura saved him by pulling out a very familiar weapon and placing it on the table in front of them, garnering both their attention.

“Hey!” Keith’s voice was louder than he had wanted, and he quickly settled himself before continuing. “Do I get my sword back?”

Allura frowned, which made his stomach drop.

“I have good news and bad news.” That was always a great way to start a conversation. Keith studied the Blade of Marmora, his mother’s weapon, and felt his hopes ebbing away. “Which do you want to hear first?”

“Good news.” It was Lance who had spoken, seeing the growing disappointment on Keith’s face. Allura nodded.

“I’ve figured out why those giants were so close to our borders.” She paused, letting the information sink in, but Lance just shrugged.

“That’s neat.”

Allura huffed, and Keith would have thought that very uncharacteristic of such a dignified leader, but he didn’t her that well yet. Shiro would have found it cute.

“Neat?! Lance this is more than just ‘neat’! I’ve been working tirelessly trying to figure out if our borders were weakening or if there was some flaw in our defences, and I think I’ve finally found it, and all I get is ‘neat’?!”

Lance shrugged, touching the scabbard of the sword in front of them idly.

“Well, you were going to figure it out eventually, so I’m not that surprised.”

Allura paused, her mouth open with a fresh argument, but no sound came out. Her face relaxed into a small smile, and something similar to gratitude passed along her features. Keith looked over at Lance, who was still lazily inspecting the Blade of Marmora, and found himself smiling as well.

It had been sort of an offhand comment, like saying Allura figuring out the mystery of the giants was the most obvious thing in the world. Leave it to Lance to know just what to say.

“So what’s the scoop?” he continued after a few moments of silence. Allura blinked, brought out of her thoughts; a look of excitement turning her smile into a wide grin. Oh boy, Shiro was going to be so jealous he was missing that.

“Well, you were going to figure it out eventually, so I’m not that surprised.”

The child of Ares blanched, eyebrows lowering in confusion as he regarded Allura. Was she blaming him?!

“Excuse me?” he asked, and even Lance looked defensive; staring at Allura in bewilderment.

“No, no,” she shook her head, still smiling, and gestured to the sword in front of them. “Not you specifically Keith, but your weapon. The Blade of Marmora was the reason behind the attacks.”

The two boys were silent, not sure what to make of the new information. Allura elaborated.

“I wasn’t sure at first, even after confirming that this was in fact a Blade of Marmora, until after the events at the arena. There was a spike in monster activity identified along the eastern edge of the
“Could that just be a coincidence?” Lance asked, for which Keith was grateful. He still wasn’t keen on what he had let happen at the arena, and 'rage' seemed much too docile a term.

“I considered that, but the spike was too timely to pass off as simple happenstance. Several monsters of higher caliber were spotted within range of the borders, completely oblivious to the deterring mechanisms I have in place. Several tree nymphs in the area reported ‘almost trance-like’ behaviour lasting for several minutes. After that they sort of cleared off on their own.”

“Right, but what does that have to do with my sword?” Keith was finding his patience wearing thin. Sure it was great that Allura had solved the monster mystery, but it wasn’t the most interesting topic, and Keith had other things he would much rather be doing. He also wanted his mother’s weapon back at his side.

“Everything,” Allura replied, point blank. “I did a little digging and asking around for information about the giant attack that brought you and Shiro to this camp. And the same result was found. Trance-like state during the same period of time you would have been fighting, drawing monsters to the location you were both found.”

There was a few beats of silence as Keith processed this. A thought had occurred to him, but it was uncomfortable to think about, and he wasn’t keen on bringing it up. Unfortunately, Lance had been thinking the same thing, and hesitantly asked.

“But...what if that was just Keith? What if they were drawn to him because of his power?”

Right.
That.

Blaming the sword was fine and everything, but what if the real reason behind the increased monster activity was simpler than that. What if he was the cause? He had been fighting during both events, so it coincided, and there was that whole matter of the glowing red aura that had surrounded him during both cases as well. There was no way that wasn’t related.

What if he had to leave the camp to ensure everyone’s safety?
Could he do that?

Before, yes. Definitely.

But now...now that Shiro was happier and finally safe, Keith wasn’t willing to jeopardize that. And then there was the matter of the boy sitting beside him.

Keith looked over at Lance, his own thoughts mirrored on the son of Aphrodite’s.

Leaving would suck.

“I considered that as well,” Allura’s voice made them both turn. She was staring at a spot above Keith’s head as she continued.

“Keith does show immense power, especially with the blessing of Ares, and coupled with the Blade of Marmora, it makes for a large energy source that monsters would be drawn to.”

Oh. Perfect.
“However,” Allura went on, “there have been a number of demigods at this camp that have had a godly blessing, children of Ares included, and nothing of this scale was ever reported. So I have reason to believe that it’s the sword that’s the key.” She stood, taking the blade in her hands and turning it over in both hands.

“I don’t know much about this weapon, but from what I have been able to uncover, it accentuates the anger of the user. I’m not sure if it only works on those with Ares blood in their veins, or if it could be harnessed by any demigod, or even human, seeing as your mother wielded it. However,” she placed the sword back down and moved to a shelf in the corner of the room, where she retrieved a large, ancient looking book and set it down in front of them.

Lance leaned forward to examine it better, but Keith held back. Whatever knowledge the book contained that was pertinent to his sword would be explained by Allura. He wasn’t interested in anything else.

“Woah, Allura,” Lance was saying, his long body bent over the desk to get a better look.

Oh lord. Since when were his legs that long? And his back?! Keith did not remember those muscles ever being that defined. And he should know. He had his hands all over Lance’s back when they were in the treehouse mere hours ago.

And speaking of back, damn...the child of Aphrodite had a really great ass. Especially now that it was accentuated as the boy leaned further across the desk to reach out and touch the book.

Keith averted his eyes to preserve his own sense of innocence, thanking whatever gods existed that both Lance and Allura hadn’t noticed his face redden as he crossed his legs.

“This thing is cool!” Lance exclaimed, blissfully oblivious.

Allura swatted away his hand, bringing a pout to the boys’ face.

“It’s very old, and contains histories beyond the life of this camp. I don’t need you meddling about with it.”

Lance scoffed, sitting back in his seat with a graceful thud.

“Meddle? Me? When have I ever meddled? Don’t answer that.” He added quickly in response to Allura opening her mouth. She smiled instead, turning her attention back to the book.

“I was doing some research on the Blade of Marmora when I stumbled across this entry.” She cleared her throat before proceeding to read it aloud.

“‘The Blade, said to be infused with the blood of his enemies, was one of the God Ares’s greatest accomplishments. Named after a lover killed by a foe in jest, Ares asked Hephaestus to forge him a weapon worthy of her name, which he would use to obliterate his enemies. Hephaestus refused, saying that’ blah blah blah...’” Allura mumbled, trailing off briefly as her finger skimmed the page. “Here it is: ‘the Blade of Marmora, forged from hatred, was capable of destroying any foe, but what made it so powerful was its ability to seize the regenerative powers of its victims. Mighty beasts would fall, never to reappear’.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Lance interjected, looking from Keith to the Allura and back.

“It would be, except that the blade wasn’t specific to monsters. It was discovered that Gods were susceptible to the same fate, leading to Zeus demanding it be destroyed. It would wreak havoc should it fall into the wrong hands.’”
“Oh...yikes.”

“Yes indeed,” Allura continued. “Ares obeyed begrudgingly, but managed to keep a few of the shards and forge lesser versions of the Blade of Marmora. His own spearhead was once part of the original sword. Though no longer able to vanquish beasts and gods, the weapons still held an immense amount of power, and monsters still actively sought it.” She took a breath, eyes skimming the pages of the ancient text.

“There was some sort of energy it gave off that was easily traced by the beasts. Not that Ares minded; he welcomed any and every chance of a fight. But it’s less desirable when you’re a demigod trying to survive out in the world.” She examined the book a final time to ensure she had said everything, then closed the cover.

“It is my belief that the Blade of Marmora attracted those giants to you. Of course we have to test it, but I’m fairly certain that it’s the sword that was behind it all.”

Lance crossed his arms as he frowned.

“What do you mean ‘test’?” he looked over at Keith, who was staring at the sword in front of him. Something bothering him.

“I just want to make sure that I’m one hundred percent correct. We’ll do a controlled test outside the borders-”

“Wait you’re going to attract monsters here for him to fight?! That’s way too dangerous!” Lance was standing now, and Keith would have been flattered at his concern over his safety, but the thought was beginning to nag at him.

“It’s fine,” he said, and both head’s shot towards him. “I’ll do it. Whatever. But Allura,” he swallowed, hoping her reply wouldn’t confirm his suspicions.

“You said before that this sword attracts monsters, and we’re going to test if it’s just for me or not, but do you think humans would be affected by it as well? Like if my mom...” he trailed off, but Allura understood. She sighed.

“There’s a good chance, yes.”

Keith’s heart sunk deep into the pits of his stomach. His whole life his mother had been protecting him, fighting off monsters with that cursed blade, and to find out now that her life could have been so much easier without it. And who had given it to her in the first place?

Lance was staring at the two of them in confusion.

“Wait, someone fill me in. What does that mean?”

“It means,” Keith spat out, “that I’m going to kill my father.”

He balled his fists to keep them from shaking, the anger rising in his chest as he thought about everything he wanted to do to Ares. This was his fault.

His mother’s death, Shiro’s injuries, both their lives devoted to keeping him safe and ignorant. Keith was to blame for all of that, and he would never forgive himself, but knowing now that the sword his mom had been using to defend him had been calling all sorts of vile creatures to her location? That her death had basically been in vain?

That was too much.
If it hadn’t of been for Ares, none of this would have happened.

Lance was gaping at him, and even Allura looked a little panicked at his proclamation.

He couldn’t stand to be in the same room as the blade anymore, and stood abruptly, heading straight for the door.

“Keith! Wait you can’t!” Lance was saying, and Keith felt something tug at his sleeve. He looked down and saw Lance’s delicate fingers curled into the fabric of his sweater. He wanted to stay; to talk things out.

But he could feel the energy pulsating off the weapon on Allura’s desk; hear it beckoning to him. Taunting him.

He had to leave.

“Let go,” he said as calmly as he could. Lance’s grip tightened.

“Keith you can’t just say stuff like that you-”

“Lance let go of me right now!” His voice was louder than he had wanted, and Lance flinched. Keith looked away, yanking his arm out of his grasp and shoving his way out the door. He hated himself for making Lance worry. Hated himself even more for yelling at him. But the rage in his gut was twisting his innards; his vision going red with each blink.

Ares was to blame. This was all his fault.
He was the reason Keith was born. The reason his mom was dead. The reason Shiro was still hurt.
The reason...the reason!

Burning hot anger was still bubbling away in his stomach, making his hands shake and mind whirl, the Blade of Marmora laughing at him as he fought against its power. It was mocking him. Teasing him. Provoking his anger as it called out his name, begging him to use it.

He needed to get away.

And then suddenly Keith was running out of the cabin, desperate to leave the painful truths behind.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again my lovely readers :)

Yes, I know what I said about the angst...and that there would be more fluff....and I'm not going back on that promise. There will be more fluff. Lots.
Believe me.

Also an Allura chapter hopefully so maybe a bit of a heart-to-heart between the daughter of Athena and son of Aphrodite? Who knows...(I know.)

Also I suck at flirting so if you guys have any recommendations for how Lance and Keith can one-up each other in compliments then please. Help a girl out.

Leave the kudos and comments as always :) Love getting the little bursts of encouragement!
Hugs solve most problems that words cannot

Chapter Summary

And finally, a bonding moment between Lance and Allura...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Keith! Wait-”

“Lance, let him go.” Allura’s voice was firm enough to make the boy pause at the door, his face slowly turning to stare at her in disbelief.

“But you heard him! He’s going to get blasted by Ares or something if I don’t stop him!”

Allura sighed heavily, taking the Blade of Marmora and leaning it against the wall behind her desk. She would deal with that later.

“Keith needs to sort that out for himself.”

“But-”

“Lance.” She placed a hand on his shoulder, but he didn’t notice, his attention instead on the door Keith had just existed from. It warmed her heart to see the child of Aphrodite so concerned over their newest camper, and she wanted to let Lance comfort him, but there was something she needed to discuss first.

“Keith will be alright. He just needs time to adjust. Let him get his head around things.”

Lance’s shoulders dropped as he exhaled and turned to face her once again. His expression was stern as he spoke.
“Allura, you heard him. He said he was going to kill Ares. I can’t let my boyfriend get blasted off the face of the Earth in a ball of flames before we’ve even had an official first date!”

Allura bit back a smile. The worry in Lance’s voice was apparent, and smiling maybe wasn’t appropriate for the current situation, but she couldn’t help herself. It had been a long time since she had seen Lance get so worked up over someone that wasn’t Hunk, Pidge or even Sabrina. She wondered what Keith would make of the whole ‘boyfriend’ title, or if Lance even realized he had called him such.

But the boy was watching her with concern, waiting for either an argument or reassurance, and she decided on the latter.

“There have been plenty of kids come into this camp with parental issues. I’ve heard my fair share of death threats and hateful comments with little to no retaliation on the God’s parts,” she paused in thought. “Well, there was that one time, but...” she trailed off, hoping to distract Lance with the purposefully vague comment, but the child of Aphrodite wasn’t having it.

His lower lip was wedged between his teeth as his eyes scanned the doorframe again, most likely hoping that Keith would make a reappearance. It was rare for Lance to outwardly display his true thoughts, usually faking confidence to hide insecurities and keep up the cool, calm and collected façade. But Allura had known him long enough to identify when his smiles were genuine or forced.

She usually tried to make an effort to reach out whenever she noticed the way his eyes didn’t light up or crinkle at the edges like they normally did when he flashed his teeth, but there were so many responsibilities as camp leader that finding the time to have a half-decent conversation with anyone was near impossible. And whenever she actually did find time, the moment was gone. Lance would evade her prodding questions and she would just end up dropping the subject. But not this time.

Seeing Lance so outwardly distraught over someone was...refreshing? No, that wasn’t right. Lance cared deeply about people; strangers and friends alike, and it wasn’t like he never showed emotion.

Hades, Lance was all about emotion.

But rarely true emotion.

Raw emotion.
Now was her chance to have an actual conversation with him. About Keith, and the wounds he had suffered, especially since the giants attack. She had noticed the changes in his behaviour, however subtle, and knew there was something he was hiding from her.

“Lance,” she began, and when he didn’t respond she moved to stand in front of him, forcing his attention away from the door. “Lance. He will be alright. Trust me.”

The boy stared into her eyes, and she noticed a shift in the deep blues of his irises. He was searching for something in her face; a truth to her words that he could cling to. It was intense, and when he finally lowered his gaze and moved to sit at her desk, Allura was almost relieved to be away from the scrutiny.

She was almost completely sure that no harm would come to the son of Ares, at least not from the God himself, and Shiro was right outside to prevent any mundane injury to his brother. But the concern that had been so clearly displayed on Lance’s face, eyes boring into hers searching for confirmation, almost made her want to run out and check herself. And that was odd, since Allura never doubted her decisions or thoughts.

*He must really care about Keith for it to be affecting me...I wonder if that’s another gift of Aphrodite’s...*

She shook her head, focusing back on the task at hand, which was getting Lance to open up to her. Solving the problem with the giants would probably prove to be the easier task.

Still, she had to try.

“So,” she began, taking her own seat across from him. He was staring down at his hands, most likely fiddling with the hem of his shirt. It was a quirk she had noticed when he had first come to camp, this need for him to always have something in his hands.

Of course, most demigods were diagnosed with ADHD, which helped their fighting skills and decision making abilities in battle, but in Lance it was almost enhanced. Or at least, he was much more fidgety than most of the other campers, and sitting still for long periods of time was something she had yet to see him do.

“I wanted to talk to you about something Lance.” He didn’t acknowledge her words, but she forged on nonetheless.
“Earlier, when you and Keith were retailing your story,” she paused briefly, noticing the flicker of realization cross his face. It was quickly replaced by a wall of calm, the child of Aphrodite already slipping behind a mask of denial.

She decided to try a different tactic.

“How are you doing, Lance?”

He looked up at her then, stunned by the sudden change in topic.

“Good?” he said after a moment, but sighed in resignation when she raised an eyebrow at him knowingly. “I’m, uh...I’ve been better.”

“You’ve been through a lot recently.”

“You can say that again,” he huffed with a smile, leaning back in his chair.

“Do you want to talk about it?” She knew she was being blunt, and could tell Lance was thrown off by her offer. It pained her a little to see.

Some camp leader she was.

“Aren’t you really busy right now?”

Yes.

