Of Moth and Men

by mothdads

Summary

Keith Kogane had always known he was different. But now he knew why. He had the burden of a life changing secret on his shoulders and nobody, not even his brother Shiro, could comprehend the significance of his discovery-

He was mothman

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Bookstore AU in which Keith thinks he is mothman, Lance is oblivious, Shiro is suffering, Hunk is done and Pidge doesn't even work here

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Keith's Worst Kept Secret

Keith Kogane was a man on a mission. Just two hours ago he had made the most important
discovery of his, or possibly anyone's life.

It was obviously a development which had to be shared with the internet. He had spent the last two
hours setting up his trusty conspiracy board with new information. Now obscured by a sheet ready
for the big reveal, there was only one thing left to do.
Keith turned on the video camera and stood before it, ready. He took a deep breath. It had been a
long time.

Then the camera beeped once and everything fell into place.

"Hello internet and welcome to the Area 53 Conspiracy channel. If you haven't been abducted by
aliens for the last ten months, you'll know this channel has been on hiatus now for quite a while.
Contrary to public expectation I have not been kidnapped by government spooks, or killed in an
unfortunate accident while attempting to track bigfoot.
No, the news I bring to you is far, far more important than a bigfoot sighting- turned accidental
death."

He paused, taking a deep breath. While the rumours hadn't been far off what had actually happened,
he would not be disclosing *that* to the public. He had a reputation to uphold, after all.
The camera stared at him from across the room, blinking red eye of light watching him, and judging.
If he didn't know better, he'd swear the thing was sentient.

This was it, though. The revelation had to be published, and it was now or never.

"Tonight, I bring you unequivocal evidence of the existence of not just mothman, but of an entire
species of moth people!" He exclaimed, ripping the bedsheet away from the board to reveal hundreds
of interconnected pictures of the mothman, as well as the main addition; A photo of his own arm,
complete with straggly purple fur.

"Welcome to the M-Files."
Lance has weird taste in youtube videos. Hunk is his suffering roommate. Anyone awake at 3:21 in the morning is either dead inside or literally dying.

It was 3:21 in the morning, and Lance McClain was watching youtube videos. It was a general consensus that this was not a good time in the day to be watching youtube videos, but this knowledge meant nothing to an overtired college student whose impulse control was no match to the mystical powers of too much caffeine.

In his hours of distraction, it had become a habit of his to watch bad conspiracy videos. Something about them always left him in hysterics— it was the combination of ridiculous ideas that never stood up to scientific scrutiny and the totally serious collective of twenty-something loners with an ardent belief that it was the absolute truth.

He scrolled through his recommended section sleepily. The usual spiel, 'Bush did 9/11- The truth revealed', 'Mushroom cloud seen above area 51'. Nothing particularly eye catching there. 'The M-Files Episode 1- I am Mothman?' Lance looked at the title and scrolled down, before doing a double take. Shitty reference in the title, episodic series, "I am Mothman?"
If Lance knew conspiracy theories nearly as well as he thought he did, he was in for a wild ride.

"Hunk, holy fuck!"

His roommate groaned loudly.

"Lance..." He moaned. "It's like three in the morning. What the fuck?"

Lance crawled out of his bed and perched himself on Hunk's, laptop in hand, grinning like a madman. "Hunk, oh my God, you have to see this guy."

"No, Lance, I think you'll find I have to sleep." Hunk rolled over, made a loud disparaging sound and covered his head with his pillow. Lance, being a man on a mission, unplugged his headphones, being reminded immediately that he had left the volume on 100%.

Hunk made a sound like a man who, if he was not dying, hoped to be very soon.

"Hello internet and welcome to the Area 53 Conspiracy channel," the video boomed.

Lance looked down at Hunk with an air of triumph, watching his roommate writhe in discomfort. "Lance! Please, it's too late for this shit, man. Or too early, I don't even know dude." Hunk looked at the clock in the corner. Admittedly, it was not a good time, but then again, there was no time like the present, right? It occurred to Lance that this might have rang truer were the present a time like midday, or at worst 8:00 in the morning, but there was rarely any space in Lance’s mind for regrets.
He was here now, anyway.

"Don't you love me, Hunk? I thought we had something special!" Crooned lance from his perch.

"No." Said Hunk immediately.

"You wound me!" Lance placed a hand over his heart and did a passable imitation of someone swooning. "What about us? What about the kids?"

"I want a divorce."

"Are you willing to pay child support?" Lance smirked at him.

"Lance what the fuck."

"Pleeeaaaaaaase."

"Well, I guess I'm awake now, anyhow." Hunk emerged from the depths of his duvet, gave Lance a look that might have killed any normal man.

Lance just grinned.

"Tonight, I bring you unequivocal evidence of the existence of not just mothman, but of an entire species of moth people!" The voice boomed from the tinny laptop speakers. “Welcome to the M-Files!”

Hunk squinted at the computer screen. "Oh my God, What is this? I think you've finally found a guy as crazy as you, Lance!"

"Hey! I don't actually believe in this shit! I just watch it ironically", Lance pouted. He was not a conspiracy theorist after all, and even if he had believed in- well, whatever it was this guy actually believed in- he was not exactly someone who would actually go as far to make videos about his mad delusions!

“You cut me real deep, hunk.”

"Sure, Jan" Hunk rolled his eyes surreptitiously at his erstwhile friend. "You were the one who was suggesting I pay child support for our fictional kids.

Well, that was true.

"Touché."

They watched in silence, as various images of mothman flashed across the screen, accompanied by, if Lance's ears did not deceive him, a vaporwave remix of the X Files theme.

To start with, the man went on a five minute rant about something called a Lepidoptera, pointing at various pictures of purple moths. Then, the man rolled up his right sleeve, to reveal an arm covered in clumps of purple fur. A strange glazed look came into his eyes.

"What is this guy's deal?" He asked Hunk in a way that did not require any answer. "Like, did he go mad at an arts and crafts store or what? You thing that stuff is held on with PVA glue or Pritt stick?"

“I think it's time to go to bed, Lance." Hunk groaned. "And I’m pretty sure that stuff is held on entirely by the power of crazy.”
"I know right? It's insane! I mean, what does he even think he's doing? I swear mothman is meant to have black fur or something? I mean, was it really too hard to find fake fur in the right colour? Or red contact lenses or something? Either this guy’s a rank amateur or he’s doing this as a joke. Hard to believe someone could actually be that delusional, huh?"

"You sure know a lot about mothman for someone self-professedly 'not insane', huh?" Hunk raised an eyebrow at him.

"Hey, unlike this guy I know the difference between reality and dreams, ok?"

"News to me."

"Aww, cmon. Lance protested. "At least I don't make youtube videos about secretly being a cryptid!"

"Well he's hardly keeping it a secret. You, on the other hand have an alarming ability to seem normal for the first three weeks someone knows you."

"And then they're charmed by my glowing personality?" Lance shot some fingersguns at his roommate, adding in a sly wink for good measure.

"Then they realise it's too late to back away, dude." Hunk looked at him in defiance of the power of all his fingersguns. Damn, his ultimate weapon. Rejected. Hunk must really be in a bad mood.

Lance sulked for a minute. "Why so mean, Hunk? You wound me so."

"Oh I dunno, maybe because you woke me up at three in the fucking morning to show me a video of some weirdo on the internet ranting about moths for 23 and a half minutes!"

"So?"

"Go to sleep lance."

"Alright, alright, fine mom!" Lance griped, scooting off of Hunk's bed and into his own, finally turning the video off. "Watch it with me tomorrow though, yeah?"

"Fine." Hunk finally conceded. "Hey, you still gonna apply for that job up at the bookstore tomorrow?"

"That? Oh, sure. I've got nothing to lose by trying, right?"

"If you get it, coffee's on the house tomorrow lunchtime."

Lance thought of the coffeehouse at which Hunk worked (not to mention his cute boss, Miss Allura) and smiled.

"And if I don't?"

"You buy us both coffee and I'll listen to you complain about not getting the job."

"Wow, noble." Lance raised a jaunty eyebrow. It was very jaunty. Lance considered eyebrows a very important facial feature and took great care of them. It was even more important that he be jaunty. Don’t ask why- it just was.