“I have some free time currently.” She half expected Coran to barge into the room informing her of some major disaster or sudden appearance of the God of War attacking her campers at those words, irony always finding a way to toy with her in some way, but nothing happened. She almost sighed with relief.

Lance hummed in reply, and a silence descended.
“Your scar healed nicely,” she tried, and Lance shrugged, attention on picking at a stray splinter on his chair. Why was this so difficult?

“It suits you. Makes you look rugged and fierce.” A quick nod in reply, but nothing more. She mentally groaned.

This wasn’t working, and it was time to switch gears once more.

“Lance,” her voice was firm, and he jumped a little at the tone. “I know there’s something you aren’t telling me, so spill it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Allura’s patience was running out, and she rubbed at her temples to ward off the impeding headache.

“Lance seriously? I’m the leader of this camp. A daughter of Athena. I think I can tell when one of my campers is hiding something.”

“I’m not hiding anything!” Lance’s voice was growing louder, more agitated, and her usual calm demeanor was breaking. Why was he making this so much harder than it needed to be? She was just trying to help!

“Yes you are!” her own voice mimicking his angry tones.

“Oh my gods Allura I think I would know if I was or not.”

“And I think you would know that I would know that you are!” This was so childish, but she couldn’t help herself. Lance was being difficult, and her patience was at its’ end.

“Why do you care!?” Lance jumped up as he spoke, chair falling back behind him, and Allura fell silent.

Why did she care?
She was their leader! She was their caretaker! She made sure they were safe and protected and loved! THAT was why she cared.

“It’s my job to care,” she said instead, trying for a calmer tone. It didn’t seem to work, and Lance rolled his eyes irritably, as if he had been expecting that answer.

“It’s nothing, alright! I’m fine!” he grumbled, turning towards the door.

“You’re not fine. There’s something wrong. I know~”

Lance whirled, hands slamming down on the desk in front of them loudly.

“And HOW would YOU KNOW?!” He was breathing heavily now, and Allura flinched, not because of his tone or actions, but because of his words.

How would she know? He was one of her campers; someone she had known for a number of years now. Of course she would know when there was something wrong!

What had she done to make Lance think she wouldn’t?

Or rather, what hadn’t she done?

Allura stood slowly, and Lance pushed off the desk angrily. He turned towards the corner of the room, glaring out the small window in her office and down at the grounds below. The sudden outburst was very unlike Lance, and she wondered if maybe she had crossed a line.

She approached slowly, stopping a few feet from him so as not to crowd him.

“How would you know if there was something wrong? You’re always busy, you never have time to talk about anything, much less notice if I-” he paused for a second, “if someone was...if there was something...” he trailed off, sighing heavily, and Allura allowed herself to take a few steps closer.
It was true she rarely had time to speak with her campers, usually relying on Coran to handle most of the situations that needed an ear to listen. She knew it was selfish; she was supposed to be available whenever it was required, but her job was all consuming, and ensuring the camp remained safe was her top priority.

It was difficult.

She had been left in charge of so much at such a young age, and there were many a night that she stayed up plagued by thoughts of ‘what if’, but she was never one for pity parties. She was a facts sort of girl.

Knowledge and wisdom and truths.

And the current truth was that she had failed at her job. Here was one of her campers, feeling angry and neglected, and it was all her fault. Lance deserved better than that.

“I’m sorry, Lance,” she said, and his head lowered. She moved to his side by the window, looking down at the camp that was her charge. “I’m sorry that I made you feel this way. It was never my intention to ignore you or make you feel like I didn’t care, but Lance,” she turned to him then, and his eyes were locked on her face, downcast and blue.

“I know when there is something wrong. I may not act like I do, and that’s entirely my fault, but I always know.” She placed a hand on his arm and he glanced at it briefly before meeting her eyes. “Especially with you.”

Lance broke down, his body crumpling forward into her. Allura was startled by the sudden reaction, but managed to get her arms around him to support his weight against her smaller frame. She was stunned, feeling hot, wet tears soak into her shirt as Lance began to sob against her chest. Some instinct kicked in then, and her arms tightened around him, pulling him close and gently rocking him back and forth as he cried.

“Shhh,” she murmured, “it’s alright.”

“It’s not-” he started, then broke off with another sob. “My family, gone...my fault-”

His breathing was laboured, and she stroked his back in order to calm him down.
“Your family?” she asked, mind spinning as she pondered his meaning. And then it hit her. Lance must have remembered something about his past! But that should be a good thing, right? Unless...

“Oh Lance,” she spoke softly, and his hands clutched at her, head digging into her shoulder as gravity pulled him down.

She wasn’t sure how long they stood that way, but when he finally calmed enough for her to be able to get him to sit, her back was aching, and her calves were on fire.

Lance was a lot heavier than he looked.

She took the seat next to him, holding onto his hand as he wiped tears away from his cheeks. A broken sound halfway between a sob and a laugh escaped his lips, and he shook his head as if chastising himself.

“Sorry,” his voice garbled from crying, “that was really lame.”

“No, Lance, it’s ok to cry.” She patted the back of his hand and he looked up at her, eyes rimmed in red from crying. “Now,” she continued, “do you want to talk about it?”

Coran entered the room suddenly, the door having not been closed all the way. He stood in the entrance and Allura shot him a look that screamed ‘not now!’

“There’s been an incident-” he began, and she held up a finger for silence.

“Is the camp being attacked?”

Coran blinked, “well, no-”

“Are one of the campers hurt?”

“No I-”

“Is something on fire, growing vines inexplicably, being electrocuted, drowned, or shrouded in darkness? Is there an angry god outside rampaging around? Have the Pegasi gotten loose again?”
Coran fiddled with his mustache.

“Not that I’m aware of,” he managed, before Allura cut him off.

“Then it can wait.”

The man looked ready to protest, but his eyes fell upon Lance, who was staring at the floor sullenly, and he nodded once.

“Understood. I’ll deal with it myself.”

“Thank you,” she said as he left, closing the door shut behind him. Lance was smiling softly as she turned back to him, a look of admiration on his face.

“Are you sure?” he asked after a moment, and she nodded, squeezing his hand in hers.

“I’m here for you.”

Lance nodded, swallowing hard before speaking.

“Um,” he began, then took a deep breath to steady himself. “I started remembering things, about my family, and life before camp.”

She knew it, but didn’t say so as he went on.

“It all started when I got knocked in the noggin,” he tapped the scar on his head lightly. “My dreams felt more...personal. Familiar almost. And I kept having these flashbacks.” Lance sighed again, staring down at his hands, which were still being held by Allura.

“Then after the fight with Keith in the arena, they came back in full force. I remember everything.”
“That’s why you were wandering camp so late. That’s when you met up with Keith,” Allura stated, and Lance winced.

“Yes,” he leaned forward, eyes pleading, “but don’t get mad at him for anything. He was feeling guilty about the whole arena thing and couldn’t sleep. So we just talked.”

Allura hummed in thought. She still felt like there was a detail to his story missing, but decided it wasn’t as important to learn. Lance could have secrets, just as long as they didn’t impact his everyday life.

Like this one.

“So,” she began tentatively, “what can you tell me about your past? What do you know?”

Lance bit his bottom lip to keep it from quivering, and took a few breaths to keep steady. That couldn’t be a good sign...

“My dad, he um,” Lance broke off, but was able to keep going after a moment. “We were searching for something. Running from something. He tried to fight the creatures off, but I don’t think he made it. And, my sister,” he was rambling now, but Allura didn’t dare interrupt. “She had Charmspeak, like me, but her gifts were way more powerful than mine. She thought she could help, but something must have happened, because the next thing I knew she was commanding me to run away. I had no choice! I didn’t want to but-” his breath was shaky as he exhaled, searching Allura’s face. “I fell, and must have hit my head, because the next thing I knew I was in your camp. Allura,” his voice was pleading and strained, “do you know anything about what happened that night?”

She was silent; she didn’t know what to do, how to feel, and the logical side of her brain was fighting for control. Lance had a sister? With Charmspeak? He was watching her closely, hopeful and fearful all at the same time, but she had no answers to provide, or at least, not ones he would like. Still, she had nothing else to offer.

“I don’t know much about what happened the night you came into my camp. I was still new to the position, and it was the first major incident to occur here. I was,” she searched for a better word, but none came to mind. “Scared.”
Lance’s face fell, but he nodded, accepting her answer. She felt useless.

“We searched, Lance, but there was nothing to be found. We had groups out for weeks, but without your memory we had nothing to go on. Do you,” she hesitated, unsure if the question was worth asking. “Do you think they survived?”

Lance answered her with a question.

“If they had, wouldn’t they have come looking for me?”

*Good point.*

She was surprised at his logical response, but still felt a pang of remorse for the boy. If only she had more information, but if Lance’s family had survived, there would have been something, anything, come up over the years he had been at camp.

She was resigned to accept the same conclusion Lance had come to: that his family was gone.

There was one point she would argue though.

“It wasn’t your fault Lance. If what you say is true, and your sister was gifted with Charmspeak, then you had no choice.” His eyes were watery, but no tears fell. “I should know,” she continued, “I’ve been under its spell a few times now.”

Lance chuckled despite himself, and she let a teasing smile pass over her face.

“As much as I wanted to avoid hopping up and down on one foot in a circle, or forced into a game of involuntary freeze tag,” the chuckle grew into a loud snort, and he covered his mouth in shame, but his eyes held more humour now.

“Sorry about that,” he huffed out, and she stood, pulling him up with her.

“Not to worry. Is that everything?” she asked, and he nodded. She pulled him in for another brief hug, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and patting his back in a motherly gesture. She felt his breath on her neck as he chuckled.
“I didn’t know you were so huggy Allura,” he teased as they pulled apart, “otherwise I would have made more of an effort.”

“You shouldn’t have to make an effort. I should have been there for you when you needed it,” his smile faded at her words, understanding what it was she was saying. He ruffled her hair lightly with his hand, startling her.

“Lance what-”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it,” he said, “I’ve heard running this camp takes a lot of effort, and there’s this one kid who makes everything so much harder than it needs to be with his dumb pranks and pointless competitions...” he trailed off, and Allura grinned up at him. She cocked an eyebrow in a teasing manner.

“He’s a trouble maker alright, but between me and you,” she leaned forward as if to share a secret, “he’s one of my favourites.”

Lance beamed, ears turning pink as he stared down at her.

“Can I get that in writing?” he joked, and she pushed him towards the door lightly.

“Go find your friend,” she instructed, crossing her arms and regarding him thoughtfully. “Make sure he’s okay. And know that I’ll be here if you anything.”

Lance nodded eagerly, but paused with one hand on the door handle.

“Thanks Allura,” he spoke softly, then exited the room to go search for Keith.

Allura sighed, sinking back into her chair. She felt exhausted, but there was a warmth within her that she couldn’t quite explain. It felt good being there for someone. She felt like she could do anything after the talk with Lance, knowing now that sometimes all it took to be a good friend was a shoulder to cry on.

Suddenly her duties as camp leader didn’t feel so tedious and overwhelming.
Coran appeared at the door again, and Allura beckoned him in.

“Sorry about earlier. What was the incident?”

“It wasn’t much,” Coran explained, handing her a cup of coffee that she took gratefully. “Just one of the campers throwing rocks into the sacrificial fire in the dining hall. I believe it was one of the new recruits. He was yelling ‘eat this’ and some other distasteful phrases that I care not to repeat.”

Allura let her head fall into her hands with a groan.

Nevermind.

Chapter End Notes

Wassup!

Sorry for neglecting you guys and this fic, I got carried away with school and other stories (go check them out :))

How’s that for some Lance/Allura bonding! These two have so many problems my gods, glad we got all the misunderstandings out of the way.

Also poor Coran, I didn't mean for Allura to be so rude to him, but he understands. And yes, that was Keith throwing rocks into the sacrificial fire. He's very upset, and hoped his 'offerings' to Ares would reach him in full force.

I was planning on ending this at Chapter 20, but we'll see how the next chapter pans out...

As always, thanks for reading, leave kudos and comments :) I love reading them!
“I still hate him, Ares that is.”

Lance rested his own head on top of Keith’s lightly. “That’s okay. There’s no rule saying we have to love our parents, even if they’re ancient mighty beings.”

He felt Keith laugh at that.

“Though,” Lance continued, “you may want to avoid the sacrificial pit for a little while. I don’t think the God of War really had a taste for rocks.”

Tracking down Keith proved harder than Lance had originally thought, even with the trail of destruction the boy had left behind.

Lance had been expecting a giant angry god to be stomping the various cabins in search of his renegade son, and as awful as that would have been to see, Lance found himself mildly disappointed. Maybe the gods didn’t really care about them as much as he previously thought.

Or maybe Ares was just a dick, like Keith had said.

Lance went with the latter.

Upon exiting the main cabin, Lance had seen a large group of campers outside of the dining hall, and figured he would find Mr. Mullet there. He hadn’t been wrong, but Keith had long since cleared off by the time he got there.

“What happened?” Lance asked the nearest camper, who happened to be Hunk’s new girlfriend Shay. He would have asked about how their relationship was going had his mind not been on other things.

Things like Keith.

Shay turned towards him, a gentle smile erupting on her face.
“Oh hi Lance!” she glanced back at the dining hall and chuckled. “Nothing much happening here, just your typical temper tantrum. Apparently that Keith guy barged in here with his brother trying to stop him, and started throwing things in the sacrificial pit yelling at Ares to come fight him.” She shrugged, “I only just got here though, so you’d be better off asking Hunk. I was just about to go find him actually.”

Lance sighed.

“No, that’s ok, I get the gist of it.” He placed his hands on his hips and gave her a knowing look. “Besides, I think Hunk would prefer to see you, and only you, right now.”

Shay blushed, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Thanks Lance,” she twittered, running off to find her new man. Now if only Lance could find his.

His heart rate quickened at the thought. Sure, he and Keith had had a bonding moment, and more, up in that treehouse, and Keith had made his feelings incredibly well known that morning, but everything was still so new. He had been planning on spending the day getting to know the child of Ares better; his likes, dislikes, favourite colours...that sort of thing. Maybe even get a few more kisses in the process.

Lance shivered in remembrance, feeling the trace of Keith’s lips on his own.

Unfortunately those things would have to wait though, and Lance forced his mind clear of the thoughts. He had more pressing matters to think about. Like the fact that Keith was missing, and blatantly upset about the whole Blade of Marmora thing. And then there was the whole matter with his mom and Keith blaming himself for that. Lance knew how that felt; what invasive thoughts would take over if he let himself be overwhelmed with guilt.

He really needed to find him.

The Ares cabin had been empty, as well as the infirmary, thank the gods, but the longer Lance searched the more his panic rose. What if Keith ran off? Like, beyond the borders off.

Should he tell Allura? Or find Hunk like Shay had suggested?

Lance was spared from having to decide by spotting a tall, muscular man walking across to the
training grounds not far from him, mood lifting immediately.

“Shiro!” he called out, running over to him. Shiro would know where Keith was.

“Hey, Lance,” he said. “I was just looking for you actually.” Was it just him or did Shiro sound irritated?

“Perfect, same,” Lance replied, trying his best to ignore the other man’s tone, “where’s Keith?”

Shiro frowned, scratching the back of his neck absentmindedly.

“That’s what I was going to ask you.”

“What?! I thought he was with you!”

Shiro sighed. “He ran off, and I lost sight of him.”

“Oh gods,” Lance whined, hopes diminished. “That boy needs to calm down! I mean, yes I understand why he’s upset, but threatening the gods isn’t the best way to deal with it-”

“Hold up,” Shiro interrupted, eyebrows creasing together with worry. “‘Threaten the gods?’ What happened?!!”

Lance sighed, thinking back to the meeting from that morning. He retailed the events to Shiro as best he could.

“Weren’t you outside when he ran out of the cabin?” he asked when he had finished.

Shiro nodded, “yeah and I asked him what was wrong but he didn’t answer. Then he charged into the dining hall yelling about Ares and, oh no...” he trailed off, worry creasing his forehead. “Are the gods angry? Can they do something to him?”
“Well, no not normally,” Lance explained, “but it’s best not to tempt them. Especially Ares, he’s always looking for a fight.”

“Sounds familiar,” Shiro grunted. He scanned the grounds around them.

“What happened after the dining hall?” Lance asked, and Shiro sighed.

“I tried to talk to him but he wasn’t being cooperative. I knew something was wrong, but,” he trailed off, a guilty expression on his face as he stared down at Lance. “In all honesty I thought you had done something to piss him off. That’s why I was looking for you.”

Lance felt a shiver run down his spine, and took a small, involuntary step backwards. Shiro noticed.