"Oh trust me, listening to you complain is the biggest sacrifice anyone could make."
Lance sighed, clambering to bed and turning off his computer. "Thanks, I think..."

"Night lance." Hunk said with an air of unarguable finality.

"Night."

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! Chapter Three ought to be out later today, but for now, enjoy some Lance!

From Mothmum and Mothdad!
Moths vs Cryptids: Why not both?

Chapter Summary

Back to Keith for some o' that sweet sweet exposition and a lil bit of Shiro on the side.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had begun with an itch. Keith had written it off as an allergic reaction at the time, and had put some aloe vera gel on it. It had not worried him unduly; after all, what was there to worry him about a simple rash? It was hardly something unusual, and he was not paranoid enough to have lost any sleep over it. He was not an overly paranoid person after all, regardless of what people who had seen his videos thought of him.

No, it had been the last thing he had expected when he came home from work, to roll up his sleeve and instead of a nasty rash discover clumps of maroon coloured fur growing out of his arm.

He had looked it up, expecting to chance upon some kind of obscure medical condition which made one develop fur, like a warped pituitary gland or something equally spurious along the same lines. His heart had sunk out of his chest like a stone dropped in the ocean when the first result had suggested cancer. When it went on to diagnose him as a cat he became somewhat less worried. Breathing a nonetheless shaky sigh of relief when he discovered no articles that adequately described his symptom in any way shape or form, he leant back on his chair, looking up at the artist's impression of mothman that he had plastered on the wall above his desk.

Then it had hit him. The colour of the fur resembled that of a Pink-Striped Oakworm Moth, one of his favourite moths. He would know, his last major obsession before discovering conspiracy theories had been in the species of lepidoptera, or butterflies and moths which he would insist were beautiful and unappreciated creatures to anyone who asked, and many who didn't. But, that was beside the point.

The pink striped oakworm moth was also known as Anisota Virginiensis. Virginia. The original sighting of mothman was near Clendenin, West Virginia, the church of which he had been left on the doorstep of as a newborn baby.

He had always felt a deep connection to the mothman, had assumed for many years that this was merely because they came from the same place, but now he knew it was so much more!

The internet had not been ready for it, that was true, but as a well respected conspiracy theorist with a semi-popular youtube channel it was his duty to tell the world! To say the video had met mixed reception was an understatement, but Keith was a determined man. If they would not believe his story he would just have to present the world with more and more evidence until there was no choice but to accept the truth.

There came a knock at the door. "Can I come in?"

"Sure." Keith called back, thankful for the distraction. Being mothman was a tiring responsibility to bear after all.

Shiro opened the door quietly, stepping through the threshold.
"It's barely been a week and the conspiracy board is already out? Should I be worried?"

Keith shook his head with a wry smile. "Not unless you're close enough for it to fall on you."

Shiro chuckled slightly. "Yeah, let's not have a repeat of last year's incident. You did fix the base, right?"

Keith smirked, remembering the incident in question, when an overzealous Matt had attempted to pull down a picture of bigfoot in one of their old cryptid vs creepypasta videos, and the whole thing had toppled onto them, complete with the paper maché bigfoot that Keith had constructed all by himself. Nobody had gotten badly hurt, and it had been very amusing in retrospect, though Keith still mourned his little bigfoot (which he had lovingly named Rosie). There was a grave for her in the garden that he had not dug as ironically as he had suggested at the time.

"Sure did, Shiro."

A silence hung in the air, hanging awkwardly between the two brothers, which was not that rare an occurrence, considering that Keith was rather prone to aloofness and neither of them were incredible conversationalists.

"So," Shiro broke the silence, probably remembering why it was that he had come here in the first place. "I was consulting the stockers as to some books on, ah, 'cryptids' and conspiracies as you asked, and I was wondering, does that include the occult? Because grimoires are funnily enough easier to find than A-Z maps of cryptid sightings." Shiro said pointedly, reminding Keith a little forcefully of their bargain- Keith would stop chasing Bigfoot sightings if- and only if- Shiro would let him stock the Bookstore with an shelf on whatever the heck he had wanted. A bargain that Shiro seemed to be regretting slightly, but he should have known better than to expect Keith to choose anything but conspiracy theories for his subject material.

Keith snorted derisively. "You and I both know very well that that garbage is clearly fake. You said I could have a shelf on Conspiracies, Shiro. We made a deal! Otherwise, I have a date with bigfoot."

Shiro's shoulders sagged in defeat. "They're just so hard to find, though! Most of them aren't worth the paper they're printed on either!"

"Your point?"

His adopted brother sighed with the air of a long-suffering parent. "Could we like, go half and half on the shelf, put one of your other interests on it as well? Books on moths are just so much easier to find."

Any other time, Keith would not have been swayed by this argument, but now? Matters had changed. A shelf devoted to moths might be exactly what he needed access to right now.

"Fine." He conceded, watching Shiro sigh in relief. "But half of them are still on conspiracies, right?"

"Don't worry, you still get to stock 'Area 51- The Real Story', complete with seventy pages of appendices and footnotes to your heart's content." Shiro grinned at him.

"Thanks, Shiro." Keith smiled back.

Shiro turned to leave, and then stopped.

"Oh, by the way, I got a donation for the library you might like for your own!" Shiro held out a
brown paperback with inked details on the front. "It's fiction, so not really your thing, but its called The Behaviour of Moths. You interested?"

That brought Keith back to his predicament. No matter how he thought about it, life as a moth was going to be hard.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! Keith is so weird it's great

find us at mothdads.tumblr.com!
Looking for a job, finding a moth.

Chapter Summary

Lance goes in for a job at the Shirogane Independent bookstore.

Chapter Notes

We are british, so apologise for any minor inaccuracies.

The rate Lance is offered is the average hourly rate for working in Waterstones (bookshop) converted into dollars. Do tell us if it seems unrealistic :^l

Lance groaned loudly and fell out of bed. In hindsight maybe watching conspiracy theory videos in the middle of the night hadn’t been his greatest idea, but honestly, all of his ideas are great so it didn't really matter anyway.

"Hunk! You there, buddy?" He called out sleepily, regarding the silence as a resounding 'no'. He craned his neck to check his alarm clock. It read 12:44pm.

Fuck.

He was supposed to be up and out of the apartment by 9:30 to get to the bookstore early today!

It could’ve been worse, at least it was Saturday. The first Saturday of Christmas break to be exact. Lance had been looking forward to two weeks of no lectures and relaxing with absolutely no work, but as a broke college student, life was not smiling on that particular aspiration. So nooo, no two weeks of pampering and hour long baths, Lance had to go get A JOB.

"Ugh." Lance staggered over to the wardrobe and pulled out a very tasteful jumper, a shirt and some jeans. After putting them on he took a well-deserved five minutes admiring himself in the mirror.

"Looking good, man" He grinned at his reflection, "Okay, you can do this. No big deal. Just walk in there, give ‘em some of that ol’ Lance charm and politely beg them for a job like the penniless fool you are!"

He walked into the kitchen and, to his delight, found some pancakes in the fridge waiting for him (life with Hunk was the best life a man could lead) accompanied by a note.

It read:
Lance, made you some breakfast. Good luck at the bookstore <3
PS. I love you dude, but if you ever wake me up at 4am to watch conspiracy theory videos again you're out one roommate. Seriously.

"Pshht, it was only 3:30." Lance said to himself. He scoffed down the pancakes and, leaving the plate in the sink, hurried out the door.
It was ten past one when Lance reached the bookstore. The Shirogane Independent Bookstore lay on the corner of Elm Street, one building down from the coffee shop where Hunk worked. It was little more than five minutes' walk from their apartment, which was good for a workplace, though this was not preferable to a lack of job. Ah well, it had to be done sooner or later.

Still slightly nervous, Lance hovered outside for a moment. The bookstore was a quaint little place, with a dated façade and decor that looked frankly ancient, though he had been reliably informed that the Shiroganes had only owned it since the fifties. He had seen the owner once or twice in the coffee shop, a powerfully built, somewhat austere looking man with a prosthetic arm and a tuft of white hair at the top of his head which might have been dyed though he could not be sure. Objectively quite handsome, but not Lance's type. Thank God, the last thing he needed was a crush on one of his co-workers.

Composing himself, Lance headed on into the bookshop, hearing a bell on the doorframe ring as he strode in.

The store was probably what constituted busy for a bookstore. There were people. They were looking at books. All normal behaviour for people in a bookstore.

A few metres away from him was the counter, behind which stood a man. This man was rearranging a display with an impressively neutral impression.

"Excuse me!" Lance strode up to the counter and flashed the man a sparly grin. There it was, the old razzle dazzle. "Do you... work here?"

"Oh no, I just rearrange book plates for fun." Lance blinked once. This was not a dialogue option he had prepared for. "What?"

"Yeah, I get a real kick out of it." The man said, with a hint of a southern drawl. Where was he from? Kentucky? Texas maybe?

"Your nametag says Keith." Said Lance simply.

"Oh, I do work here. I was just. Making a joke, y'know?" The man said just a little too quickly. Perhaps he was a little anxious, which suited Lance just fine, so long as he had a read on him. That perfectly blank expression might have gotten a little unnerving. That and the fact that the man struck him as vaguely familiar.

"Yeah, yeah I get it man." Lance made an effort to grin again. "Hey, do you know if there are like, any vacancies here over Christmas?"

The man just shrugged. "I've been here a week. I wouldn't know."

"Oh." Said Lance feeling slightly disappointed.

"I can take you to Shir- uh, the manager if you want though?" He asked.

"That'd be great... Keith."

Keith made a swift exit round the counter. "Gimme a sec." He said to Lance over his shoulder, approaching a man sat in a comfy looking armchair in the corner who was wearing a cheap pair of earbuds connected to a phone upon which he was desperately trying- and failing- to play a game Lance recognised as Geometry Dash.

"Matt!" He tapped the man on the shoulder, and he looked up from his game, promptly died and swore under his breath. "I need you to take over at the front desk ok? There's a guy here to see Shiro."

The man nodded, muttering something under his breath about 'almost having it' which he incidentally did not- he was only 35% of the way through level one, which Lance would know, having proudly mastered all the levels up to Time Machine and had boasted about it until everyone around him had stopped caring.

He got up, playing (and failing) the game as he made the slow trek over to the counter, where he sat down and proceeded to look as uninterested in his actual job as was feasibly possible. Lance was relieved to see that if he were to get a job here he was unlikely to be the worst employee Mr Shirogane had ever employed and that thought gave him courage.

Then Keith turned back to him, and Lance got a proper read on his face. Which was a very nice face it turned out, cute and all. At a glance he was probably south-east Asian, though judging by the accent, he had been raised in America. He had a sculpted face under the pretty dreadful haircut. A mullet? In 2016? Madness if Lance had ever seen it, but strangely enough it looked not one bit out of place on this odd man. He looked funny- funny in the sense that only someone who wore extra-long sleeves with holes for the thumbs could be, but also strange in the sense that there was an intensely peculiar, alien beauty to him- the smooth face, completely devoid of any emotion, his haughty bearing, unusual stylistic choices and those eyes- oh those eyes. Angular and penetrating, and were those irises purple? Perhaps it was a trick of the light or perhaps even coloured contact lenses, but Lance could have sworn they really were purple.

"Hey, you okay there? You still good to see Shiro?"

The accented voice snapped him out of his reverie, and Lance had the decency to feel quite embarrassed.

"Oh yeah, definitely." He said, fiddling awkwardly with his hair. "I just spaced out for a minute there, sorry."

"No worries. I do that too." Keith smiled slightly at him, and it turned out to be a very pleasant half-smile indeed. Good looking, but that came with the territory, and Lance wasn't going to get involved. Not with a co-worker and certainly not with anyone who still wore a mullet.

"C'mon," he gestured. "Shiro isn't going anywhere."

And with that, Lance was led through the bookstore to a different room, which was filled with old, comfy looking furniture. The books on these shelves were battered and mismatched, and there was a large wooden box that said 'EXCHANGE' on it in loud, black lettering. In the centre of the room was a large wooden table which looked like it dated back to the era of Edward the Confessor (the Norse king who brought Christianity to England- Lance had been a huge fan of history in school and was not afraid to distribute this knowledge to anyone and anything). Around the table was a set of rickety chairs, and upon it sat the most terrifying piece of hardware Lance had ever seen. Was that a laptop? Was it a glowing green death-machine? Was it… a decepticon? It was hard to know. All Lance could say was that it made a sound like a very small jet fighter taking off and honestly, it was a little terrifying.
"Hey Pidge." Keith said to a diminutive person who was sat at the table in front of the death-laptop-transformer-thingy. She looked up, screen-glare reflecting in her circular glasses to create a decidedly odd effect. Like she was an alien. Or a teenager. Both, he decided, were inherently terrifying ideas.

"Have you seen Shiro?"

Pidge pointed to a corner of the room, which looked very much like a corner with no managers in, but, Lance digressed.

Keith muttered a 'thanks' and led Lance into the corner, which looked even more like a corner with no managers in up close, and Lance was not sure how much digressing he could actually do. Mr Shirogane was very not there.

Then Keith grabbed what upon closer inspection looked a lot like a door handle and pulled the entire shelf away to reveal another room. Lance observed, quite correctly, that it was the break room. There was a counter with a sink, kettle and microwave on the other side, a sign for the bathroom and in the centre of everything, upon another antique looking table sat a rather over-worked looking Mr Shirogane, surrounded by three huge piles of books which much resembled him in height and stature.

"Keith." The man said, without looking up. "Care to tell me why you put 'Set This House in Order' by Mark Ruff in the kids section?"

Keith shrugged nonplussed. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Keith it’s about a man being abused by his stepfather and developing a personality disorder."

"So? Kids’ stuff.” Keith said rather defensively.

"In what way is that suitable for kids? It's grim enough that I can't finish it, Keith, what kid would want to read something like that???

"I did." Muttered Keith. "I thought it was quite good, too."

"Okay, just put it in with the psychological thrillers or the crime novels. Somewhere it won't emotionally scar anyone who reads it."

Muttering something sullenly, Keith absconded, notably without the book.

Shiro sighed, massaging his temple, and Lance stood there in silence, not knowing if he was more shocked by Keith's open insolence or Mr Shirogane's long suffering patience.

Then Mr Shirogane noticed him. "Oh, hello." He said tiredly. "What can I do for you?"

Lance shot him the trademark sparkling grin. "Lance McClain. I was wondering if you needed an extra hand on deck during the holidays?"

"Takeshi Shirogane." The man smiled at him. "Call me Shiro."

Lance smiled politely, and extended a hand, which Shiro took, and Lance wondered all too late if it was rude to try to shake a man's prosthetic arm. Still, he had already done it, and Shiro didn't look all too offended, so he did not dwell on it.

He handed Shiro his CV, which he had folded, very neatly, in an envelope in his back pocket. Shiro took it out, and read through it, and Lance made an effort not to look nervous.
"You had a previous job at a convenience store?"
Lance nodded.
"And you left because?"
"I moved out to attend college."
Shiro glanced up at him. "Good, good. Can you tell me why you want to work here?"
"Well, you know, I've always liked bookstores, and books, so I thought-"
Shiro raised a perceptive eyebrow at him. Lance was impressed, it was rather jaunty. Was he wearing eyeliner? "Or, you're broke and college doesn't pay for itself."
"Well, I mean, partially, but-"
"No worries," Shiro smiled. "I remember being in the same position. Are you looking for full-time or part-time work?"
"I could do full time over the holidays, but after that I’d have to go down to part time, on weekends or something."

Lance grinned, surprised at how well it was going. Mr Shirogane- Shiro- seemed a pleasant enough possible boss. He was certainly lenient in any case.
"Perfect." He smiled back. "We're open 9 til 5:30, and I'll expect you to be here on time, despite anything Matt tells you. Rates are $9.13 an hour, I don't think you'll have a problem with that, and we don't open on Christmas or Boxing Day. That sound good?"
Lance nodded dumbly. "Yeah," he said, finding his voice. "That sounds great, thanks."
"Good." Shiro winked at him, and yes, he most definitely was wearing eyeliner. "Can I expect you tomorrow?"

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Lance could have danced out of the bookstore. It had gone well! He had a job! That meant money, and boy, Lance liked money. Honestly, he was expecting it to be much harder. While it wouldn't be his first job, getting a job was significantly easier when your dad was also your boss.