“Wait no, not to beat you up or anything, just talk.” He tried for a smile, but his concern over Keith’s whereabouts was more predominant.

“Great, I’m the worst older brother. I just let him run off thinking it would be better for him to sort things out alone, at least for now. I didn’t know he had learned more information about his dad and our mom.” He cursed under his breath, startling Lance, who had been under the impression this guy swore just about as much as Hunk. Which meant not at all.

“Ok, well,” Lance breathed out, feeling more helpless than ever. If Shiro was a bad brother then what did that make him? He had allowed Keith to run off on his own, knowing he was hurt and angry and...

Shiro clapped a hand on his shoulder, and Lance glanced up at him.

“We’ll find him. He can’t have gone far. In fact,” Shiro started, a plan formulating in his head, “I think I know where he might be. You said that treehouse was yours, right?”

Lance felt himself pale, memories of last night surfacing and clouding his brain. Shiro couldn’t possibly know about that, right?!
“That’s where he went that first time, remember?” Shiro continued, and Lance exhaled in relief.

Oh thank gods! Their secret was safe!

“Um, yeah. It’s mine. But why would Keith go there?” he had a few ideas as to why, but felt it better to keep his mouth shut for now. He hadn’t actually thought of the treehouse, but figured it would be a decent place to check. And if Keith wasn’t there then maybe Lance would be able to spot him from the vantage point the old oak provided.

Shiro ran a hand through his hair in thought. “He likes high places, especially when he’s upset.”

So cute!

“And it was pretty quiet there the last time I visited,” Shiro continued, “and like I said, Keith prefers to be alone when he’s going through stuff.”

“Oh,” Lance’s chest fell. Of course Keith would want to be alone right now. Why had Lance thought his presence would even be wanted? Shiro was watching him curiously.

“However,” he began, “I think he could use someone to talk to right about now.”

Lance nodded somberly, mood dampened completely.

“I’ll take you to the trail if you don’t remember where it is,” he started, but Shiro shook his head.

“Actually, I think he might want to talk to someone else.”

Lance’s head jerked up, and he tilted it at Shiro questioningly.

“You think so?”
Shiro nodded, a sly smile on his face.

“It’s unusual for Keith,” he chuckled, “but for some reason he’s really taken a liking to you.”

“It’s just my good looks and devious charms,” Lance joked, and Shiro’s face made it look like he was deliberating his words seriously.

“No, it’s more than that. It takes time for Keith to open up to people, even me. But with you it was instantaneous.”

Lance scoffed at that.

“Yeah all it took was two near death experiences and a few heated arguments...you know, the usual.”

Shiro chuckled.

“Maybe, but even so,” he raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms in front of him. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen Keith kiss someone the way he did you this morning.”

Lance’s face flushed at the memory, words failing him. Hades it was embarrassing talking about this sort of stuff with the brother of the guy he was seriously crushing on, but despite the awkwardness, Lance found himself glad to have Shiro’s approval.

“And if he doesn’t want to talk then maybe you can make him feel better using different methods,” Shiro teased, and Lance wanted nothing more than to sink into the ground and disappear.

Oh GODS.

He cleared his throat uneasily, eyes shifting to the ground as he tried to think of a witty reply.

“Um...sure thing.”
Smooth. Definitely had a way with words.

Shiro laughed, patting him on the shoulder again and turning back the way he had come.

“Let me know if he’s even there, ok? I still want to talk with him, but for now I think I’ll go to breakfast. I believe he’s in good hands.” He began walking back towards the dining hall, hands tucked in his pants pockets casually, and an idea occurred to Lance.

“Oh Shiro!” he called out, and the man paused to turn. “Allura was wanting to go to breakfast as well. I think she would want you to join her.”

Shiro beamed, and Lance could have laughed at his expression.

“Sure thing!” he replied, jogging off in the direction of the main cabin. Lance got the odd impression they had just exchanged blessings, but quickly shook the thought. He was just doing Allura a favour.

That girl seriously needed some time to relax, and Shiro looked like a great hugger.

He smiled to himself as he made his way to the treehouse, but another thought struck him, and he changed course. He turned towards the Aphrodite cabin to grab some supplies, then made a quick stop at the kitchens before heading out in search of the angry boy who had seemingly stolen his heart.

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Lance held his breath as he approached the treehouse, branches shifting slightly in the breeze. He told himself over and over again that if Keith was here, great, and if not, then at least he could drop off the bag of supplies he had brought.

He had weighed the pros and cons of each during the short trip there, which had resulted in nothing more than an increased heart rate due entirely to stress.

If Keith was sitting up in his tree house, then that was win. Lance had found him, ten points to Gryffindor. But what if Keith didn’t want to talk? What if he was still angry and wanting to be alone? That wouldn’t be a problem, not really; Lance knew when to back off, despite popular
belief, and would respect Keith’s wishes.

But then what?

He could go and tell Shiro he supposed, but that just made Lance feel like a failure. Keith’s older sibling seemed to be under this impression that Lance had this sort of special connection with his brother, and that Keith would open up to him.

Yeah, no pressure...

But on the other hand, if Keith wasn’t there, Lance didn’t know what he would do. Panic, most likely, then run to find Allura and Shiro, panic some more, maybe form a search party? Was that too extreme?

He had threatened the God of War, so maybe those kinds of actions were warranted.

Gods, he knew he was overthinking this, but he was worried. Keith was, for the short while he had known him, impulsive, reckless and ever eager for a fight. Plus, as Lance had already been resigned to admit, he was impossible to read. Who knew what the kid would do next?

Hades, he had been trying to throw rocks at his godly father via sacrificial food pit! Who did that?

_The guy you’re crushing on, apparently._

Right.

Lance took a breath to steady himself, adjusting the bag on his back before beginning his ascent up onto the platform. His heart sunk to his toes when he saw it empty.

So, Keith wasn’t there. That wasn’t good.

Lance forced himself to calm down, and tried to dispel the disappointment bubbling in his chest. What was he supposed to do now?

He hoisted himself up and let the bag fall to the floor, thinking up possible hiding places that Keith
could have crawled into. Lance got the feeling the guy was good at hide and seek.

His nerves, which had already been on edge, were making his insides jittery. It wasn’t ideal to have a demigod child running around camp cursing his heavenly father, much less one as powerful as Keith. What if Ares decided to grace them with an appearance?

Oh gods...hadn’t Allura mentioned something about a God or Goddess showing up at camp before during their talk? Why hadn’t he pushed her on that subject?!

Lance clenched his fists to keep them from shaking. Why was he reacting this way in the first place? Sure, he was worried about Keith, but this was a bit overkill, wasn’t it?

Even if they had snuggled and kissed and confessed their mutual feelings to each other, they had only known each other for little over a week, and really only been on the same page for one day.

Lance paused, startling himself with the revelation.

Gods, maybe he was overreacting. There was no logical reason for him to be acting the way he was, but it wasn’t like he was choosing to be this worried.

His body and mind were reacting on their own accord, and his heart was in another lane altogether.

It was all very confusing, and he wondered briefly if maybe the things he was feeling had anything to do with his mother. Aphrodite was, after all, the Goddess of love and ooey gooey feelings. What if his were just amplified by the blood coursing through his veins?

And, knowing now about his family, wasn’t there a thing about Latinos being overly passionate?

Lance took a deep breath through his nose, releasing it slowly out his mouth.

*Just think this through. You can see most of the camp from up here, so let’s find Keith first and worry about other things later.*

He made his way over to the edge and peered out over the grounds. He could make out the training ground, arena and archery range, as well as most of the cabins from this height, and on a clear day, sometimes even the lake was visible. Groups of campers were making their way around camp, unaware or else uncaring of the situation with Keith, and Lance huffed.
Despite the great view, there were still several trees blocking his line of sight, so Lance made his way over to the second platform ladder, figuring it wouldn’t hurt to try.

Back when he and Hunk were designing the tree house, the second section had been meant as a lookout tower, and though they hadn’t finished it, it served its purpose fairly well. Lance was watching his footing as he traversed the slippery blocks of wood that had been haphazardly nailed into the tree, and therefore wasn’t paying attention as he grabbed a hold of the ledge and hoisted himself up. He stopped midway in the process, noticing he wasn’t alone.

“AH!” he shrieked, nearly falling, but was lucky enough to grab hold of the boards before tumbling to his death.

There, sitting with his back to him, was Keith.

“Gods, you scared the crap out of me!” Lance chastised, upper half grasping the ledge tightly, but Keith didn’t turn. Lance paused in his efforts to climb fully up onto the platform to stare at the son of Ares.

His legs were tucked up to his chest, arms wrapped around them and head leaning against the trunk of the tree, but that was all Lance could tell from his vantage point. He cleared his throat, thinking maybe Keith hadn’t heard him. When that didn’t work he tried again, voice soft so as not to startle him, though Lance doubted that would happen, seeing as the other boy hadn’t even flinched at his previous, very manly yell.

“Hey, everyone is looking for you,” he paused, waiting for a reaction, but was disappointed. Right, well, if Keith wanted to be alone, Lance would oblige. “Okay, well,” he sighed, beginning to descend the ladder, “I’ll just be going then-” he broke off as hand suddenly reached out and took hold of his upper arm, keeping him from lowering it off the platform.

Lance looked up with a startled blink, and saw Keith staring down at him, hair falling down around his face like a veil of black. His eyes were ringed in red; lower lip chapped and a bit bruised, as if he had been biting it.

“Don’t-” Keith paused, voice sounding hoarse, and averted his eyes to focus on the bark of the oak tree, cheeks turning a light red in the process. “Don’t go.”
Lance beamed. He couldn’t help it.

“If you insist,” he replied, and Keith moved back so he could make his way up onto the platform. It wasn’t as large as the one below them, so Lance was forced to sit close to Keith to avoid falling off, not that he minded at all. He just wasn’t sure if Keith would.

“How are you feeling?” he asked after getting his legs up underneath him as comfortably as the space would allow. Keith didn’t reply, instead turning his face out towards the camp, his lower lip secured tightly between his teeth, explaining why they looked so rough.

He sighed heavily after a moment.

“Not great, to be honest,” his voice was shaky as he spoke, sounding like he was on the verge of tears, or had just recovered from a bout of crying. Lance reached out and took his hand, squeezing it lightly in a reassuring gesture.

Keith stared down at their fingers, watching Lance’s thumb stroke the back of his knuckles gently, and then suddenly he was talking, the words falling from his lips like rapid fire, as if the wall he had built to hide them in had finally succumbed to their weight.

“I’m just so angry all the time, and I keep finding out these things about my past that I should have known years ago. Things like who my dad was. Or that monsters existed and were after me from day one. Shiro’s been protecting me my whole life and I had no idea. He’s been hurt so many times because of it, and then my mom...” he broke off, taking a quick, choked breath before going on.

“And then to find out the one thing she left, the sword she had been using to protect me, was cursed and only making matters worse!? What kind of sick irony is that?!” Fat, heavy tears were dripping down from Keith’s eyes now, but he didn’t bother wiping them away. He shook his head angrily instead, chest heaving as he fought to control his emotions.

“I should have known better, but I was stupid and selfish and it’s my fault everything bad has happened! My mom, Shiro,” he looked up at Lance through watery eyes, “I’ve even hurt you!”

Lance had heard enough, and lunged forward, grabbing Keith’s shoulders and bringing them to his chest protectively. He secured one arm around the boy’s back and the other on his head firmly, holding him tight as Keith broke down.
He sobbed into Lance’s chest, hands clutching onto his shirt like a child, and Lance rocked back and forth gently, cooing all the while. It reminded him very much of how he had cried into Keith not even a day ago, but the son of Ares recovered much quicker, hand pushing lightly against Lance’s chest as his tears subsided after a few minutes.

Lance pulled back slightly, moving the hand that had been pressed into Keith’s hair down across his shoulders, then around the small of his back where his other hand was resting. Keith kept his head down as he leaned back.

“Sorry,” he sniffed, and Lance lowered his head to Keith’s eye level.

“No, don’t be. I’m here for you, just like you were there for me.” Keith didn’t reply, but a small hint of a small graced his lips. Lance smiled back.

“Besides, now we’re even. Bonding moment repaid in full.”

Keith chuckled at that, and the sound made Lance’s insides flutter.

“I wouldn’t say full, more like twenty-five percent.”

Lance scoffed.

“And what makes you say that, Mr. Mullet the Math Man?”

Keith wiped his eyes with a gloved hand. “I’m pretty sure I held you for a lot longer. Plus I lent you my coat, and then shared my body heat with you so you wouldn’t freeze to death. So yeah,” he looked at Lance teasingly, cheeks still moist from the tears. “Twenty-five percent.”

Lance let his arms tighten around Keith briefly, pulling him in closer and leaning his head down so their faces were mere inches apart.

“Then I guess I better start working off my tab,” his voice was low and husky, and Keith’s face turned three different shades of red as he replied, tilting his head up until their noses were nearly touching.
“How, exactly?” he breathed out, eyes fluttering shut as he moved to close the remaining space. And then Lance told him.

“With a picnic!” he cheered, leaning back and throwing his arms in the air excitedly. Keith’s eyes shot open, a look of confusion crossing his face before being replaced with a pouty frown. He crossed his arms over his chest as his ears burned, refusing to meet Lance’s eyes.

“Aww, what is it? You don’t want a picnic?” Lance teased, tilting his head to the side to get Keith’s attention. The other boy harrumphed.

“I thought you were going to kiss me,” he mumbled grumpily, and Lance beamed.

“What, like this?” he reached forward, taking Keith’s face in both hands and bringing their lips together. A small yelp escaped the child of Ares’s throat, but was replaced with a soft moan as his body reacted to the embrace. He reached his arms around Lance’s neck and into his hair, pulling him down closer, and Lance grinned against his lips. He broke apart after a moment, staring into Keith’s indigo eyes with admiration. He looked a bit dazed, arms still wrapped around Lance’s neck as he spoke.

“Yeah,” he breathed, “like that.”

Lance was grinning, light-headed and giddy, and winked.

“Great, then I think that brings me up to sixty percent.”

“Sixty?!” Keith huffed, recovering quickly and frowning indignantly. “And don’t you think highly of yourself!”

“I do indeed,” Lance admitted, “but that was a surprise kiss. It’s worth bonus marks.”

Keith opened his mouth to reply but shut it after a moment of consideration.
“Ok, fair enough,” he pulled down on Lance’s neck, bringing their faces close together once more. “But that still leaves forty percent. What else did you have in mind?”

Lance quirked an eyebrow, leaning back once again to stare Keith straight in the eyes.

“I wasn’t joking about the picnic. I brought a bunch of food and blankets and stuff with me.”

Keith’s eyebrows lowered as he considered Lance’s words.

“Really?”

Lanced nodded. “Yeah of course. You didn’t get a chance to eat anything at breakfast, and I wanted to stock the tree house a bit anyways.”

Keith tilted his head to the side questioningly. “Stock it? For what?”

“Well,” Lance lowered his voice, aiming for more seductive tones as he spoke. “For all those late night meet ups.” He winked, but where he was hoping to get a blush out of Keith, he only got a raised eyebrow.

“Meet ups with who?” he asked, and Lance blinked, trying again.

“A special someone...” he trailed off, inclining his head forward so Keith would get the hint. He didn’t.

“Wait, are you seeing someone? Because I do not endorse cheating Lance, and if you’re sneaking around.”

Lance put a finger to his lips to stop him talking, baffled at how dense Keith could be at times, but also a bit charmed by his merit. He rolled his eyes teasingly.

“It’s you dummy. You’re the special someone.”
“...Oh...” There was the blush. Lance chuckled.

“I was suggesting we could use the tree house whenever we wanted to be alone,” he paused, “if you want. Don’t feel pressured to say yes or anything. It was more for privacy than anything, since my sisters are so nosy and Sabrina would be asking all kinds of questions and-” It was Keith’s turn to shut him up, and did so by placing a quick kiss on his cheek. Lance felt his face flush.

“Yes,” he mumbled, “that sounds nice. Thank you.” He shifted then, unlacing his hands from around Lance’s neck and shuffling over to the ladder. “Shall we then? I’m starved.”

Lance bowed theatrically from his sitting position. “By all means, m’lord.” Keith rolled his eyes and descended; Lance following shortly after.

Once on the lower platform, Lance removed the blankets he had snuck from his cabin and set them out on the floor, then handed Keith a large bag of snacks and a jug of orange juice. Keith eyed it all with surprise.

“How did you get all this?” he asked, and Lance shrugged.

“The satyr that runs the kitchen is a good friend of mine,” he paused, “well, more of Hunk’s, but he knows me well enough.”