As Lance strode through the bookstore, he passed the two employees he had met, or more accurately, encountered earlier. The two of them were busy bickering about something. Something moth related.

He turned to look at the two of them, frowning slightly.
"But it's obvious! There's a subconscious link which led me to cryptids and moths even before I understood the significance!" The pretty one, Keith exclaimed, slamming his hand down on the counter with a loud 'thud'.

Lance felt an intense sense of déjà-vu just then, which he could not quite place. There was something about him, about the accent, the face that screamed to him of familiarity. Then Keith stood back, sliding into the shadows in front of a poster, dark purple with 'Mothstorm' written on it in silver lettering. His subconscious screamed at him- and then Keith turned to look at him, a blank dreamlike
caste to his face.

"You wouldn't understand."

The penny dropped.

Lance had to go. Without a word, he sprinted from the bookstore, narrowly avoiding an elderly lady who made a comment about 'kids these days'. He pelted full throttle along the street, barrelling through the doors to Coffee Corner.

"Hunk!" He panted. "Holy Fuck!"

Chapter End Notes

Dean aka mothdads has a mullet in 2016.................. :^)
RIP

Hope u enjoyed! Find us on tumlr at mothdads.tumblr.com
The New Guy

Chapter Summary

Keith takes the new guy on a quick tour around the bookstore.

Mattness ensues.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Keith was not a great talker.
He did not hate talking, it was merely not a skill he possessed. As a child he had never been overly talkative, though he had a penchant for asking question upon unanswerable question. While he was still curious, Keith now knew better than to ask (and believe) any stranger he met. After all, there was the internet for that, and books, of which Keith was a firm believer in the legitimacy of both. Hence, Keith did not need human contact. As someone who had proven himself able to live alone in a Texas backwater at age 15, it was a welcome distraction, though very little else.

That was where the main distinction lay between himself and the new guy. It was nothing personal, he seemed nice enough and all that- he just seemed like the kind that thrived off attention. That and Keith found him very distracting. Not even in a 'poor sad homo lusts after his new co-worker' way, more in the way that for the last half hour, the guy had been sitting directly opposite to him, glancing at him every so often, smirking like he thought Keith couldn't see him, then typing furiously on his phone to someone or another.

Sighing, Keith put his book down.

"Can I help you?" He asked, in that way that really just means' fuck off'. He interacted with customers on a regular basis, he knew how it worked.

The new guy had the audacity to look up and stare at him like he had been doing nothing at all. "What? Me?" He said innocently. "No, I'm fine, thanks for asking."

Keith groaned. So he was one of those types.

"You know you don't start until tomorrow, right?"

The man smirked at him. "Well, I was just trying to get the feel of the place, y'know? I wanna know where I'm working and what it's like and all that."

"You're working at a bookstore. The feel of the place is books. If you really wanted to get a feel for the place you'd, I dunno, read one instead of staring at me while I'm on break." Keith shot the man a pointed stare.

"Well, maybe I wanted to find out about my co-workers? Is that so wrong?"

The man's eyes were smiling and it was all too obvious he was finding the current happenings very amusing.
"Then why don't you go talk to them instead of staring at me and giggling?"

The man just shrugged.

God, he was irritating when he wanted to be.

"Fine, I'll show you round, I guess." Keith put his book down, sliding in the bookmark (a freebie the bookstore gave away with purchases), and putting the book down on his seat. "Follow me," he said, leading the newbie over to the counter, "You've already met Matt."

Matt was leaning back on his chair, utterly engrossed in the latest instalment of a new YA novel franchise that was rapidly gaining popularity.

"Robot Cats from Outer Space™, huh?" Lance murmured to himself, glancing at the cover, which depicted, lo and behold, five mechanical felines in space.

"Matt," Keith said, snapping his fingers to get Matt's attention. Evidently, Robot Cats from Outer Space™ was just too good to put down, as Matt continued reading unfazed.

"Matt!" Keith said in aggravation, snatching the book away from his preoccupied colleague.

"Huh? Oh, Keith, what's up?" Matt finally replied.

"This is the guy that came to talk to Shiro earlier. He works here now."

"The name's Lance" He grinned.

Matt's eyes glanced over him and then brightened with recognition.

"Oh, I remember you now," All of a sudden his expression turned serious and he looked Lance straight in the eyes. "Before we can work together I'm gonna have to ask you a few questions. Bigfoot related questions."

Lance cocked an eyebrow and Keith groaned.

"Bigfoot is real, Matt. We've been over this."

"Yeah, but what evidence is there that he is?"

"A lot more evidence than the theory that the Rugrats are all dead and figments of Angelica's imagination"

"Don't hate on Angelica. Besides, it's common sense, man. Bigfoot is just a guy in a suit."

"I SAW him. I did NOT nearly die for just a guy in a suit. We discussed this during the great conspiracy board-gate of 2015". Keith's outrage was subdued by the sounds of Lance giggling like a school girl in the corner, hurriedly typing on his phone.

"What's so funny?"

Lance was surprised briefly at Keith's question, but recovered quickly and began to feign innocence once again.
"Oh, nothing, nothing. Don't mind me."

That was bullshit and Keith knew it. He wasn't about to ask though. He had bigger fish to fry—namely Matt, who had also turned his attention to Lance.

"Sorry about Keith, he suffers perpetually from 'stick-up-his-ass-itis'. It's a very serious condition."

"Whatever," Keith pouted, "Bigfoot is real and you know it."

"What about you, Lance? What are your opinions on Bigfoot?"

Lance hummed, and scratched his head in an exaggerated display of contemplation. "I gotta say, I'm leaning towards the 'guy in a suit' argument, BUT there is a lot of evidence that he really is real."

"Interesting." Matt replied smugly, glancing quickly over at Keith, who rolled his eyes at him. "OK, next question. Who is really to blame for Miley Cyrus' downfall: capitalism or the Illuminati?"

"OK, that's enough." Keith dragged Lance away by his sleeve, "Sorry about him, he's into some really crazy theories". Lance snorted.

"Yeah, OK then." Keith didn't like Lance's incredulous tone.

"Here's another question, Lance," Matt interrupted before either of them could say anything. "Do aliens exist?"

"Well, obviously!" Agreed Lance. "There's on average two earth-like planets per Solar System, so statistically speaking, the idea that aliens don't exist is very unlikely."

Keith and Matt nodded at each other. "He's cool." Matt said.

"But do you believe aliens have visited us yet?" Keith raised an eyebrow at him.

"If they have, then not in a very long time," Lance said sagely.


"All explainable phenomena. Feasibly speaking, if there are alien races out there looking for other civilisations, such as ourselves, no light, radio wave or signal would reach them for light years. It'd take them even longer to get here."

"How can you believe in Aliens but not in countless alien sightings?!" Keith demanded, outraged. This guy clearly didn't know what he was talking about.

"I'm an astrophysics major," Lance said a little frostily. "I know a thing or two about space."

Keith frowned. "Yeah but-"

"Shuddap Keith, he clearly passed the test!" Matt growled. "We discussed this. He believes in aliens, he knows his stuff and he doesn't make freaky videos about tracking the bigfoot on youtube." He paused for a second and glanced at Lance. "You don't, right?"

Lance shook his head.
"Fine, fiiine." Keith sighed. It wasn't his fault that the world chose to judge him for his calling, but he'd let it pass. This time. They'd understand soon enough when his metamorphosis was complete.

"I won't keep you from your... work... any longer." He shot Matt a poisonous look.

"Hey, I’m not done showing you around yet, am I." He said, dragging Lance away into the other room.

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Well, of all the possible outcomes, this was not the one Keith had expected. He had introduced Lance to Pidge and they had gotten along- well- like a house on fire. He had half a mind to retrieve his book from the other room. Awkwardly he hovered over the table, watching Lance and Pidge watching We Are Number One spliced with freeze frames from the bee movie every 3.14159265359 seconds. It was certainly something.

When it was over he tapped Lance on the shoulder. "You still want me to..."

"Oh sure!" Lance beamed at him, which made Keith feel slightly strange inside for reasons he would not disclose. "I've been meaning to ask, what is this room?"

"This? Oh, this is the exchange room. Basically, people bring their old unwanted books here and we stamp them and shelve them. Then people can take them. So long as people bring as many books as they take, and they usually do, the system works."

Lance raised a jaunty eyebrow at him. Keith noticed it. It was perfectly sculpted, and dare he say, rather jaunty.

Lance was very handsome.

"So, if these books are exchanged for free, don't you make a loss on them?" He asked, probably unaware of how handsome he looked in the dim light, how jaunty his eyebrows were.

"Actually, they draw in a lot of customers. Half the battle is actually getting people into the store. People aren't likely to buy stuff if they aren't here. Plus, it's kinda giving back to the community y'know?"

Lance nodded. "Cool beans."

Dang, who said cool beans anymore? This guy was a dork. It was... kinda cute, if Keith was honest. But he wasn't, so there was no need to recognise that fact.

"Yeah."

Then Keith brought him through the super-secret doorway into the break room. Shiro had since absconded to the coffee shop, no doubt to make a fool of himself in front of the lady who worked there and her weird uncle. It had been happening for years now.

'Set This House in Order' by Mark Ruff sat on the table, glaring at him. He sighed. Shiro was just being pig-headed, it was obviously suitable for kids. Keith made a mental note to return it to the kids section later.

"This' the break room." He mumbled. "It's where we, y'know... have our breaks."

Keith sat down at the table, where Lance joined him.
"Doughnut?" He offered, grabbing a bag that Matt had left there earlier. "They're Matt's, but he won't mind if we take them."

Matt would mind. Keith however, did not care.

"Thanks." Lance said, taking one. Keith also took one. They sat at the table with piles of books looming over them like a paperback leaning tower of Pisa. They ate in silence, though it was not as uncomfortable as it could have been.

"So, what's up there?" Lance asked between bites.

"Oh, that leads to the Shirogane residence."

Keith answered. Technically speaking it was also HIS residence, but Keith had never really gotten used to that. Neither had he changed his name, so if you looked at it that way there was also one room that was the Kogane residence. But that was just semantics.

"I guess that's not part of the tour, huh."

Keith shrugged. "I could show you around if you really wanted. It's no trouble."

"Nah thanks dude, I wouldn't want to intrude. Not sure Shiro wants me walking about in his house uninvited."

Keith refrained from pointing out that it was technically his house too, instead taking another doughnut. He was not awfully fond of sweet things but the knowledge that Matt would not be able to enjoy them made them taste so much better.

"Hey, isn't Pidge a little young to be working here? I heard you can't work in a bookstore until you're like, eighteen because there's heavy lifting involved."

"Oh yeah, that's true."

Keith nodded. "Good thing she doesn't work here then."

"But! She's employee of the month!" Lance protested, pointing at a poster entitled 'Employee of the Month, November 2016' with a photo of Pidge herself stuck onto it, hanging on the wall behind them. And then at another poster for 'Employee of the month, October 2016', a title that also went to Pidge. In fact, it seemed that she had been employee of the month for the past 6 months.

"When Matt started working here he'd usually take her along, since their parents work long hours and he didn't wanna leave her alone. So she'd come along and do her homework, and help out a little if she got too bored. Shiro always used to joke that she did the most of anyone, and frankly he's not wrong."

That said, Keith worked here now, and he was marginally less likely to get distracted by crappy Japanese mobile games than Matt was at the very least. That wasn't to say he had never played any-he remembered fondly his stint as a guild leader in Ayakashi. Just that he was unlikely to make customers wait until the end of a battle in order to buy a pencil top.

"Well, I'm sure that won't last long now the two of us are working here, eh?"

Lance smiled at Keith, pointed chin resting on one hand, and Keith was suddenly very aware of how he looked. And how he looked was nice, by the way. Nice was a good word. It had positive connotations but also did not suggest that there was a possibility that Keith thought his soon-to-be co-worker was hot. Which OBVIOUSLY was not the case. Perish the thought.

"Hey, since you're here and all, wanna help me stamp all these books?" Keith pointed to one of the
towers which wobbled threateningly at them. "It's like, real easy, there's just so many of them. One of the piles fell on Shiro last week and he just kinda lay there and told the books he wasn't mad, just disappointed. I'm sure he'll appreciate a little extra help, y'know?"

Lance grinned that shiny, shiny grin at him again.

"Sure thing, Keith, sure thing."

Keith had had his doubts at first, but with Lance here? Life at the bookstore seemed to be looking up. Even without bigfoot.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaaaand back to Keith!
We get some sweet Keith & Lance bonding time, though not The Bonding Moment™

Thanks for all the comments!!! We're incredibly happy and grateful for all the love this has received, since it is the first fanfic we have done together!

As always, Raum & Dean, the MothFamily are at mothdads.tumblr.com feel free to come talk to us! Any! Time!
Rare Mothman Sighting at the Shirogane Independent Bookstore

Chapter Summary

It's Lance's first day, and Coran and Allura make an appearance!

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the issues uploading this, it's up and ready for reading now :'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"He's actually pretty cool, even if he thinks he's a moth."

It was 8:45 the following morning and the Coffee Corner was busy as usual. Lance had finally left the house after a non-threatening phone call from Hunk telling him to wake up already (what would Lance do without him?). Hunk's shift started at 8 am and every day without fail his Lance Senses™ would kick in and he would be filled with a profound knowledge that Lance was going to be late. Today, thankfully Lance had gotten to the Coffee Corner with time to spare before work started at 9 am. He stopped by to recount his strange moth encounter again- not that he hadn't divulged every single detail of the day to Hunk the night before- and binged some of Keith's other videos at the same time.

"Who would've thought, huh?" Hunk replied with as much patience as he could muster. Since stumbling across that conspiracy video Lance hadn't shut up about the moth guy, and Hunk was obviously fed up with what he referred to as Lance's swooning for the mysterious mothman.

Because Lance was definitely swooning.

"You seem to really like this Keith guy, don't you?" Hunk insinuated with an eyebrow raised jauntily.

"Yeah, he's not as crazy as I thought he'd be. I guess he does have some brains in that pretty head of his."

"Pretty, you say?" And in that moment Hunk achieved a startling resemblance to the Lenny face. Lance caught on to his meaning.

"Not like that, dude! I just think he's cool"

"And, I quote, 'pretty'" Hunk waggled his eyebrows at Lance amusedly.

"Ugh, come on. A guy can appreciate a beautiful face without developing a crush on that person, Hunk."

"Oh, so he's beautiful now?"

"Huuuunk!" Lance groaned, throwing an arm over his eyes dramatically.
"Who's beautiful?" Allura, Hunk's boss, asked, emerging from behind the coffee machine.

"Why you are, of course!" Lance winked at her.

"Oooh, good one Lance!" Hunk cheered.

"That was...actually quite smooth? Who are you and what have you done with Lance?"

"Nothing you wouldn't do." This time he hit her with both a wink and finger guns. The classic Lance combo.

"Aaaaand he's back." Allura rolled her eyes, attempting to stifle a yawn as she turned her focus back to the coffee.

"You ok there Allura? You seem kinda tired this morning." Hunk asked, voice laced with concern.

"I'm alright, I just didn't get much sleep last night."

"Another weird dream?"

"Yeah."

"Aw, Allura, are you dreaming about me at night?" Lance wiggled his jaunty eyebrows.

"Please, Lance, I didn’t say I was having nightmares."

"Savage." Pidge said, appearing out of what seemed to be thin air.

"Pidge!" Lance screeched and almost spilled his coffee, "When did you get here?!"

"I've been here all along, Lance. In both body and spirit. I practically live here. Just ask them." She pointed at Allura and Hunk

"Morning, Pidge." Hunk hummed.

"Morning, Hunk, Allura. You look slightly frazzled, Allura."

"Mmmh, yeah." Allura agreed sleepily. "I didn't sleep too well again."

"I'd suggest you get your shit together quickly. Matt and Shiro will stop by any moment now." Pidge advised, just as the front door chimed open, and none other than Matt and Shiro walked in. Matt was once again buried in a Robot Cats from Outer Space™ book. Upon seeing Shiro, Allura stood up straighter and smoothed down her hair.

"By the way, what *are* these weird dreams you've been having, if they're not about me?" Lance was seemingly unaware of Allura's nervousness at Shiro's arrival, and continued the conversation as normal. Luckily for Allura, that normalcy is just what she needed to regain her composure.