“That’s awesome,” Keith praised through a mouthful of pastry. He sat down next to Lance, who was leaning against the trunk of the tree, admiring the way the sunlight was reflecting various shades of green as it shone through the surrounding foliage. He wasn’t that hungry, and instead let Keith eat in peace, choosing to enjoy his company in silence for the time being.

Keith spoke after a few minutes.

“Thank you, for this.” He was looking up at him as Lance glanced over, and a small smile broke out on his face as they made eye contact. Lance grinned back.

“It’s the least I could do,” he said, aiming for charming and nonchalant. Keith frowned at his words though, turning to stare at his shoes with a heavy sigh.
“Hey,” Lance began, suddenly concerned he had said or done something wrong. “Everything alright?”

Keith pulled his legs up and wrapped his arms around them, similar to the position Lance had first found him in, and let his chin rest on his knees.

“It’s just, you remind me of my mom.”

What.

“Oh...” Lance started, not sure how to respond, and Keith hastily elaborated.

“No no no!” he said quickly, turning his body to face Lance with a look of horror. “I don’t mean in a weird way or anything,” he scrambled for words, “she just used to say things like all the time, and was always looking out for me and-” he broke off, letting his head fall forward on his knees with a soft thud.

“Never mind,” he murmured in defeat, and Lance chuckled at his embarrassment.

“No, I get it. I give off some serious mom vibes,” he joked, and Keith groaned, voice muffled.

“I take it as a compliment Keith,” Lance continued, taking a more serious tone, and Keith turned his face to the side to stare up at him. “Besides, I like taking care of you.”

Keith blushed at that, lifting his head to lean it against the trunk of the tree again. He let his eyes close, eyebrows twitching up slightly in thought.

“She used to take us for picnics all the time, Shiro and me that is,” Keith explained, and Lance listened intently. “On days like this, when the sky was clear but the sun not too hot, and if there was a breeze she would lift me up and tell me to close my eyes, and imagine I was flying.”

As if on cue, a light wind passed through the trees, ruffling their hair and clothes playfully. Lance
felt a shiver run across his skin, but knew it wasn’t from the cold. He had to remind himself that Keith’s mom had been human, and was therefore not manipulating the elements to send him a message, as the Gods sometimes did. It had just been a passing breeze; nothing more, nothing less.

A smile was on Keith’s face when Lance turned his attention back on him, his eyes still closed as his face tilted up to meet the sun.

“I miss those days,” he confessed, and the smile faded slowly. Lance felt his own heart sink with it.

“She sounded amazing,” he said softly, and Keith finally opened his eyes to stare at him. He nodded once.

“She was. And I didn’t deserve her.”

“Woah, Keith,” Lance leaned forward so that the child of Ares would be forced to look him directly in the eye. “Don’t say things like that. What happened to your mother was not your fault. It may feel like it was, but it wasn’t. Believe me,” he laughed darkly, “I’m in the same boat.”

Keith sighed again.

“I know, and I’m glad you understand,” he paused and frowned. “Well, no actually, it sucks that you know how I feel. This guilt...”

“I know,” Lance confessed quietly, “but you don’t have to carry it alone. You have me, and Shiro as well. We’re here for you.”

Keith’s eyes scanned over his face, and he reached down to take Lance’s hand in his own. He brought it to his lips and placed a gentle kiss on each finger, then entwined his own with them warmly.

“And you have me,” he whispered. Lance felt his stomach flip enthusiastically, and leaned back against the tree with a warmth in his heart.

Keith let his head fall onto his shoulder as soon as Lance was comfortable, holding their entwined
hand close to his chest, and sighed deeply.

“I still hate him, Ares that is.”

Lance rested his own head on top of Keith’s lightly. “That’s okay. There’s no rule saying we have to love our parents, even if they’re ancient mighty beings.”

He felt Keith laugh at that.

“Though,” Lance continued, “you may want to avoid the sacrificial pit for a little while. I don’t think the God of War really had a taste for rocks.”

“Oh god...” Keith groaned, digging his face into Lance’s side in embarrassment. Lance chuckled.

“What was your plan with that one exactly?”

Keith huffed. “I wanted to fight him. Still want to fight him.”

“Yeah, ok, but rocks? Really?”

“Don’t make fun of me! I’m mortified!”

Lance burst out laughing, ignoring the sharp poke in the ribs he got in reply.

“I’m serious! Everyone saw! I don’t think I can ever show my face in there again!”

“It’s fine,” Lance managed, still laughing at how bashful Keith was being. “Campers freak out all the time over their parents. It’s like an initiation; a rite of passage.”

“Ugh,” Keith groaned, and Lance patted the top of his head with his free hand, amazed by how soft his hair was.
“If anything you’ve only made the others less scared of you.”

“How!” Keith exclaimed, lifting his head to stare at Lance. “I was throwing rocks in a fire trying to make a god appear!”

“Exactly. They’ll just think you’re a bit crazy. Nothing to stress over.”

Keith made a noise of exasperation, letting his face fall back into his side. “Perfect. Just what I needed.”

“Hey, in case you forgot, you’re dating the hottest guy in camp. So that’ll help your case if you’re really that worried.”

Keith was silent for a moment, and then so quietly Lance barely heard: “Am I?”

“Of course,” Lance scoffed. “I mean, hottest may be a bit of an overstatement, but definitely like, top five-”

“No,” Keith interrupted, “I mean, am I dating you?”

Lance paused, realizing what he had said, and lifted his head to stare down at Keith, who met his eyes with a curious expression.

“Do you want to?” he asked delicately, and Keith bit his lower lip.

“Yeah,” he replied after a moment, lips twitching up into a wide smile. “Yeah, I do.”

Lance beamed, his insides jumping for joy.

“Good,” he said after a minute or celebration, “because I want to date you too.”
“No way...really?” Keith asked, and Lance frowned down at him.

“Well obviously! I mean we’ve been kissing and hugging and I brought you this nice lunch and-” he broke off as a sly grin appeared on Keith’s face, and Lance’s eyes widened in shock as he realized he was being played.

“Oh ha! Hilarious. Now you’re the funny guy?”

Keith was giggling, the sound vibrating in his chest and into Lance’s side. Overcome with giddiness, Lance tackled the child of Ares, knocking him over onto his back and landing on top of him lightly; his elbows on either side of Keith’s head to support his weight.

Keith’s eyes were wide with the sudden movement, but narrowed seductively as Lance spoke.

“I’ll get you back for that.”

“Oh?” Keith quipped, hands trailing their way up Lance’s side and over his stomach, sending goose bumps radiating over his body wherever he was touched. He struggled to keep his balance as a hand slipped under the hem of his shirt, the brief flash of cold from Keith’s fingers making him gasp.

Keith was watching him with a wicked smirk. “And how do you plan on doing that?”

Lance grinned, one eyebrow quirking up at the challenge.

“I have a few ideas,” and he lowered his head, meeting Keith’s lips halfway as the other boy tilted his face up in response. Keith’s hands traced patterns on his skin as they kissed, and Lance bit back a groan as the sensations began to overwhelm him. He let his hips fall heavier into Keith’s and was pleased to hear the small gasp escape the other’s throat.

He pulled back just enough to form a few words.
“Besides, I still owe you forty percent.”

Keith pulled his face down in reply, lips hungry as they moved over Lance’s.

“Make it sixty,” he panted between kisses, and Lance was more than happy to oblige.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for the wait!

I got distracted by other fics (go check them out!) and while you're at it, CHECK OUT THE NEW LINK WITH A BEAUTIFUL RENDITION OF LANCE!!! Thank you @emeraldlld (SpaceL10ns) for drawing it! I love it so much!

I'm hoping to wrap this guy up in the next few chapters, (but who knows really), so thank you for your patience and I hope you enjoyed the Klance this time! I promise no more angst.
(please don't hold me to that...)
Maybe it is too good to be true

Chapter Summary

Finally some Shallura

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been a long while since Shiro had felt any sort of nervousness around a woman.

Sure, he had had his fair share of first date jitters and the like, but this was different. Being around Allura not only made his insides swivel like a revolving door, but there was genuine sense of fear in his gut whenever he was in her presence. Not that that was a bad thing. This fear was more of a mix of intimidation, admiration, and overwhelming respect than anything, all combining into the beautiful tapestry that was Allura.

But this was a woman who could kick his ass if it ever came down to it.

And Shiro was certain that he wouldn’t even mind.

Their breakfast date, if one could even call it that, that morning had been pleasant enough. She had agreed to go with him to the dining hall, but had had to settle several disputes that Keith had inevitably caused with his earlier visit, and thus had left little to no time for actual conversation.

Not that he had minded. Merely being in Allura’s company had been sufficient to ease Shiro’s worries over his brother. Sure, he was still planning on having a lengthy conversation with him later on, but he knew for the time being that he could relax, knowing that Lance would be doing a better job at calming Keith down than he could.

Or, at least, would be able to distract him enough to get his mind to focus back on not trying to fight the God of War. Who knew Shiro would have to worry about those kinds of things even after reaching the camp. And here he thought he would get a bit of a break.

Needless to say Shiro was pleased that Keith had found someone else at the camp to rely on in situations such as these, not because he disliked helping his brother, but because there were only so
many ways to tell someone to stop picking fights with everyone and everything before the words became redundant. There was a saying out there about choosing your battles...Keith didn’t know about it.

Or else, didn’t care.

So now it was Lance’s turn to give it a shot.

Shiro smiled at the thought, and sent a silent prayer out to whatever greater power was listening to give Lance the strength not to strangle his brother.

“Shiro?”

Allura’s voice pulled him out of his thoughts. They had been in the process of leaving the dining hall when she had been approached by a few angry nymphs about something or other, and Shiro had zoned out. He blinked, glancing down and taking in the sight of Allura in front of him. Her white hair was practically glowing as the sun shone down on it, giving her an aura of light that matched her so entirely, like looking at one of the gods themselves, and Shiro was struck speechless. His mouth opened and closed a few times as his mind worked to say something, but his heart was in another world altogether.

“...Shiro?” she asked again, a hint of amusement in her voice, and Shiro found his.

“Good thanks how are you?”

Allura tilted her head in confusion, and Shiro felt his face heat with embarrassment as his brain finally processed her words, fighting to keep his feet grounded at hearing her say his name.

“Oh, um sorry...” he managed, and she smiled, causing his brain to short circuit again. Good lord, no one had ever had this much power over him. He was almost grateful for the continuous flow of distractions that had prevented them from sharing more than a few words over breakfast, since Shiro was positive he wouldn’t have survived anything longer than that. And here he had been teasing Keith over his crush on Lance.

Yikes.
“You look awfully red,” Allura went on, which only deepened his blush. “We have sunscreen if you need it,” she finished, and Shiro nearly choked.

She thought he was sunburnt! Thank god Keith wasn’t anywhere near him to hold that over his head, since he would never hear the end of it. As it was he ducked his head shyly as they exited the entrance of the dining hall to make room for other passersby, silently urging the redness in his cheeks to fade.

“Yeah,” he responded, “I should probably get some of that...”

Allura nodded, content with his reply, and he sighed with relief.

“Certainly,” she said as she made her way over to the main cabin once again, “wouldn’t want anything to mar that beautiful face of yours.”

Shiro paused, eyes wide as he watched Allura freeze in place, turning slowly to face him with a look of pure horror on her face.

“I-uh..I mean to say that-” she cleared her throat, avoiding his gaze as she studied the ground furiously. “Sunscreen is an adequate form of protection against the elements and should be worn in the warmer months to prevent burns and-” she broke off as Shiro chuckled, and slowly raised her head to stare at him. He was beyond pleased to see that her face was now a shade darker than it had been mere seconds ago, and felt humbled that at least he wasn’t the only one suffering from butterflies and awkward nerves.

“What SPF do you suggest?” he asked in an attempt to save her from melting into an embarrassed puddle, and her shoulders dropped in relief, as she exhaled a breath she had been holding. It was cute, and he wasn’t about to tease her over the comment on his facial prowess. She analyzed his features for a few moments, then nodded, as if coming to a decision he wasn’t aware of.

“I would say thirty at the very least. Forty-five if you’re feeling extra cautious.”

He grinned at that, and she smiled back shyly.

“Noted,” he said as he initiated their walk back to the main cabin, Allura keeping pace beside him. As content as he was with the silence, Shiro was feeling a bit braver after hearing the compliment
from the camp leader, and decided to go out on a limb.

“So,” he asked, and she glanced over at him, “what are your plans for the rest of the day?”

A look of exasperation crossed Allura’s face.

“Oh I’m sure Coran has a list ready and waiting. There’s always something going on in this camp, and it’s my job to solve most of those problems.” She sighed, and Shiro watched her as she put her hands behind her back and straightened her shoulders, like a commander of an army; stoic and resolved.

“But it is my duty, so I must not complain.”

“Not even a little bit?” he teased, and a crooked smile appeared on her face.

“Well, not out loud anyways.”

Shiro bit back a grin, eager to keep the playful banter going.

“You know,” he went on, “I don’t know much about the gods or magical beasts or this camp in general, so you could complain all you wanted, and I wouldn’t mind. I wouldn’t know any better.”

Allura side-eyed him skeptically, putting a hand on her hip and raising an eyebrow.

“Really now,” she stated, and Shiro nodded enthusiastically. “So if I said that the Pegasi needed to learn to preen their wings in more accessible areas so we could collect the discarded feathers afterwards?”

“I would wholeheartedly agree.”

Allura hummed to herself, eyes narrowing in challenge.
“What about how the children of Hephaestus keep leaving their tools around?”

“Savages.”

“Or how the wood nymphs keep persuading the children of Demeter to grow illegal crops?”

“How dare they!”

“And then there’s the eternal struggle of keeping the campers from killing one another.”

“Teenagers.”

Allura laughed at that, the sound making Shiro’s heart bounce happily in his chest. He bit his lower lip to keep his smile from growing too wide.

“So do you want to help me out today?” she asked after a moment, turning to face him as they reached the cabin steps.

“I was going too whether you asked or not,” he replied, and Allura beamed. Her smile faded suddenly though, and Shiro frowned at the change.

“Oh, Shiro, I completely forgot to tell you about Keith! You should be with him today, not me.”

Shiro shrugged. “Nah, he’s good.”

Allura’s head jerked up, eyebrows knitting together in confusion.

“What do you mean? Did you find him?”

He shook his head. “No, but I sent Lance out after him, so I’m sure he’s in good hands.”
Allura considered his words for a moment, then sighed.

“Maybe so, but you should also-”

“Allura,” Shiro interrupted, placing a hand lightly on her shoulder. “Keith will be fine. I’ll talk to him later, but I think for now Lance is enough.”

She chuckled at that, shaking her head slightly as they made their way into the cabin.

“More than enough I would assume. He has true feelings for Keith. I can tell.”

“It goes both ways, believe me. I’ve never seen my brother so smitten with anyone before. I mean, you saw them kiss this morning right? That wasn’t just me?”

Allura laughed, going to a supply closet and grabbing something from within.

“It was...dramatic to say the least. Keith’s gone and upped the expectations of every couple in camp now.” She came back and handed him a bottle of sunscreen, and Shiro was momentarily confused. “SPF thirty, as promised.”

Ohhh, right.

He took it with a content huff, turning it over in his hands.

“Still though,” Allura went on, “Lance and Keith will be the talk of the camp for a few days at the very least. I hope they’re prepared for some nosy questions.”

She walked across the room and began reading over a list on Coran’s desk. Shiro was mulling over her words, wondering how Keith would react to someone asking him why he had kissed Lance the way he had. His answer would likely be curt, if not physical, and Shiro made a mental note to warn him later, more for the sake of the others campers than Keith though.
He looked up then, towards Allura who was mumbling to herself as she read, and spoke again; a nagging thought having been on the back of his mind for a while now.

“Allura,” he asked tentatively, and she looked up at him. “I’m just wondering...”

She tilted her head, waiting for him to go on, so he took a deep breath and asked.

“Do you think their relationship is a bit rushed? Like, they’ve only known each other for a little while now, and I guess I’m just worried that Keith might get hurt...”

Allura blinked, smile fading as a flash of disappointment crossed her face. Shiro wondered at it briefly, but then she was smiling again, and his worries vanished.

“Allura’s smile was a confused one. “I meant his heart.”

“Does he suffer from a health condition?” she asked, and Shiro snorted, shaking his head at her. This was too cute.

He tried again.

“No, no, no, nothing like that. What I’m trying to say is that most people start things off slowly. Get to know each other first, then move on to holding hands, and kissing, and dating in general.” He paused for a breath, doing his best to avoid Allura’s eyes as he spoke about that sort of thing, lest his face betray him again. “It just feels like Keith and Lance skipped over that step. I’m worried because Keith isn’t used to a fast paced relationship, or a relationship at all really, and I don’t want him to end up with a broken heart.”