"Oh, so... there are these semi-sentient space ships in the shape of lions. They even act like real lions, but they need pilots. And they can combine to create a giant robot man? I think. I can't quite remember."

"So, like, Optimus Prime made of lions?"

"Essentially, yes"
"Are you talking about RCFOS?" Matt inquired, having reached the front of the line.

"What?"

"Robot Cats from Outer Space™, obviously." He squinted at her. "Don't tell me you haven't heard of it?" His appeal fell on deaf ears. The title rang a bell, but frankly the series sounded terrible, so decided perhaps she didn't want to know. Lance didn't blame her. "Seriously, guys? No one?"

"Oh, um," Allura fumbled politely, "What's that?"

"Only the best book series to ever be written!" Matt waved his book in her face, "Read some of it and don't tell me it's not the best piece of literature in existence!" Allura took the book and flicked to the first page, moving aside as her Uncle Coran arrived. He was the manager of Coffee Corner, Lance knew that much, as well as being a personal trainer on the side. Shiro was one of his best customers, as Hunk had informed him, both in his coffee business and in his personal trainer business. He scoured the room, and alighted upon Shiro.

"Ah, Shiro my boy! How are you this fine morning?"

Shiro as usual was the very height of good manners. "Morning, Coran. I'm well thank you. You?"

"Just fine. I've come up with a new protein shake recipe I think you'll be quite pleased with."

There was a fear visible in everyone's eyes when Coran said those fearful words.

"Protein shake" resonated throughout the room like an ominous spirit.

Coran's coffee recipes were delicious. His protein shakes? Not so much. Coran had been trying feeding them to Shiro for years, and Shiro, the angel, was too nice to tell him that they tasted like death. There was terror in Shiro's eyes as he waited, filled with both acceptance and dread, for the inevitable question.

"Would you care to try it?"

Yep. There it was.

"...Sure." Shiro forced a smile.

Everyone cast him silent looks of solidarity. Allura gave him a sympathetic smile, her eyes glittering. Shiro shuddered slightly, an action that could only partly be accredited to the threat of a protein shake.

As Coran busied himself preparing the foul concoction, Shiro turned to chat with Allura. The crowd (for it was now a crowd) watched with interest. Maybe today would be the day he asked her out.

Allura smiled at him again and Shiro blushed, looked away, looked back at her, looked away again and became deeply fascinated with his shoes.

Today would likely not be the day.

That was when Lance noticed the book in her hand. There was hope yet! Shiro could talk about books. Evidently, Shiro had noticed too. Lance watched as he took a closer look at the cover. It was Robot Cats from Outer Space™.

Shiro recoiled, looking as grim-faced as he had before at the promise of protein shakes.
Shiro's stance on the Robot Cats series was well known within the bookshop. Just yesterday Lance had witnessed Shiro giving a bemused Matt a long lecture on why he blatantly refused to sell a series so insipid and clumsily done. According to Shiro, he just didn't understand the appeal of the series. The story was predictable and characters were flat and boring. The only one he could almost relate to was Jiro, the leader of the Space Rangers and pilot of the purple lion, and really, he didn't have the shelf space for so long a series, even one as madly popular as Robot Cats from Outer Space™.

"I... I see you're enjoying the Robot Cats series." He gave her a weak smile. "I was just about to start stocking them. I've heard some great things about the series."

Behind Allura, Matt's face fell into a wide, shit-eating grin. He indulged himself in a celebratory air-guitar, Bill & Ted style.

"Oh, I guess I'll come in to buy them then." Allura smiled half-heartedly, and then looked at the building queue which her meagre staff were trying desperately to handle. "If you'll excuse me, I have coffee to make."

She turned and strode away, just as Coran reappeared, protein shake in hand, leaving Shiro to bask in a moment of utter despair before Coran caught up to him.

That poor guy, thought Lance. Shiro had it bad.

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Being stuck behind the counter was every bit as boring as Matt had made it look. Lance sat on his chair and tried to look as attentive as possible, when the most engaging discussion he had partaken in for hours was with an elderly woman asking for books on crochet patterns. Admittedly, Lance was more of a knitting fan, but knew enough about crochet to suggest a few books. Business was slow today, and Lance decided that a small distraction to keep him from dying of boredom would not be unwarranted. He got out his phone and decided to text Hunk.

-- - --

Lance: Hunk, my main man, wyd

Hunk: nothing much. Just on break. hbu?

Lance: just working the register

Lance: MAN is it boring

Lance: I mean, if Keith was here we could talk about conspiracies or smth but he's in the back room doing a stock check

Lance: so I'm all aloooone

Hunk: seems like you're missing Keith...

Lance: hoe don't do it

Hunk: (⊙﹏⊙)

Lance: GOD DAMMIT

Lance: it's not like that
Lance: he's just a friend that just so happens to be hot
Lance: like Allura

Hunk: I think you'd be hard pressed to call Allura your friend, dude

Lance: ([-_][-_][-_])

Hunk: maybe more of an acquaintance
Hunk: just calling it how I see it man

Lance: ok that's fair
Lance: ok but srsly I don't like Keith like that

Hunk: whatever floats your boat Lance
Lance: you saw that video
Lance: I mean come ON

Lance: even if I wasn't bi as a bicycle I couldn't deny he's one fine looking dude

Hunk: It was 3:30am and it was dark and I was tired so I couldn't really see his face all that clearly
Lance: no not the conspiracy vid
Lance: the one I sent you yesterday

Hunk: ???
Hunk: I didn't get any videos
Lance: I'm sure I sent it
Lance: wait lemme check

-- -- --

Lance scrolled through his previous conversations with Hunk. He was so sure that he had sent him a video of Keith reading his book, but he just couldn't find any evidence of ever having done so. He distinctly remembered captioning it 'Rare mothman sighting'. He kept checking and double checking every messaging app he had in which he'd had a conversation with Hunk in the last few days. He was wondering if maybe he had captioned the video but forgotten to press send when his phone buzzed with a notification. Someone had liked an Instagram post. One of his selfies, maybe? He opened the app and-

Oh?

Oh.

-- -- --

Hunk's break was about to end when his Lance Senses™ began to kick in again.

Lance had done something stupid. Again. Wonder what it is this time? Hunk thought to himself,
vaguely miffed.

His phone began to vibrate furiously.

-- - --

Lance: HUNK HOLY FUCK

-- - --

Hunk sighed.

Guess I won't have to wait long to find out.

-- - --

When his shift ended, Lance was relieved with a capital R.
It had just been so awkward! All damn day! Somehow or another Keith's weird collection of followers had gotten hold of the video, and now? It was everywhere. Lance literally meant everywhere. The mothman guy was biig news, it seemed- he hadn't been the only one to have seen the videos for the piece of documented insanity they were, which on the positive side totally vindicated him for waking Hunk up at three to show him them, but on the negative side, made like at the bookstore even more awkward than it was already, reaching a whole new level when Keith had asked if he wanted to go get lunch together. Before he had the chance to think about it, he had already stammered a very final "No!", and Keith had left, red-faced and surly.

How Lance was going to survive another few weeks in close quarters with him he did not know.

Chapter End Notes

Lance McClain more like Lance McFucked Up

as always, find us at mothdad.tumblr.com

Hope you enjoyed!
**J'ai une âme solitaire**

**Chapter Summary**

Keith is an angsty boy and Lance is a little too confrontational.

**Chapter Notes**

We're back with some klangst :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith was quite tired. Making conspiracy videos was a pastime which took a hell of a lot of research after all, and if he was honest with himself, he remembered very well why he had stopped making them in the first place. It wasn't worth putting hours of work into every video just to be mocked for what you believed in.

The videos were trending, mainly he knew, because everyone thought he was insane. Which he wasn't, incidentally. Keith had had his fair share of psychologists in the past, but that was just because people didn't get him. People never would, it seemed. Shiro got him well enough but Keith could never tell him everything, purely because he didn't want his brother to worry (which, knowing him, he inevitably would).

He had thought that maybe the new guy got him as well. He had seemed so cool that first day they had met, but since then it was like Lance had become a different person, straight up ignoring Keith the entire day. Or maybe he had just been acting cool to get the job, and this much more distant, nervous person was the real him.

Keith sighed. Well, it was none of his business, not really. He didn't have to care.

"J'ai une âme solitaire," he whispered softly to himself (and his bucket of ice-cream), as he put in disc one of his twin peaks box set. It was going to be a lonely night.

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Nobody could say Shiro wasn't a merciful brother. After one look at him this morning he had simply told Keith to go back to bed.

If Keith hadn't slept well, that was merely the norm, but tonight had been particularly bad- and Shiro understood, after all, he was no stranger to the sleepless night, being regularly woken up by nightmares. It had always been good for him to have someone there when he woke up, and Keith was happy to get to be that person. Last night, Shiro had woken up at 4 am on the dot, and Keith had been there dutifully. He had even let Shiro sleep in his bed while Keith sat on the floor to watch yet more twin peaks with the brightness turned down.

Hence Keith was reliably informed that this morning he looked like hell, and that he should use the morning to get some well deserved rest. Shiro didn't look much better, mind you, but there was really
no need to tell him that. Poor guy had enough on his plate already.

Bracing himself, he picked up his phone for the first time since last night. He was prepared for this, he told himself, he had put the videos out to get a message to the world, and he had succeeded. While becoming a meme had not been part of that plan per se, it was ultimately a small price to pay in the face of informing the world of the truth.

There at the top of his feed was a video entitled ‘Rare Mothman Sighting’. Trying to curb his enthusiasm, he clicked on it.

The video was a bad quality repost from Instagram. The footage was grainy and poor quality, which was probably a stylistic choice (one that Keith had made upon occasion) rather than actually being a restraint of the format. Twelve seconds of a man sitting by himself in a bookstore, reading ‘The Behaviour of Moths’ and glancing over occasionally. A lump developed in Keith’s throat. It was him, it was definitely him, sitting in his little nook in the bookstore. The word ‘confirmed’ floated over his head in glowing green letters.

There was only one person who could have taken that footage.

Anger welling up within him, Keith threw his door open, bounding down the hallway and down the stairs, out into the exchange room where Lance was at work stocking shelves.

“You, me, break room. Now.” He snarled, grabbing Lance by the arm and pulling him aside without another word.

“Hey, Keith, what the hell!” Lance exclaimed loudly.

That was rich, coming from him.

“Explain this!” He yelled, forcing the phone into his hand. “Rare mothman sighting at the Shirogane Independent Bookstore, eh? Tell me you didn’t do this, I fucking dare you!”

He watched in satisfaction as Lance’s face burned red, confused expression falling flat.

“Oh.” He said quietly.

“That’s all you’re gonna say?” Keith growled at him, slamming a hand down on the table. “That’s all you’ve got to say to me?! After humiliating me! Exposing me! Being nice to me, for God’s sake!”

“You want to attack me for being nice to you? Really?” Lance glared at him. “A secret isn’t a secret when you make shitty youtube videos about it every two days!”

Lance had nerve alright.

“Oh so this is my fault now? I’m so, so sorry for sharing important truths with the world, Mr McClain, obviously it was my fault that you took video of me in secret and used it to mock me, my bad!”

“No but it’s your fault for making batshit crazy videos pretending you’re mothman! Like, we know it’s just some crazy attention grab, just get over yourself!”

The break room fell deadly silent. The air hung about them as if it might, at any moment fall to the ground and shatter.

“What did you say?” Keith said icily.
“You heard me!” Lance scowled at him defiantly. “Like it’s none of my business dude, but you need to sort yourself the fuck out.”

Silence.

“I didn’t want to have to do this.” Keith said quietly. “But you leave me no choice.”

Keith rolled up his right sleeve.

“Yeah, I saw the picture, do you really think you can convince me otherwise?” Lance snorted loudly, and Keith had to curb the urge to deck him in the face.

“Literally, just stop trying dude, you know I don’t believe in that kinda shit. Some goddamn faux fur glued to your arm isn’t gonna convince me.” He said, grabbing a fistful of it and yanking, as if he thought it might come away. Idiot.

Lance tugged harder, and Keith bellowed with pain as the man tried in vain to tug the fur from his arm. Then a clump of it came away and Lance stumbled backwards, knocking two separate towers of books over. Dazed, he turned the clump of fur over in his hand, noticing a distinct lack of glue. He looked back at Keith, who was clutching his poor abused arm, skin red and raised, and then back to the clump he held in his hand.

“Shit...you're not lying?” He breathed.

Keith shook his head, trying very hard to ignore the pain throbbing from his arm. “No.” He breathed raggedly.

At that moment, the door swung open and a bored looking Pidge stepped through. “Hey, I dunno if you wanted to scare away the customers or something, but if that wasn’t your intention maybe keep it down?”

Keith looked from Lance to Pidge and back to Lance. They stared back at him.

“Hey is that the fur you were wearing in your mothman video?” Pidge gave him an odd look, and, with one last glance at the two of them, Keith booked it back upstairs as fast as his legs could carry him.

Chapter End Notes

For those who neither speak french or have seen twin peaks, J’ai une âme solitaire means ‘I am a lonely soul’.

:')

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We are mothmum and mothdad, aka Raum, who is generally awesome and Dean, who has a mullet. RIP Dean

Find us at mothdads.tumblr.com and thanks for all the love and support!! we love all of you!
Lance felt both confused and ashamed. Nothing made sense.
"Hunk," he said. "Nothing makes sense."

"I know, Lance, you told me already." Hunk yawned loudly, ensconced upon the sofa before their shitty TV, watching the end of high school musical for what might have been the third time that month.

"Yeah, but like, what the fuck? This goes against everything I understand as a man of science, dude. This shit is major."

"Have you considered that he may not actually be mothman? It could be something else entirely like a rare genetic condition. We don't know who his parents are after all, it could be hereditary."

Wait, what? Lance frowned at his roommate. How did he come to know that?

"How do you know that?" He asked, confused.

"Hey, I watched his videos too, he says in the first one that he was abandoned at a church somewhere in West Virginia. Home of the mothman and all that."

"Ooooh." Lance felt slightly guiltier. "I kinda... didn't realise. So is he adopted or what?"

"Why would I know, Lance? You're the guy who works with him, you ask him."

"I can't do that! He doesn't like me anymore! It'd be, like, super awkward!" Lance protested loudly.

"Not my business dude." Said Hunk, very unhelpfully.


Hunk hummed a response, being immediately distracted by the tune 'we're all in this together' booming from the TV.

Lance wandered back to the bedroom and found himself watching, of all things, Keith's youtube channel. He watched one of the earliest videos. Keith was sitting in front of the conspiracy board- as always- but the setting was different. It was far brighter, the lighting warmer and Keith was considerably younger- fifteen, maybe? He was slighter (tiny), and far more tanned (sunburnt). The Texan accent was far stronger, and his head was shaved. Keith had changed a lot since then, however, the way in which he talked, animated discussion as he illustrated, using a shitty paper maché model, what he thought Lariosauro might look like. That had not changed at all.

It was dated 2011.
Lance found himself strangely drawn in to the videos, watching all the ones that looked halfway interesting up until the part where the theory videos disappeared, and were replaced with a series of poorly done vaporwave remixes. Wow, Keith was odd.

There was one video, entitled simply 'Goodbye', in which he made the tearful declaration that child protective services were forcing him to move out of his shack (where he lived alone and didn't go to school, apparently.) "For the last time!" He had showed them round his rather grim looking hovel (which he appeared to love dearly.) It was decidedly odd and eccentric, but in that moment Lance felt for him, very deeply.

The final thirty seconds, featuring Keith hugging the conspiracy board and sobbing bitterly made Lance feel emotions that he didn't know he had, bizarre and unplaceable ones that he wanted to sweep under the sofa and ignore.

Keith was a deeply bizarre man, but he did not seem like a bad one. Lance wanted to make things right between them, but that was a thought for the morning.

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Lance made a mental note never to refer important decisions to the morning, especially not mornings where he was five minutes late for work.

"Hey!" He shouted over to the counter of coffee corner, which should probably have been called coffee edge, as it was not on the corner but Lance was nobody to judge.