Allura was silent for a few moments as he finished, and Shiro raised his eyes to search her face. Her eyebrows were tilted downwards in a small frown that Shiro wasn’t fond of seeing directed at him, and when she spoke his heart plummeted.
“Are you implying that Lance isn’t serious about his feelings for Keith?”

*Maybe...*

But Shiro wasn’t about to admit that. He wanted his brother to enjoy his time at the camp, and where Lance had been a blessing for the most part, it almost felt too good to be true. The last thing Shiro wanted for Keith was heartache.

He had suffered enough of that already.

Allura seemed to be reading his thoughts, as her next words were spot on.

“You’re worried that Lance is only interested in Keith because he’s new and exciting, and I understand that, seeing as you both grew up outside of our borders, and know little of demigod ways. However,” Allura moved to stand in front of him, and Shiro once again felt that fear of being near her; felt the overwhelming power radiating off of her in waves. He shivered.

“Demigods that know about their heritage from a young age tend to realize certain things early on. Things that most adults fail to understand.” She sighed heavily, sitting on the edge of the desk and staring down at her hands. Her voice was low and informative as she continued.

“Time, for one, is fleeting, as the dangers of our world are ever-present and death is always lurking around the corner.”

Shiro shivered again, but Allura wasn’t done.

“The children that come to this camp are often alone, and find family in their companions. You and Keith, being true blood relatives, are lucky in the sense that you always had each other. That’s more than most can claim. Lance, for example, had his entire family ripped away from him, and to add insult to injury, his memories of them were taken as well. All he knew were the people in this camp. His half-siblings, his friends...” She looked up at him then, eyes glassy and wide, but tear free. She was in perfect control of her emotions.

“Love is something that demigods take advantage of, simply because there’s no guarantee they’ll
live the next day to enjoy it. It’s a sad fact, and maybe has something to do with the Godly blood in our veins, or maybe the human, but when we find someone that we connect with, someone we...love, well,” she broke off, a slight blush creeping across her cheeks and ears. Shiro wasn’t sure what to say, and Allura smiled gently up at him.

“So to answer your question, no, I don’t think their relationship is rushed. I think it’s progressing exactly as it should. And I would never accuse Lance of toying with someone’s emotions, regardless of his mother being the Goddess of Love and having that stigma associated with her offspring. If anything, Lance’s feelings are truer than he may even know, and it’s Keith I would be worrying about.”

Shiro was silent as she finished, guilt creeping into his gut as he processed her words. He didn’t completely understand it yet, but Allura’s explanation had made some sense. He had lived the past few weeks on the run with Keith, not knowing if they would survive the next day, and it was during that time that he had realized the extent to which he would go to keep his brother safe. He wasn’t half-god, but he could grasp the concepts of unwavering love and the fear of death enough to get what Allura was saying.

“You’re right, I’m sorry for implying otherwise,” he spoke softly, and suddenly Allura was standing in front of him again, closer than before, and tilting his chin up with a delicate finger. She was smiling gently, and Shiro felt his breath hitch in his throat.

“There’s no need to apologize Shiro,” she whispered, and when he shivered this time, it was due entirely to the way her voice sounded this close to him; the warmth of her flooding into his bones. “I know that everything is new for you here, and understanding it all will take time, but I don’t think you need to worry about Keith and Lance. At least,” she stepped back with a chuckle, and Shiro fought the urge to pull her back, “not about their feelings for each other. I think that much is obvious.”

Shiro smiled in reply, thinking back to the way Keith had spoken about Lance; about how he had kissed him in front of so many people, an entirely un-Keith thing to do.

And then he remembered the concern he had seen in Lance’s face when he asked him where Keith had gone. How he had gone out of his way to ensure Keith’s safety over anything else.

And though the switch from bickering to kissing had been rapid, and he didn’t entirely understand it, Shiro figured that as long as they were both happy, then he had nothing to worry about.

Besides, he knew where Lance lived.
“Allura,” his voice came out quieter than he had wanted, but she still heard, and turned back to face him, list in hand.

“Yes?”

“I was...well, do you-” he scrambled for words, brain tripping over his tongue as his heart rushed to fill in the gaps. “I’ve only ever taken things slow, so I don’t know anything else, but I just have to say that I think I really like you and-” he broke off as she stepped closer to him, putting a finger to his lips to silence his ramblings.

“I don’t mind slow,” she whispered, and goose bumps rose all over his body at the sound of those words. He grinned, not caring if he looked like an over-zealous puppy.

“Really?”

Allura nodded, the smile on her face teasing, but the blush in her cheeks very real.

“But you’ll have to teach me,” she went on, and Shiro nearly bit his tongue in half.

“I can definitely do that.”

Allura smirked, folding her arms across her chest and raising an eyebrow.

“So what’s step one?” she asked, and Shiro yanked the list from out of her hands. She let out a startled yelp at the sudden movement, then stared at him in amused bewilderment.

“First I follow you around all day performing manly tasks that show off my many skills.” He read the first item written on the list and cleared his throat dramatically. “Prepare to witness me ‘order new spokes for the racing chariots from the Hephaestus cabin’.” He frowned, “hmm, not very impressive, but I’ll do it with gusto for the lady.”

Allura giggled; the sound reverberating around inside his head like a favourite song. He committed
it to memory right away.

“I can’t wait,” she confessed, and took hold of his arm gently.

“Woah, step two already? I must be doing well.”

Allura rolled her eyes at him, but didn’t release her grip. She linked her own arm with his and stared up at him innocently. Shiro felt the heat in his face return, and she winked.

“You may want to apply that sunscreen now,” she teased, and he huffed out a laugh.

“I don’t think any amount of sunscreen is going to help my case,” he confessed, and she giggled once again, exiting the cabin and heading towards an area of camp he hadn’t been to yet. They received several strange looks, and numerous double takes, but Allura didn’t seem to notice, or else, didn’t care.

Shiro decided he wouldn’t either.

***

Throughout the course of the day, Shiro was subjected to a multitude of strange and bizarre tasks he had never known existed prior to arriving at camp. Apparently satyrs need a certain type of comb for their legs, as well as specialized hoof polish. And nymphs have a nasty habit of resting in the most outlandish areas, which resulted in several startled campers trying to use the rest rooms.

The pegasi were intimidating, but Allura informed him that they always acted standoffish in front of strangers, and began lecturing them on proper etiquette. Shiro had laughed, thinking she was joking around, but the pegasi had all lowered their heads in what appeared to be shame, then proceeded to bow in front of him after she had finished.

It was...different, to say the least. And very humbling.

But Shiro was happy. Spending time with Allura was a blast, and she had a rather dark sense of humour he could really appreciate. Several pop-culture references went over her head, but Shiro
was willing enough to explain the bulk of them.

It was when she said she had no idea who Harry Potter was that he balked.

“Wait, hold up,” he called after her, having been so shocked that his legs had stopped moving, and she turned to look back with a confused expression. “You don’t know Harry Potter?”

Allura shrugged. “Is he a friend of yours?”

Shiro nearly choked, then shook his head with a laugh.

“No! Well, I guess I grew up with him, but not in the way you’re thinking.”

Allura blinked, waiting for him to explain. He did.

“He’s a wizard, which means he’s different from normal humans, muggles, and lives in this magical world, and-” he paused, realizing that trying to explain Harry Potter to someone who had never seen it was really difficult, if not entirely ridiculous.

“Oh, so he was a demigod? Who was his parent?” Allura asked, and Shiro shook his head.

“No, no. Basically it’s a book series that was made into movies, and it revolves around the life of a boy, Harry Potter, who survived the killing curse. He goes to a magical school and learns to use his wand, and-” he broke off again at Allura’s confused expression, and huffed.

“You know what, it would just be easier to show you.”

Allura crossed her arms and smirked up at him, a teasing crook in her eyebrows.

“Are you asking me out on a date?”
Shiro felt the blood rush into his cheeks, and a wave of awkwardness descended upon him.

“Um, I guess?” he managed, then after a moment: “yes. Definitely. But only if you want to,” he added quickly afterwards, and Allura smiled.

“I think I can make the time for one movie.”

“Yeah...the thing is...” Shiro runned the back of his neck subconsciously, “they made eight.”

Allura looked momentarily surprised, and Shiro was worried about what she would say, but then the smile returned, and she laughed.

“Well, then I better start clearing my evenings.” Her own cheeks flushed at that, and Shiro felt his heart swell. She turned then, moving on to the next task, and he followed after her, feeling lighter than he had all day.

“I should warn you though,” he said as he caught up to her, and she glanced over at him. “I’m a quoter. Especially with Harry Potter. I know like, all the lines.”

“Oh gods,” Allura rolled her eyes playfully.

“Yeah,” Shiro chuckled, “Keith always threatens to suffocate me with a pillow whenever we watch it. He’s serious too. I have PTSD from some of our movie nights.”

Allura laughed at that, her hair jostling lightly with the motion of her shoulders shaking joyfully.

“I promise not to do that,” she confessed, and then: “speaking of Keith...” She folded her list in half and stuffed it in her pocket. “I have time now to test out my theory with his Blade of Marmora. Do you know where he is?”

Shiro nodded, mildly disappointed with the change in subject, but knowing that Allura’s mind was constantly whirling, and lingering on one topic for too long was not a luxury she could afford.
“The treehouse I think. That’s where I suggested Lance check anyways, and he hasn’t come back yet, so I’m guessing Keith was there.”


“The one in the woods? That big oak tree? Lance said it was his...” he trailed off, realizing that maybe Allura wasn’t aware of all the goings-on in her camp, and that he had potentially just outed Lance of a long kept secret. It was too late for cover-ups though, as Allura had seemingly put two and two together.

“That-! Ugh Lance, just wait until I get a hold of him!” She turned towards the area of woods where Shiro knew the path to the treehouse was hidden, a purpose in her steps. “I’ve told him a hundred times not to wonder into those woods—”

“Allura wait!” Shiro called out after her, and she turned briefly to stare at him. The last thing he wanted was for Lance to get in trouble on his account, and he quickly thought up an excuse for her not to get them. “Let me go instead. I wanted to talk with Keith anyways, especially if this is a test with that sword. He might not be open to it just yet.”

Allura considered his words, weighing the pros and cons of several thoughts at once, then sighed.

“I suppose you’re right.” She was silent for a few moments, then, as if coming to a decision in her head, nodded firmly. “Alright. You go and retrieve them. I’ll be at the main cabin. Come get me when you’re back.”

Shiro saluted in reply, and she chuckled, rolling her eyes teasingly in the process. She turned and headed in the direction of the main cabin, and Shiro exhaled in relief. Now he could warn Lance.

And also speak with Keith, since his excuse had been real enough. He wasn’t sure if his brother would be ready to test out the sword and see if it really was the reason behind the increased monster activity.

But as much as Shiro wanted to protect him, he also knew that Keith needed closure on the subject more than anything, and then he could work on healing.

Allura had explained her findings on the blade during their time together, and had filled in some gaps Lance had missed in his hasty explanation. Shiro felt terrible that Keith had had to learn that news, especially after the week he had had. But Shiro was also suffering. To know that their
mother had died protecting them with a weapon that was drawing in beasts was...well it was unfair to say the least.

It would be good to talk to Keith about it. Clear up the situation. Support each other and try and get through whatever truths Allura’s test revealed.

But first, he had to find him.

Shiro headed off in the direction of the treehouse, hoping that he wouldn’t stumble into any compromising situations involving his brother. As hilarious as that would be, there were some things he just didn’t need to see.

Chapter End Notes

HEEEYYY

Sorry for the wait (and short chapter) but I finally have an ending for this fic in mind. But let me warn you...you may not like it....I'm going to do something mean >:)
(Reemeber I promised no more angst? Yeah well, that wasn't part specific...hehehe)

Also poor Shiro someone help this poor guy out. (I know I write him a bit differently than canon would suggest, but I like to think that Shiro is just a mega nerd outside of a leadership role, so I'm giving him a bit of a break before things get....well I'll stop there ;))

Stay tuned for the next and FINAL chapter, which should be up shortly.

Stay thirsty my dudes <3
And then everything went black.

Chapter Summary

Not everything is as it seems, but sometimes it's those closest to us that end up twisting fate the most.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The floor of the treehouse, despite the added blankets, was just as inflexible to sleep on the second time around, but Lance couldn’t care less.

Here, with Keith tucked up close in the crook of his arm, snoring softly as the breeze played with his hair, was the most comfortable Lance had been in a long while. He didn’t want to move a single inch lest the moment break, and had promptly fallen asleep from the effort, despite telling himself that he would stay awake.

He and Keith had been having a splendid time up in the old oak tree, with no one around to bother them save for the cooing of birds, but the three hours of sleep had caught up to them, and it was when Keith yawned in the middle of them passionately making out that Lance had pulled back.

“Oh,” he scoffed, placing both hands on his hips as he leaned back on Keith’s, “am I boring you?”

Keith laughed, his yawn cutting off short with a quick exhale of breath as he stared up at Lance. His cheeks were a lovely shade of red, and his lips, though still chapped, were slightly swollen from the attention they had been given.

Lance smirked, knowing his own probably looked the same.

“Do you want to stop?” he asked, and Keith bit his lower lip, drawing Lance’s attention back down to his mouth, the shape of it embedded into his memory; the taste something he would crave for a while now.

Damn this boy.
“No,” Keith admitted, and Lance blinked, a large grin spreading across his face as Keith reached up and pulled him back down. Their lips met once again, fitting together much more smoothly than before, seeing as they had had time to practice. Lance groaned softly as Keith trailed kisses along his jaw, hands reaching around behind his back and tracing small circles on any exposed skin.

A buffet of different sensations rocketed through him, making his head spin with giddiness, the blood rushing down to lower regions. Keith was so overwhelming, and Lance was sure that if not for the hardness of the platform beneath them, ensuring him that he was still grounded, he would be entirely convinced that he was floating away.

Keith broke off suddenly as another yawn made itself known, this one larger than the last, and lasting twice as long. Lance sighed, the moment of bliss gone, and lifted his head to stare down at him once again.

“You know, it’s really hard to try and keep this mood going with you yawning like that,” he mumbled, and Keith frowned.

“It’s really hard to keep from yawning when I barely slept last night.”

Lance smirked down at him.

“That’s what you get for following me like a creeper.”

“This again? I saved your life,” Keith retorted, letting his eyes roll to the back of his in exasperation. “Probably.”

Lance chuckled at that, shifting so he was no longer straddling Keith, and rolled to sit beside him. Keith watched him, but made no effort to keep him in place, much to Lance’s disappointment. He couldn’t really blame the son of Ares for being so tired though, since he himself wasn’t fairing much better, and it was nice to be able to stretch his legs after having had them in the same position for so long.

Keith turned over onto his side to stare up at Lance, then shifted on the blanket so there was room enough for him to lay down properly. He patted the area next to him.

“Nap with me.”
“You’re so needy.” Lance complained, but was already in the process of sliding down next to Keith on the blanket, so the comment was moot. When he had positioned himself so that he was comfortable, or at least, as comfortable as the platform allowed, Keith scooted closer, resting his head on Lance’s chest and sighing contently.

“So freaking cuddly,” Lance mumbled, and he felt rather than heard Keith’s indignant huff.

“Am not.”

“Sorry? What was that? I couldn’t hear with you draped across me like that.” Keith’s quiet laughter vibrated against his chest, and Lance smiled as warmth flooded into him.

It didn’t take the darker haired boy long to fall asleep after that, and Lance had taken advantage of the opportunity to play with Keith’s hair. He marveled at the softness of it, and relished the silky smooth sensations of combing his fingers through the locks, brushing them out across his chest.

Keith sighed contently several times in his sleep, making Lance wonder what he was dreaming about, and hoping that he was making an appearance. He still wasn’t sure why he felt so strongly towards the boy, but decided that as long as Keith was happy with the way things were progressing, then he really had nothing to worry about.

They had all the time in the world now.

An idea had occurred to him then, and Lance had proceeded to weave several braids into Keith’s hair, practicing the techniques Sabrina had showed him. He was, in his most humble opinion, an expert braider, but may have gotten carried away, seeing as soon Keith’s hair was a cacophony of french braids, fishtails and several pieces of Lance’s own creation that he hoped weren’t too tight to pull out later.

Not that he would mind seeing Keith’s face upon realizing what he had done.

Or maybe he wouldn’t...

Whatever. Lance was a fast enough runner. And Keith looked adorable.
As the day grew hotter, and with Keith’s body heat seeping into him, Lance eventually passed out. He had wanted to remain awake for as long as possible, in case Ares decided to show up after all, but his eyelids were heavy, and soon his thoughts were too muddled to think up proper reasons to keep them open. He didn’t know how long they napped for, only that it was a fitful rest, and his dreams were pleasant enough.

That was, until they were rudely interrupted by a hand shaking his shoulder lightly.

Lance tried to swat it away, missing entirely, and grumbled about needing his beauty sleep. A voice whispered into his ear then, sending shivers down his arms and warmth into his chest that he knew had nothing to do with the hot weather.

“You’re beautiful enough. Now wake up.”

Lance smiled, eyes still firmly shut.

“Sleeping beauty needed a kiss to rise from her slumber, if I recall,” he hinted, fully expecting Keith to lean down and plant one on his lips, but nothing came. Instead, Lance was swatted with what felt like the now empty backpack he had brought with him.

He jolted awake, flipping over to glare at Keith, who was wearing a very embarrassed expression and tilting his head towards the ladder, some of the braids in his hair already coming undone. Lance looked to where he was gesturing and nearly passed out again; the blood draining from his face so quickly his head spun.

There, with only his upper body visible above the platform, was Shiro. He glanced down at Lance and winked, a wide smirk on his face as he scanned the scene in front of him.

“Oh gods,” Lance cursed as he hastily sat up, doing his best to smooth out his disheveled clothing. He didn’t even bother with his hair though, knowing that Keith had run his hands through it repetitively during their kissing session, and that it was most likely sticking up in odd directions.

Maybe he could play it off as bed head...
Which might have worked, except for the fact that Keith still had a few braids in his hair that he had yet to notice, and Shiro was eyeing them with ill-hidden amusement. He turned back to Lance, and his grin widened.

“I see you found Keith,” he said, the teasing tone in his voice letting Lance know that his earlier advice had obviously been heeded. Keith’s face turned bright pink, and Lance knew that his own was just as guilty, but maybe he could still play this off...

“I uh-yes. I found him. Then we fell asleep.”

Shiro raised a skeptical eyebrow, looking between him and Keith, then at the empty backpack, the blankets, and finally the picnic basket. He turned his head slowly back to Lance, who felt his cheeks begin to heat.

“Fell asleep hey?” he asked, arms crossing in front of him. “Just, passed right on out?”

Lance could feel his heart racing. Was Shiro toying with him? He had been the one to suggest distracting Keith using ‘different methods’ in the first place!

“Yes,” he said instead, deciding it was best not to bring that up in front of Keith, “just two dudes, falling asleep, together, at the same time-” he broke off as one of Shiro’s eyebrows shot up.

“Same time was it?” he repeated, and pointed to Keith’s head. “Was that before or after the makeover?”

Keith’s eyebrows lowered in confusion, then both hands shot up to his hair, where they discovered the decorations Lance had bestowed upon him.

“Wha-” he began, pulling one of the longer braids out to analyze it better, and his mouth fell open. “Lance what the hell!”

Shiro laughed, and Lance would have as well, had his embarrassment not been so extreme. Having Shiro find out he had braided Keith’s hair as he slept was...well it wasn’t ideal. In fact it was downright insufferable.
He smiled innocently at Keith, shrugging as nonchalantly as he could given the circumstances. The boy simply huffed in reply, and began working the braids out of his hair, the strands pulling free in loose waves that Lance ached to play with.

“You know,” he said as he tugged at a particularly stubborn piece, “you could have just asked to play with my hair. I would have let you.”

“Really? You?” Shiro piped up, and Keith froze, having forgotten he was still watching. He recovered quickly though, and turned to glare at his brother.

“Yes me.”

Shiro scoffed.

“You, who refused to have anyone touch his hair except mom, and only then to cut it? Who doesn’t care what his hair looks like but is still incredibly particular about it? Who won’t even give me, his darling older brother, the luxury, the privilege, of putting it in pigtails even once!” he folded his arms in front of him again, shaking his head slowly. “I don’t believe it, you’re playing favourites.”

Keith’s face was a mask of loathing as he glared daggers into Shiro, his cheeks flaming red as he crossed his own arms and pouted.

“Am not,” he retorted, and Lance watched, trying to keep his smile from growing too wide. Keith was adorable when he pouted.

But this bickering reminded Lance of a time when he used to argue with his own twin sister, the memories surfacing and bringing a sense of melancholy along with them. He pushed them down though, forbidding himself to ruin the moment the brothers were sharing.

He could reminisce later.

“Are to,” Shiro shot back, sticking his tongue out at Keith and turning to Lance. “Lance, can you do me a favour and put pig tails in his hair the next time you guys have a make-out session?”
“We weren’t!” Keith choked out, eyes wide and face glowing, and Shiro rolled his eyes with a dry laugh.

“Riiightt,” he drawled, and Keith hung his face in his hands, defeated. Lance was grinning now, and made a mental note to follow through with Shiro’s request later. Pig tails were a must.

“Anyways,” Shiro continued, “Allura wants to see you guys.”

“What? Again?” Lance asked, grateful for the change in subject, despite its humorous turn. As awesome as it was having the brother of the guy he was cuddling with find them in such a compromising position, and then proceed to tease them relentlessly about it, Lance wasn’t keen on prolonging any unnecessary conversation into that topic.

Shiro nodded, oblivious to his relief.

“She wants to test out her theory with the Blade of Marmora.”

Keith froze at the mention of his sword, and both Lance and Shiro turned to face him.

“You don’t have to Keith,” Shiro explained, tone serious now that he had successfully embarrassed his brother and moved on to more important matters, “not if you aren’t ready,” but Keith shook his head.

“No, it’s fine. I want to get this over with and be done with that-that...” he didn’t finish, but there was no need to. Both Lance and Shiro knew what he meant.

“It shouldn’t take long,” Shiro continued, and turned back to Lance. “Allura said something about going outside of the borders to test it...is that safe?”

Lance shrugged.

“I mean, if Allura says it is, then it is.”
“She never said it was safe though,” Shiro explained, and Lance nodded slowly.

“Then...no. Probably not.”

“Great.”

Lance chuckled at that. Despite the previous joshing, he really liked Shiro, which was a good thing, since he also really liked Keith, and figured it wouldn’t hurt to get to know the brother of the guy he was now dating better. Plus, Shiro was scary at times, and Lance worried that if he ever did anything to upset Keith, he would need to watch his back. Or front, depending on how vengeful Shiro was.

Hopefully it would never come to that.

“But if she’s with us then there’s no need to worry,” Lance explained, and Shiro tilted his head slightly. “Plus, if anything does happen, Keith is already a great fighter, and I’m sure you are as well, so there shouldn’t be a problem.”

Keith looked up at that, tilting his head to the side slightly as he appraised Lance.

“You’re coming too, aren’t you?” he asked, and Lance felt his heart jump a little inside him.

“Do you want me to?”

Keith nodded, reaching out to take Lance’s hand in his own, either forgetting that Shiro was still there, or else not caring. Lance was overjoyed either way.

“Of course.”

“Then it’s settled,” Shiro announced, making them both jump, and began to descend the ladder to the ground. Keith watched him go, then turned back to Lance with a sly smile.

“Last one to the bottom has to plan the next date,” he challenged, and Lance scoffed.
“You’re on-” but he broke off as Keith was already moving towards the ladder. “Hey! Cheater!”

There was a bit of a scuffle over who would get their foot on the top rung first, but Keith won that one, leaving Lance with no choice other than to get down the old fashioned way.

He rushed over to the edge of the platform and jumped into a neighbouring tree. Shiro called out from down below, startled at their sudden, rapid movements, and was cautioning Lance to be careful as he descended the branches with ease.

Despite his efforts however, there was no definite winner, with both he and Keith touching down on the ground at the same time.

“Well that was stupid,” Lance huffed, out of breath from the excursion.

Keith grinned, but Shiro shook his head, as if he were a babysitter who was definitely not getting paid enough. They followed him out of the woods and towards the main cabin, sneaking glances at each other and sharing secret smiles behind Shiro’s back, then looking away whenever he turned around to see what they were giggling about.

The game ended when they reached the clearing that lead out to camp, with Shiro slowing his pace enough to wedge himself between them, earning him a disgruntled glare from Keith, which he ignored. Lance giggled, knowing Sabrina would likely have done the same thing had she been there.

“So, little brother of mine,” Shiro began, looping an arm around Keith’s shoulder and pulling him in close. “You promise to stop hurling rocks at the God of War? Or do we need to have a long, serious, incredibly boring conversation-”

“Shiro get off of me!” Keith interrupted, trying to duck out of his grip, but Shiro was a head taller, and a whole heck of a lot stronger, so his efforts were futile.

“That didn’t sound like a promise,” Shiro teased, and Keith scowled up at him.

“Then maybe you should clean your ears out you old man.”
Lance was trying his best not to laugh at the two, and settled on trying to keep the grin off his face as he listened to them argue. Once again he was reminded of a time when he and his own sister would argue over silly little things, oftentimes the bickering growing heated and requiring the intervention of their father to settle things.

His smile faded. The memories, old and yet still new to him after so long of nothing, causing an ache in his chest for a life he once knew.

A life he lost.

Or two lives, if he were to be technical.

Lance shook his head, forcing himself not to dwell on the gloomy remembrances, and instead look to the future. A future with his friends at camp, and with the newcomers he was quickly growing attached to.

A future with Keith.

Speaking of, the boy was once again struggling against Shiro’s hold, who was laughing now after hearing his siblings comment.

“Old man!? Maybe you should show your elders some respect-OH!” Shiro broke off suddenly, pulling down the hem of Keith’s sweater and gasping loudly. “Is that a hickey!?"

Both Lance and Keith froze in their tracks, eyes wide and faces pale as they both realized that yes...there was a good chance that it was.

Lance had, after all, been paying some close attention to the nape of Keith’s neck up in the treehouse, and his face flushed as those memories rushed to take the place of the ones he had been previously dwelling on. As delightful as they were however, Lance felt only panic as Shiro leaned his face in closer towards Keith’s in order to get a better look.

“Oh my god...it is!”
Keith managed to shove off of him then, tugging the hood of his sweater up and over his hair and pulling the drawstrings tight so that only a portion of his face was showing; bangs pressed down flat against his forehead like a veil.

“It’s not!” he mumbled behind the fabric, but Lance could hear the way his voice faltered, and knew that Shiro wouldn’t be buying it.

Gods, this was turning out to be a great afternoon. Nothing like providing embarrassing moments for a brother to use as ammunition whenever it was needed.

Keith was doomed.

“My goodness,” Shiro mused, “and here I thought you were so innocent.”

“Piss off, it’s just a bruise,” Keith tried again, but his brother was smirking widely, and crossed his arms in front of him, like a stern parent would prior to a lecture.

“A bruise? Really?” He looked over at Lance then, who shivered under his gaze, then back at Keith, and sighed. “Am I going to have to have the talk with you both?”

Keith’s face was burning under the hood of his sweater, and if looks could kill then Lance was positive Shiro would already be six feet under. Lance himself was no better off, and nearly choked upon hearing the question. Having Coran explain the birds and the bees to him once already was bad enough.

Luckily they were saved from having to reply by a voice calling out to them from a little ways ahead.

“There you guys are!”

Allura was waving at them from the porch of the main cabin, and Lance was tempted to just bolt over in her direction to save himself from another ‘talk’, and Keith looked like he was having similar thoughts.
Shiro on the other hand, was beaming, and his cheeks had gone a light rosy colour upon turning to wave back. Keith noticed, and a sly smirk appeared on his face.

“Oh how the tables have turned,” he muttered to himself, but Shiro heard, the smile dropping off his face as quickly as it had appeared.

“Don’t you dare-” but Keith was already raising his own arm in greeting, cupping both hands over his mouth and shouting out in Allura’s direction.

“GROSS SHIRO I DON’T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT HOW NICE HER REAR END LOOKS-” he was cut off as Shiro pounced forward, flinging both hands over Keith’s mouth in an effort to silence him. Keith was giggling now though, and Lance found himself not only incredibly amused, but also slightly shocked at the nerve he had; not only saying something so outlandish about Allura, but also challenging Shiro at his own game in defense of their honour.

He watched the two wrestle on the ground for a bit, Shiro’s face scarlet as he tried to keep Keith quiet.

“Ok truce!” he relented, and Keith seized his efforts at trying to call out again. Allura was watching them with a curious expression, then began making her way towards their group.

“No more teasing us,” Keith said, and Shiro looked over his shoulder, noticed Allura coming closer, and then narrowed his eyes back down at Keith.

“Fine. But no more lies, you little pest.”

“Oh, and stay away from our treehouse from now on as well. No annoying older brothers allowed.”

Lance paused upon hearing that. Did Keith just refer to his treehouse as ‘theirs’? That was...really freaking endearing, and Lance couldn’t keep the smile from showing on his face as he stared down at Keith, who noticed and shot him a quick wink.

Oh gods, this boy will be the death of me.
“I don’t think you get to make that demand,” Shiro shot back, standing up and reaching a hand down to help Keith to his feet. He turned towards Lance afterwards, and raised an eyebrow.

“It’s *your* treehouse, so you make the rules.”

Lance looked between both brothers, then shrugged.

“I think I’ll stay out of this one actually.”

Keith smirked, wagging his eyebrows mockingly at Shiro as he looked back towards him.

“It’s up to you bro. We could always go back to doing things the hard way...” he made to cup his hands over his mouth again, but Shiro was faster, and got a hand over his mouth before any words could escape. Allura was almost upon them as it was.

“What did I do to deserve such a bratty little brother,” Shiro grumbled, then let his hand drop. “Fine, I’ll keep my distance. But you two better be safe, you hear me? I don’t want to hear about any broken limbs from falling out of a tree because you were too busy with each other to watch the edge-”

“What was all that commotion about?”

They all whirled around to see Allura standing with her hands at her hips, a battalion’s worth of weapons on her back, watching them all with an amused expression.

“Nothing,” Shiro started, side-eyeing Keith to make sure he wouldn’t say anything embarrassing. But Keith remained silent, moving to stand beside Lance with a victorious smirk on his face.

Allura didn’t look convinced, but decided not to pursue the topic. She turned towards Keith.

“I’m glad to see you well Keith,” she said, then reached for something at her hip. “I hoped you would be willing to try and test out my theory with this blade.”
She withdrew the Blade of Marmora and held it out in front of her. Once again Lance was astounded at the beauty of it, disbelieving that such a lovely sword could have such a dark past.

But then again, most lovely things did.

Keith was eyeing it with distaste though, going so far as to edge away from the weapon and move closer towards Lance, almost subconsciously.

“I mean, I don’t want to, but the sooner I figure out this blade the better, so I guess...” he trailed off, sighing heavily as he reached out to take hold of the weapon. Lance could sense his hesitation though, and acted before he could touch it.

“I’ll carry it,” he offered, and grabbed the sword out of Allura’s hands, marveling at its weight. Almost immediately a humming went through his head, like being near a power source; a steady flow of energy coursing up his arm and into his body. With it came a sense of longing; almost like the sword was reaching out to him, calling his name and yearning for him to wield it.

Lance had to force himself to focus, understanding what it was Keith had been experiencing all this time, and why he was hesitant to use it after discovering its true nature. A rush of sympathy ran through Lance’s mind at the thought of Keith having had to combat this lure, and then suddenly the Blade fell silent, the sirens call broken off. Lance blinked a few times, the abrupt absence of noise in his ears disorientating, and he looked around at the others.

“Woah, this thing is mega wack.” He turned towards Keith, who was watching him with concern, and exhaled a breath. “I get it now.”

“Wait, did you hear it?” Keith asked, eyes growing wide as Lance nodded. Shiro and Allura exchanged confused looks.

“Hear what?”

Lance turned to face them, holding the sword on the side away from Keith, so he didn’t have to be near it.
“As soon as I touched it I felt this...”

“Buzzing?” Keith offered, and Lance nodded again.

“Yeah, and then some part of me was tempted to start slashing at the nearest object.”

Keith was nodding now as well, eyes searching Lance’s face with something akin to excitement that he understood; that he wasn’t just imagining it. Allura was frowning however.

“I didn’t feel anything like that,” she said, reaching out to take hold of the handle once again. A few moments passed and her frown grew larger. “It just feels like a normal sword to me.” She let go, and Lance let it fall back to his side.

He shrugged.

“It does now for me as well,” he explained, and Keith’s eyebrows lowered in confusion, creasing in the middle slightly as Lance went on. “It only lasted a moment, and then it was gone.”

“Really? How?” Keith asked, eyeing the sword with suspicion. “Whenever I’ve held it it’s been constant. Like having someone in my head. There were only a few times when it really went quiet, and that was whenever I went into those rages. How did you get it to stop?”

Shiro was watching his brother with concern, and looked towards Allura for guidance, but she was also staring at Lance, just as curious.

“I...uh,” Lance felt his face heat, but figured it would be more beneficial to just tell the truth. He looked down at Keith, who was regarding him with hesitant hopefulness, as if Lance held a valuable answer he had been searching for for a while now.

He smiled at him tenderly.

“I thought about you, and how you had to deal with this for so long, and how awful that must have been. And then it just stopped.”
Keith’s cheeks flushed pink, but he smiled back softly.

“Allura spoke before Keith could reply, and fell silent for a few moments as ideas ran through her mind. Lance could always tell whenever she was deep in thought, since her eyes would dart back and forth as she studied the ground, as if she were sifting through multiple pieces of information at once.

“Does that have anything to do with the monster attacks?” Shiro asked after a couple of minutes, and Allura blinked.

“I have a few new theories, but like I said before, we should test them outside of the camp borders, just to be sure.”

“Is that safe?”

Allura looked over at Shiro then, and smiled gently up at him.

“It will be if I’m there,” she reassured him, and Shiro’s shoulders sagged in relief. It was the same thing Lance had told him, but hearing the words come directly from her mouth must have been more comforting.

Keith rolled his eyes at Lance and made a gagging gesture, causing him to snicker lightly in reply.

“Let’s go then,” Shiro said, face red as he shoved Keith jokily in the side. He and Allura took the lead, and Lance used that opportunity to reach out and take Keith’s hand in his own.

The son of Ares stared down at their entwined fingers for a moment, then up at Lance. He then beamed, squeezing their fingers together lightly and shimmying in closer to his side as they walked.

“Hey,” Lance whispered to him as they followed behind the other two, and Keith leaned his head in closer to better hear him. “After this is over do you wanna go see the pegasi?”
Keith’s head jerked around to gape at him, mouth slightly open as his eyes grew wide.

“Those exist?” he asked, and Lance chuckled.

“After all you’ve been through, all you’ve seen, and you’re surprised? Unbelievable.”

“No,” Keith retorted, “what’s unbelievable is flying horses. I think you’re messing with me.”

Lance scoffed.

“Me? Messing with you? About winged stallions? You wound me!”

Keith rolled his eyes, but his excitement was clearly visible.

“Can we ride them?” he asked, and Lance shrugged, keeping his voice low so Allura wouldn’t hear.

“Technically we aren’t allowed unless it’s for an event.”

“Technically?” Keith repeated, and Lance grinned wickedly.

“Yeah. Lucky for you you’re now dating one of the few men in camp who know not the meaning of the word.”

Keith frowned at that.

“You don’t know what technically means?”

“Oh my gods Keith,” Lance groaned teasingly. “It’s a good thing you’re cute.”
Keith blushed, his frown turning into one of those pouts Lance loved so much. He didn’t get a chance to reply though, as Allura had suddenly stopped and was gesturing for them to proceed more quietly. Lance let go of Keith’s hand as she pulled his bow from off of her shoulder and handed it to him, as well as a quiver of arrows, both of which he dawned with ease.

“Wait,” Shiro whispered, eyeing the exchange with disquiet. “I thought you said this would be safe. Why does Lance need a bow?”

Allura was in the process of removing another sword from her hip, and handed the belt and scabbard to him.

“That’s why it will be safe. With myself and Lance keeping guard, nothing should go wrong. Besides, I’ve seen Keith fight, so I know he is capable with a blade.” She pointed to the sword Shiro was now holding.

“And you as well I imagine. I would like to see you fight once your ribs have fully healed. I bet you’re quite fantastic.”

“I mean, I’m not terrible…” Shiro spluttered, and Keith gave Lance another bored expression through heavily lidded eyes, as if he was watching the world’s most boring romcom.

Allura turned to him as well, and Lance straightened under her gaze, a habit from having trained under her command for so long.

“Give Keith the Blade of Marmora now,” she informed him, and Lance nodded once. As much as he wanted to protect Keith from the weapons influence, it was best to just get this over and done with.

“You ready samurai?” he murmured to Keith upon handing over the blade, and Keith nodded, his mouth a determined line.

“Just promise me that if anything goes wrong you’ll use your gift to stop me,” he whispered back, and Lance froze.

“Keith, you know I couldn’t-”
“If it means saving a life, then yes. You have to.”

Lance was silent as he processed Keith’s wishes, then sighed in defeat.

“Alright, but just promise me that nothing will go wrong.”

Keith chuckled at that, taking the blade from his hands and giving it a few practice swings. His eyes shut briefly as he fought against the lure of the weapon that Lance knew understood, then he took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders, ready to fight.

Allura nodded, then gestured for them to proceed with caution towards the edge of camp. She took the lead, with Lance taking up the rear, his bow at the ready now that he didn’t have to carry Keith’s sword. He tried to ignore the fact that Keith hadn’t actually promised him anything, and sent a silent prayer up to the gods to make sure he would be alright.

He hoped they were listening.

“Allright,” Allura whispered once they had reached the area Lance assumed was the border. He couldn’t see anything, but a faint humming was coming from the direction directly in front of them, as well as a pulsating energy he could sense in his fingertips that alerted him of the magic that surrounded their camp. He wondered briefly if Shiro could sense it as well, seeing as he wasn’t exactly a demigod, but felt now wasn’t the ideal time to ask.

“The basic idea,” Allura continued in hushed tones as they gathered around her, “is that Keith will exit the border alone first, with us keeping watch. I have Pidge monitoring the area with that device, as well as Shay and several others from my cabin scanning for larger beasts from several new watchtowers I had her design. They’ll alert me via comms, and we’ll let Keith know what to watch for.”

“Hold up,” Shiro interjected, his disapproval of this plan obvious in his facial features. “Keith’s going alone?”

Allura nodded.

“I have to eliminate as many variables as possible. With Lance here it could disrupt the experiment.”
“Wait...how?”

“His scent.” Allura stated, and Shiro’s confusion was evident. She gave him the cliff notes. “Lance has a stronger one than most demigods, and monsters are attracted to it, which could bring more in.”

Lance turned to Keith and waved his eyebrows teasingly.

“Looks like you’ve got some competition,” he whispered, and Keith exhaled through his nose in a short laugh.

“I guess I’m not the only one who likes the way you smell,” he murmured back, and Lance nearly choked on his tongue. Damn this guy was smooth!

“Oh,” Shiro went on, oblivious to their exchange, “so basically we send Keith out there by himself waving around a monster beacon and just wait?”

“Shiro,” Keith cut in before Allura could reply. “I’ll be fine.”

“But—”

“Just trust me.”

Shiro looked ready to argue, but held his tongue, instead choosing to pat Keith on the shoulder in a very brotherly gesture.

“I do trust you,” he said. “It’s that sword I don’t.”

Keith glanced down at it, his expression almost bittersweet.

“Yeah well,” he mumbled, turning the blade over in his hands a few times, “if mom could do it,
then I at least have to try. I need to know if this thing had been making her life harder than it needed to be.”

Shiro was silent for a few beats, then: “but why? What good will it do besides make her passing that much harder to accept?”

Keith smiled then, but there was little warmth in it. In fact, Lance felt a chill run up his spine at seeing such a grimace on the boy’s face; distorting his delicate features into something unkind....something evil.

“It’ll let me know if I need to seek out my father or not.”

It was the first time Lance had heard Keith refer to Ares as his ‘father’, but there was no compassion in the word. His statement was a threat; and everyone in their group knew it.

If the Blade of Marmora was the reason behind the increased monster activity due to its supposed lure, then Keith would most likely go on a rampage again, in order to once again try and fight the God of War. And if the sword was already egging him on...

“Keith, you can’t-” Allura started, but he shook his head.

“I can, and I will.”

“Fighting doesn’t solve anything!” Shiro tried, but again Keith was quick with a retort.

“It solves tons of things. I’ll make you a list once this is over and done with.”

“Keith, be reasonable here,” his brother begged, the concern in his voice clear. “You can’t fight a God!”

“Well, technically it has been done before,” Allura pointed out, and Shiro looked over at her in exasperation as Keith made a very ‘see? I told you so,’ face.
“Not helping!” he turned to Lance then, his eyes pleading as he spoke. “Lance, tell him not to do anything drastic!”

They all twisted to stare at him.

_Oh gods..._

Why had he chosen to fall for a child of Ares? Sabrina was always telling him they were hotheads, and Keith was no exception. Fighting gods? That was ridiculous, no matter how just the reasoning.

Still though, Lance could see the determination in Keith’s eyes. He knew that no matter what he said, his mind was already made up, and Ares was in trouble if this panned out the way Allura was theorizing it would. So really, the best Lance could do now is just make sure his new boyfriend didn’t end up on the bottom of the God of War’s boot, and if that meant fighting Ares, then so be it.

He turned to Keith, a coy smile playing at his lips.

“I’ll provide you with cover fire,” he said, and Keith grinned as Shiro grumbled in defeat. Allura allowed a small smile to grace her face, proud of his answer, but smothered it quickly to get back to the task at hand.

“Listen, we’ll cross that bridge when we reach it, but for now let’s just see if I’m right.”

Keith nodded once, jaw set in determination as he took up the sword and stepped outside of the barrier without further discussion. Lance could sense the ripple that was sent out across the border, radiating waves of energy around the dome before settling on the calm humming once again, but then his full attention was on Keith, who was walking a little ways ahead of them to a small clearing, body low to the ground in anticipation of an attack.

Everyone was silent as they watched, Allura listening to the comm device in her ear for any new information, but after several long minutes, she sighed, thanking whoever had just spoken to her from back in camp.

“Pidge just informed me that there is nothing notable on the scanner, and Shay hasn’t spotted anything peculiar.”
“Isn’t that a good thing?” Shiro asked, hopeful.

“It is and it isn’t,” Allura explained, and Lance allowed himself to relax the string of his bow, which he had had trained on the area in front of Keith, ready to fire should something jump out.

“What’s the problem then?” he asked, and Allura motioned for Keith to rejoin them instead of answering. He jogged back over, face impassive, if a little bored.

“What’s up?”

“I had my suspicions before, but now I’m fairly certain.” She gestured to the sword in Keith’s grip and frowned slightly. “I think the Blade only truly activates when you’re in danger,” she explained, and upon noticing the three blank stares she received in reply, elaborated. “For example, in the arena with Lance, we noticed spikes in monster activity. And when you were fighting those giants when you first came to camp, well, giants don’t usually wander that close. You were in danger both times, and actively using the sword. I think we need to create a situation in which you are actually fighting, to tempt the Blade, and thus you, into one of those rages.”

“Uh...” Shiro started, but Keith spoke before he could finish his thought.

“You want me to get angry? To give in to the lure?”

Allura nodded, and Lance immediately saw Shiro’s face pale.

“No way,” he stated, waving his hands in front of him to emphasize his decision. “Not happening. It’s too dangerous. Besides, who would he fight?”

Allura’s frown grew deeper, considering. Lance knew she couldn’t volunteer herself, since she needed to monitor the scanners, and Shiro was still injured with his broken ribs and most likely unwillingly to fight his own brother. Her only options were to either go back and find someone to fight Keith, or else...

“Me,” Lance spoke up, startling them all. Allura looked as if she were already considering a dozen other options, Shiro had his mouth open to argue, and Keith’s eyes were wide with shock as he
gaped up at him.

“No.” They all spoke in unison, as if they had rehearsed it, and Lance blinked.

“Woah, that was super creepy,” he pointed out, then chuckled lightly to help ease the mood. When that didn’t work he sighed. “Listen guys, it’s fine. I don’t mind play fighting a bit for the sake of research.”

“It wouldn’t be play fighting,” Allura pointed out. “Keith would need to be in a situation where he felt threatened enough to activate the Blade.”

“Easy peasy,” Lance sang, and turned to Keith with a wink. “I think I know how to get under his skin.”

“No.” Keith’s voice was stern, and Lance huffed at the blunt reply.

“Don’t you want to figure this out? It’s just a bit of fighting. Nothing we haven’t already done.”

“But what if I hurt you?”

“Please,” Lance scoffed, placing a hand at his hip casually. “Don’t flatter yourself.”

“Lance,” Keith replied, no humour in his voice as he stated the facts. “I nearly killed you last time.”

True...

“I’ll be fine,” he said, then, for added measure, copied what Keith had said earlier to Shiro. “Just trust me.”

That seemed to do the trick, and Keith fell silent as his mind worked, considering the possibility. Allura was also thinking away, and only Shiro seemed to have his mind fully made up.
“Absolutely not,” he ordered, crossing his arms over his chest. “I forbid it.”

“You aren’t the boss,” Keith explained, and the glare he got in return was enough to convince Lance that he might as well be. Shiro was about to reply when Allura placed a hand on his shoulder, bringing his full attention to her.

“Shiro,” she said calmly, and some of the tension eased from his neck. “They won’t be alone. I’ll be there to interfere if things get too hectic.”

“But what if you can’t stop them?” he asked, voice low and meant only for her. Lance heard nonetheless, and felt the need to support his camp leader.

“You haven’t seen Allura fight yet Shiro,” he said, and once again all three sets of eyes were on him. “She could kick my ass with her eyes closed and on one leg if she wanted to. It’s terrifying.”

“I wouldn’t go that far-” Allura replied modestly, but Lance had plenty of cases to solidify his reasoning.

“You took down two giants by yourself! Hunk told me!”

“So did Keith,” Shiro stated, and Keith opened his mouth to say something, but Lance was faster.

“Maybe, but Allura did it in like, forty seconds. Plus I’ve seen her slice the head of a boar clean off before. Do you know how tough boar skin is?!”

“There are boars around here?” Keith mumbled to himself, looking around at the bushes and bringing his sword in closer to his chest out of habit.

“And,” Lance continued, “no one has ever bested her in an arm wrestling match. Not even Hunk could win, though I think he may have been holding back a bit. That guy is too nice for his own good-”
Allura stepped forward then, cutting off his ramblings.

“Thank you, Lance, for those...flattering examples.” She turned back to Shiro, who was staring at the ground in deep thought, eyebrows pinching in the middle. He looked up as Allura placed a finger under his chin and lifted his head gently.

“It will be alright. We just have to let them fight a bit to see if monster activity picks up. When I get the signal from either Pidge or Shay, or if I should say, then we call it off, and deal with the next step after that.”

“But you said Lance had to get Keith mad. I’ve seen him in one of those rages...it’s not something you can just interfere with. Lance could get seriously injured.”

Allura’s face fell slightly as she considered, and Lance was once again about to reassure them that he would be fine when Keith spoke suddenly.

“Shiro’s right.”

Everyone turned to stare at him, and Lance tilted his head in confusion at the sudden change in his attitude.

“But Keith-” he began, but was cut short.

“I’ve changed my mind,” he stated, looking at Allura. “I don’t want to hurt Lance again.”

“Again?” Lance scoffed, crossing his arms in front of him awkwardly with the bow still in his hands. “Boy, you barely touched me last time!”

Keith jerked around to face him, jaw set.

“You passed out! And you were all bruised up! I know because you flinched a few times whenever my hands touched-” he broke off with a blush as his eyes wandered slowly over towards Shiro and Allura, who were watching with varying expressions of confusion. He cleared his throat and tried a different tactic.
“I just don’t want to hurt you. I want to fight someone else.”

It made sense really, his reasoning, and Lance had been pretty beat up during their last tussle, but he couldn’t help but feel a little disheartened to hear Keith so openly request for someone else. Did he think Lance was really that easy to beat? Was he not a threat at all? He obviously held no fear of hurting another camper, since he was still open to fighting a different demigod for this experiment.

Was Lance someone that needed to be *protected* in Keith’s eyes? Like some lost child?

No, that wasn’t it.

Lance knew that Keith was just worried about him, and that was adorable.

Really.

But there was still a small part of him that was growing frustrated with Keith’s lack of faith in his abilities, and Lance had never liked being underestimated.

“Keith, c’mon, I promise nothing bad will happen-”

“Don’t say *that!*” Keith yelped, rushing forward to slap a hand over Lance’s mouth and silence him. “You’ll jinx us!”

Lance backed up a step, causing Keith’s hand to fall forward through empty space, and frowned.

“There’s nothing to jinx! Why don’t you trust me?”

“I don’t want to hurt you again!”

“You *didn’t* in the first place!”

“You barely survived when we fought in the arena!” Their voices were growing louder, and any previous efforts at stealth went out the door as their argument grew more heated. “And even if I
don’t manage to obliterate you in the first two minutes, there’s still the chance that monsters will come rushing in!”

“I can take care of myself Keith! I’ve done it for years now, and I don’t need you telling me about monsters!” Lance retorted sharply, frustrations growing with Keith’s obvious lack of confidence in him. “I was the one who rescued your sorry butt from those giants in the first place!”

Keith’s shoulders were heaving as he stepped forward and jabbed Lance in the forehead with his index finger, right on top of the scar he had received from that particular fight. A dull throb made itself known at the sudden pressure that he tried to ignore.

“And you almost died that time as well!” he practically yelled, eyes bright with malice, and Lance briefly wondered if the sword was amplifying his rage, but then Keith spoke again, and his mind went blank.

“The only thing you were good for in that fight was a distraction!”

Keith’s voice rang out through the trees, echoing around them mockingly, and no one spoke.

Lance couldn’t reply. His jaw was beginning to ache with the effort of withholding tears, and he was sure that if he tried to speak his voice would break. He wanted to say something in his defense, but Keith had hit a sore spot, and his scar was proof enough of what he had been saying.

The words vibrated around inside his head like a bullet ricocheting off steel, each repetition bringing about a fresh pang of hurt. As much as Keith’s words wounded him however, it was his next statement that dealt the finishing blow.

“I should be fighting someone I know won’t get hurt.”

Something inside of Lance cracked, though he wasn’t sure what. All he knew was that there was a deep ache in his chest that was growing more painful with each passing second of silence that Keith let fall around them.

But try as he might, Lance was at a loss for words.
He wasn’t a liability. Getting hurt was just something that happened. It was by chance. But somehow Keith had gotten it into his head that Lance and near death experiences went hand and hand, and hearing those words come from his mouth, no matter how good the intentions or sound the evidence, made Lance recoil from the boy, as if he had been struck.

“Enough,” Allura interjected suddenly, and both boys turned to gape at her, startled by the abrupt sound of her voice. “Please, Keith,” she addressed him directly, and Lance stared at the ground in front of him, urging the tears to stay away as he clenched his fists tightly. “Lance knows what he’s doing. And the sooner we get this over with, the sooner we can begin dealing with other things.”

Keith was silent as her words washed over him, analyzing the ground, then the Blade of Marmora, but never once looking up to glance at Lance at all.

Shiro was also quiet as he watched his brother, not daring to speak after having witnessed the violent verbal exchange, which was fine by Lance, since the last thing he needed right now was pity.

In fact, if Keith wanted to be a jerk about this, then why should he allow himself to be brought down any further? Why should he go off and cry and only solidify Keith’s point?

No.

He would ensure that he didn’t get hurt. He would work him up into a frenzy and then bring him back out of it, all without getting a single scratch. Just to spite him.

*Stupid mullet loving arrogant son of a-

Lance silenced his mind with a quick shake of his head. So this was to be their first official fight as a couple hey? What better way to solve their dispute then with a little roughhousing?

Besides, Allura had wanted a genuine fight, well... now he had something to dig into.

“Fine.”
Keith’s voice brought him out of his thoughts, and there was a moment of tense silence that followed that one word, in which everyone was still.

And then Allura adjusted her weapons belt and headed off in a direction to the East of them, decision made and done with.

Shiro followed after exchanging a brief look with Keith, who turned to finally look at Lance, his eyes displaying a mixture of sadness and frustration that Lance tried to ignore. They stared at each other for a moment, and when Keith opened his mouth to say something, Lance simply gestured to the path in front of them with a casual swing of his hand, letting his eyes fall to the path ahead of them.

“After you,” he said curtly, and Keith sighed after a moment before turning to follow the others.

They walked a good distance without saying much of anything, which gave Lance the opportunity to mull things over.

He was angry with Keith.

Wanted to be mad and upset about the things he had said, but the more Lance thought about it, the more Keith’s words made sense.

Lance had gotten hurt pretty badly during his most recent fights, and though he knew for a fact that those were just flukes for the most part, Keith didn’t.

In his eyes, Lance probably was a walking disaster, just begging to be bested, and it was when Lance tried to put himself in Keith’s shoes that he really understood where the boy was coming from.

Hades, if Lance had seen Keith nearly die twice in the span of a week, he would be off his rocker with worry. And he would definitely be protesting another fight that could result in a similar circumstance.

Lance came to that realization as they walked, and knew right then and there that he was being entirely foolish for feeling upset with Keith.

Of course the child of Ares would be worried! Anyone in the same situation would be!
Plus he already had so much on his plate, what with the Blade of Marmora and the lure that thing had over him, his mom and her passing...his freaking dad! All this demigod was still new to him, and Lance knew how mystifying that could be.

He had been completely unfair to push Keith, and downright selfish for having been making this about himself.

He stared at the back of Keith’s head, the guilt coursing through him like venom, and was about to call the whole thing off when Allura motioned for them to stop, gesturing to keep quiet. It was then that Lance realized where they were.

Allura, as if by some cruel twist of fate, had lead them to the same clearing he had first met Keith and Shiro. And where he, as Keith had pointed out, nearly died.

The clearing where the giants had attacked.

They were long gone by now, their bodies having turned to ash and descended to Hades, awaiting the opportunity to regenerate, but the air was still heavy with their presence. It was almost as if their spirits were haunting the clearing, waiting to take revenge on their vanquishers. Lance felt a chill run his down neck, and the hairs on his arms rose at the thought.

“We’ll do it here,” Allura informed them in hushed tones. “That way we can have a decent vantage point from all angles, as well as provide an open area for Lance and Keith to spar.”

Lance was once again about to protest the decision to fight at all and apologize for having forced Keith into it, but the boy was already walking out into the clearing without so much as word, startling Lance and the others.

Shiro looked ready to call out after him, but decided better of it, and let his mouth shut closed.

It was too late to call it off now.

Keith was stretching, swinging his sword a few times with such ferocity that Lance nearly found himself pitying any stray giant spirits that may be lingering in the air. He knew where that anger was stemming from though.
Oh gods, I’ve really pissed him off, haven’t I.

Oh well, he would apologize later, properly, once this was over. He shouldered his bow and, taking the sword Allura offered to better fight with, wandered out into the clearing after the boy, the previous fire in his gut nothing more than a few cold coals now, no longer wanting to fight with Keith, in both senses of the word.

He sighed heavily though, since Keith obviously wanted to get this over with, and figured he could at least try for his sake.

Lance glanced around the clearing upon exiting the safety of the trees and shivered once again. This was where it had all started.

This was where he had almost died. Where he had used his Charmspeak for the first time in a long while. Where he had first begun to regain his memories.

...Where he had met Keith.

Speaking of, the boy was now facing him, rolling his shoulders and lowering his eyebrows menacingly as he glared at Lance, who wondered briefly if this was such a good idea after all. He knew now that the lure of the Blade was enough to drive any person insane with rage, and though he had been able to quell it, Keith apparently, hadn’t had such luck.

Lance wondered with a shock of panic if Keith had already given into it, but there was no red haze around him, so maybe that was a good sign.

Still, this was a dangerous game they were playing, and if Keith did give in to the power the weapon promised, as he had on several other occasions, then Lance was in trouble, and once again he realized with a rush of guilt the pressure he had placed on Keith’s shoulders.

He had blatantly said that he didn’t want to hurt Lance, and instead of respect those wishes, here he was, about to get him into a frenzy and risk just that. He had been so focused on what Keith had said, and sure his words had hurt, but they all stemmed from truth. Or at least, Keith’s truth.

But instead of trying to reason with him, and talk it out, Lance had taken the opposite route, and
gotten himself all worked up over a stupid argument that he had no business partaking in in the first place.

What kind of boyfriend did that?!

_Screw this_, he thought to himself suddenly, and let his posture relax as he dropped his sword to the ground.

“Keith, I’m sorr-” he broke off as something suddenly whipped past his face and plunged into a nearby tree trunk with a heavy thud, the rush of air that followed afterwards making his hair fly into his face. His head jerked around in the direction the arrow had come from, and he saw Keith do the same out of the corner of his eye, sword raised and at the ready.

He was about to call out when Allura came hurtling out of the bushes from behind them, spear in one hand and the other at her ear where the comm piece was, listening to either Pidge or Shay.

“There’s been a drastic spike in monster activity according to-” she trailed off, falling silent and freezing in place, causing Shiro to run right into her with an ‘ooft’, and Lance turned to see what had caused her to stiffen.

It was difficult to make out at first, but once his eyes adjusted, he was able to see where the arrow had originated from.

There, standing at the very edge of the clearing farthest from them, was the silhouette of a person, the sun glaring down and causing the shadows in the forest to appear larger and darker, and thus hiding them from proper sight.

Lance could make out enough to know that they held a bow in their hands, another arrow nocked and pointed at them, and as he moved to reach for his own, his whole body suddenly tensed as the shadows shifted with a passing cloud moving overhead, and the stranger became fully visible in the absence of the blinding sunlight.

He felt the breath hitch in his throat, his lungs contracting in shock and mind whirling as he stared at the person.

Their hair was cut short, hanging in loose waves around a sharp jaw, with bright blue eyes growing
wider as they searched his face. And he knew exactly what they were seeing, because aside from the hair, this person was the spitting image of him, and his expression as just as stupefied as theirs.

It was like looking in a mirror.

Beside him Keith gasped, and Allura made a strangled sound in the back of her throat. Lance ignored both, instead stepping closer to the edge of the clearing, feet moving involuntarily towards the stranger.

Except, this wasn’t a stranger. He knew this person! The same skin, same eyes, Hades, even the same nose! Everything about this person was familiar, not only because they looked so much like him, but because his mind was providing a concoction of flashbacks and memories that he had shared with them at one point in time.

A time that had come and gone, and with it, he had previously thought, this woman who stood gaping at him in disbelief.

His twin sister.

“...Pragma?”

The stranger lowered her weapon slowly, letting the slack out of the string enough that the arrow hung loosely, and took a hesitant step forward, so that her entire body was now out in the clearing. Lance felt his mouth fall open.

This was his sister?! She was alive?! And standing not twenty feet away from him!

“Lance?” he heard her ask, and the sound of her voice brought another array of recollections to the front of his mind, making his heart rate increase in anticipation. He nodded quickly, unable to form words, and then suddenly she was running towards him, sprinting really, and Keith tensed, moving to stand in front of him.

Lance was quicker though, and moved past him, ignoring the look of worry that passed over the child of Ares’s face, and then he was running as well. Running towards the girl who looked so much like him it was disorientating. Running towards someone he had only recently remembered.
Running towards his family.

They collided heavily, with her force knocking him back a few steps, but he remained on his feet as his arms wrapped around her in a tight embrace.

This was his sister! His actual flesh and blood! And she was here, right now, in his arms!

He couldn’t help the tears that formed in his eyes as he thought about how long he had been alone. How desperate he had been to recall anything from his past for so many years.

And with his regained memories, how guilty he had been that he had lived while she had gone off to fight with their father. Gone off and never returned, and he had believed she had died protecting him!

The emotions spilled out of him like an overflowing cup; the mixture of grief and absolute bliss combining to form a wonderfully bittersweet concoction. Pragma was laughing, a sound he remembered cherishing as a child, as he spun her around in a circle, her own arms coiled tightly around his neck for balance.

“I’ve finally found you!” she exclaimed when he finally set her down on her feet. Despite their visual similarities, Lance stood about a head taller than her, and where his skin was virtually flawless, she had a light dusting of freckles across the bridge of her nose that he found himself instantly jealous of. It had been ten or so years since he had last seen his sister, but he could have pretended it was only yesterday. Everything about her was so familiar, that Lance found himself grinning like a fool as he stared down at her face.

“You were looking?” he asked, and a flash of apprehension crossed her face, before quickly being replaced with a large grin.

“You were looking?” he asked, and a flash of apprehension crossed her face, before quickly being replaced with a large grin.

“Of course! For years! And I can’t believe it...this whole time, you were right here!”

Lance wanted to know so much, the questions were bubbling up inside him and threatening to explode, but he found himself rambling out explanations to try and explain why he hadn’t been looking for her as well.

“My memories were lost,” he spoke quickly, voice growing wobbly and unstable as his emotions
took over. “I-I didn’t even know you existed until a few days ago! And at that point it had been so long that I thought you were dead and.”

“Shh...Lance, it’s okay now,” Pragma cooed, and like a breath of fresh air on a sweaty brow, his worries were soothed. “In fact, you’re becoming very tired.”

Lance felt his eyelids begin to droop. Exhaustion rushed into his limbs, making them heavy and awkward, and he leaned into Pragma’s arms, which were now wrapped around his shoulders.

Keith’s voice rang out, calling his name with sudden urgency, and then Allura and Shiro were yelling something as well, but Lance couldn’t hear what they said, his mind growing fuzzy with the idea of sleep.

“You’re so tired you’re going to fall asleep right here in my arms,” Pragma whispered to him, and as much as Lance wanted to close his eyes and pass out, there was still so much he needed to ask. To know! He struggled to stand, but his legs wouldn’t cooperate.

“I-I...have to ask things,” he mumbled, the words coming out slurred and broken, like those of a drunk man, and he felt Pragma chuckle softly.

Keith’s voice echoed in his ears again, this time closer than before, and Lance felt something in the back of his mind grow alert at the panic he heard in his tones. But as much as he tried to focus on that thought, the more his body protested, until soon his legs were giving out, his full weight now supported by his sister.

“That’s right,” she lulled, “just go to sleep.”

But there were so many questions still! So many things he wanted to talk about! This was his sister! And she was finally back after a decade of nothing! He couldn’t fall asleep now, not when he had to introduce her to everyone. Not when he had to reconnect with her himself, and show her their camp, and his friends, and...

Maybe a quick rest won’t hurt, he thought to himself, and let his arms fall heavy to his sides, bow tumbling from his grasp and to the ground with a soft thud.

“I...I remember you,” he managed to slur out, the sounds of frantic footsteps growing louder as his
friends approached, and he heard his name being called once again, with such intensity that he earned to turn towards it, but his head was a weighted block now, and Pragma’s shoulder was a comfortable resting place that he didn’t want to leave.

“LANCE!”

That’s Keith’s voice...

The thought ran through his mind, a sudden bright light amongst the growing grey, like the sun peeking through a cloudy sky, and Lance felt himself smile at the sound of it.

“I remember...” he murmured into her shoulder, and Pragma’s voice was louder this time, ringing out across the clearing with a clarity he felt reverberate deep into his bones.

“That’s good,” she replied, and he felt her raise her bow from behind his back, drawing the string tight and aiming at something behind him.

Something that was running towards him, screaming out his name.

“But now it’s time to forget.”

And then everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

.....(0.0)

Wow, so this is done, finally, and I just want to say THANK YOU FOR READING!!

jk, it's far from over, but this part sure is. I'll be writing a second part so don't worry, it won't end in a cliffhanger forever, but I will be going on a bit of a break from this fic for a while, so I can work on other stories and, you know, life stuff.

For those confused by the ending, feel free to leave a comment, since I read every one of them and reply as best as I can, and since this chapter is so freaaking long there may have been some confusion going on.

I apologize for that, but I really wanted to get this finished by this weekend since I have to start another fic as part of a collaboration and my deadline is coming up.
Again, I want to thank everyone who's read this and left kudos/comments/ and supportive messages in my inbox. You guys are the real MVP's and I just, love you all? so much?

Thank you especially to the readers who continuously left messages after each chapter update (you know who you are ;)) and to those who created art based on this story. Seriously still get excited over that everyday :)

Anyways I hope to be posting some new stories soon, and I for SURE have a plan for the second part, unlike this first part, which was basically me just making shit up with each new chapter (I'm honestly amazed I got this finished). I take back my first statement about not writing drafts.
Do it.
You'll thank yourself later.

Seriously, plot holes are a BITCH to try and fix, and I have a sneaky suspicion that there may be one or two in this story that I forgot to address, so if you find any, let me know asap so I can go in an edit.

I'm so excited to continue this story, but I'll be waiting to see what season 3 brings, since I have every intention of adding Lotor into the story, and yes....a quest.

Stay tuned my dudes, and thanks one last time for hanging with me as I struggled to write this. It means a lot :)


End Notes

Based on thesearchingastronaut's [http://thesearchingastronaut.tumblr.com/] greek god au.
Not sure how long this will be since I don't write drafts.....*we die like men*
Based on Rick Riordan's PJO books, hence the crossover.

Like I said I don't really know where this is going, just wanted to start somewhere, so if you have any ideas about how the story should progress I'm here with open arms *sick reference brah*

Also, let me know if I have any misunderstandings with the sexualities and how they are written, because I don't want to offend anyone by writing in ignorance. (^ 3^)

EDIT:
Learned how to link so have some images from my Tumblr
Here
Here
and Here

MAY 11 2017 UPDATE:
New art by emeraldlld (SpaceL10ns)
Check it out!!
Sharpshooter Lance
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!