"Hunk! Quick! Give me something!" Hunk blinked once, and looked very much like he was judging Lance, but handed him a box of freshly baked something-or-another anyway.
"That'll be-" He started to say, but Lance had no time for it. He threw a note to Hunk with no idea how much it was worth, deciding that he'd sort that out later.

Grabbing the box, he hurried back, through the doors of the bookstore, almost colliding with Shiro.

"Whoa there!" Shiro grabbed Lance's shoulder before anything untoward could happen. "You're in quite a hurry! Eager to get to work?" He asked in a tone of faint yet still discernable humour.

"I didn't want to be late," Lance confessed, which was the truth, though not in its entirety.

"Admirable." Shiro agreed, and Lance turned to go. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Lance," Shiro said solemnly. "I don't know what it is you and Keith were arguing about yesterday, but I don't want to see any more of it, alright? I'm not asking you to be the greatest of friends, I'm not even asking you to be his friend, but we are going to have a problem if you don't manage to tolerate him on a professional level, understand?"

Even if he had a mind to disagree, Lance could see a glint of steel in Shiro's eyes that told him that disobedience would be a very, very bad idea.

"I understand, Shiro." Lance said as professionally as he could. "It won't happen again."

"I'll be holding you to that." Said Shiro, and returned to the counter.
Lance felt very, very nervous.

He went through to the break room, in search of Keith. The room was sadly devoid of any Keith, but Lance did find his new name tag and also, Matt.
"Have you seen Keith?" He asked him, struggling to pin the badge on his shirt, which made Lance slightly sad because his shirt was really very nice and he did not want to make any holes in it, but he guessed it was a sacrifice the island demanded.

"Oh, I doubt he's up yet." Matt said over the top of his Robot Cats book.

"He is going to turn up, right? He hasn't like, quit or something?" Lance asked, worried.

"Nah, he hasn't. But I don't see why you want to know? You two aren't exactly buddies." Matt gave him a pointed look.

"Hey, I..." Lance started, and then found he had nothing to say. "You heard that whole argument yesterday, huh?"

"Who didn't?" Matt scoffed. "Mrs Nesbitt from three doors down came in to make a noise complaint!"

"Really?"

"No, but she could've!" Matt exclaimed. "Jeez, you were loud enough!"

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for it to get so heated. Heck, I didn't mean for it to get heated at all. I kinda fucked up. I came to apologise to him." Lance held up the box of treats from Coffee Corner.

Matt let out a long sigh and closed his book.

"Well, if you're genuinely sorry I won't hold it against you. Look, I get it, everyone makes mistakes. That said, I haven't seen anyone manage to get under Keith's skin quite so easily, and as his friend you can bet that I don't wanna see that again, right? He's been through some shit, man, and the last thing he needs right now is to deal with all your bullshit, so don't do this again. And if you can't do that just stay out of his way. He doesn't need to deal with this, man."

Lance gulped. "Yeah, I really fucked up." He could feel shame washing over his face. Had the pattern of the floor tiles always been that fascinating?

"Now," Said Matt, as if nothing had happened, "Since we're a man down, Shiro asked me to arrange the display. With Christmas colours of all things." He threw his hands up in mock despair. "Please, please switch with me."

Lance viewed him bemusedly. "Is there some secret taboo about the book display that I don't know about? Why would you prefer that to stamping the exchange books?"

"Lance, I'm red-green colourblind."

"Ooohhhh." Lance nodded. "I- I guess I'll do the display then."

"Sick one!" Matt called after him. "I owe you!"

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Lance could not believe that he had, as little as three days ago, had spent an entire life without understanding the purpose of book plates. He had obviously lived a foolish and sheltered life free from that particular purchasable item. As Lance now knew very profoundly, book plates are what you get for your slightly neurotic niece or nephew who asked for nothing but Neil Stephenson novels for Christmas when you want to get them something that isn't a 500 page paperback but you don't know them well enough to get them anything that isn't actually book related.
Lance now knew he could very easily live a happy life without having to as much as touch one again. Objectively speaking, they were useless, and also, only catered to the impossible market of book nerds who only owned 12 or fewer books. Was that not defeating the point? They were sold in small packs, so anybody serious about putting them in all their books would have to track down whatever bookstore the gift originated. Then they would have to buy enough for all their books, which might itself be quite challenging as they would have to know how many books they owned or else estimate it and risk buying too few. Then at some point they would inevitably need some more as their collection expanded and they might not even be able to find them again! Any other book plates they could buy wouldn't match the others, and Lance hadn't even taken into consideration the logistics of placing book plates in all of your books. What if one was wonky? If it were Lance, he was just saying, it'd bug him.

He was giving it a lot of thought. Perhaps even too much thought.

Lance was disturbed from his vital contemplation upon the true nature of book plates by a slightly concerned looking elderly lady.

"Excuse me, young man?" She said in a kindly manner. "I was wondering if you might help me pick out something for my granddaughter?"

"Oh, sure, of course." Lance smiled at her. "Do you know what kind of book she likes?"

The woman paused, obviously deep in thought. "Well, I got her a book called Artemis Fowl last year, which she seemed to like, and she's always talking about this 'Percy Jackson' series, but the thing is, she already has all of those, so I'm not quite sure what she'd like?"

Hmmm. Tricky. Lance had always been more into comics than fantasy.

"You might want to try the Bartimaeus trilogy?" A voice said from behind him. Lance spun around.

Keith.

"Oh, really?" The elderly woman asked, completely unaware of the tension that had arisen between the two.

"Oh yeah, they're great books," Keith smiled slightly at her. "They're in the teen fiction section, under S for Stroud."

The woman beamed at them. Her cardigan had cat hair sticking to it. "Thank you very much, the both of you!"

With that, she hurried off towards the teen fiction section.

"Keith."

"Lance." Keith's gaze was daggers stabbing into Lance's flesh.

"Hey, I-"

"Don't."

"Keith, we need to talk." Lance beseeched him.

"I don't have anything to say to you." Keith glared at him coldly.

"Dude, please. Just hear me out, okay?"
"And why would I want to do that?"

"I- I dunno, I wouldn't want to either, but just give me the benefit of the doubt, yeah?"

Keith gazed at him, calculating. Then he sighed. "Fine."

"Breakroom?"

Keith nodded.

Lance pulled him into the breakroom. Happily enough they were alone- Matt had long since absconded in favour of tormenting Shiro with their shiny new collection of Space Cats books.

"So." Lance said.

"Yeah?"

"You're mothman."

Keith shared a particularly unpleasant glance with him.

"So you believe me now? A bit late, isn't it?"

Lance took a deep breath, and composed himself.

"I do! I'm sorry about yesterday, I really am! And I can explain. I didn't mean for it to be like this."

"Are you sure? It seemed pretty straightforward in that you took the video to mock me."

Keith looked decidedly unimpressed and began flicking through one of the books on the table.

"Well, the thing is, I didn't mean to post that video, I only meant to send it to a friend. And then by the time I realised and deleted it, it was already, like, everywhere!" He gesticulated wildly.

"So, what you're saying is, you only meant to mock me privately." Keith perched on the edge of the table and sighed. It was funny, the expression on his face was somehow very reminiscent of Shiro.

"Can I go now?"

"No!" Howled Lance. "You've got to listen to me, man! I'm like, really genuinely sorry. I didn't mean to mock you that much, it was just like, super weird because me 'n Hunk had literally just been watching your channel the last night." He paused. "And, y'know what, I'm not gonna lie to you. I guess, partly I was laughing at you. Like you come across pretty strong in your videos, like this crazy, driven conspiracy theorist and seeing you in normal life behaving like a regular chill guy was like, really freaky for me. I wasn't expecting it."

Keith said nothing.

Fuck, Lance was bad at this. "Listen, Keith. I'm a man of science. I don't believe what can't be proven true, or at least likely through scientific process. And honestly, I didn't view a youtube video about mothman as a source of legitimate fact. And that's my fault for judging you before I knew you, right? That's all on me, and hey, I fucked up real bad, I'll admit that. So, I'm sorry for humiliating you and hurting you and everything." Lance smiled weakly at him.

"You know, I could have been a man of science too." Keith said, a little huskily. "It's what I always wanted to be. A Lepidopterist. Study butterflies and moths. Especially moths, and I know that sounds stupid, especially with the whole mothman thing, but seriously. People always expect them to be dull little creatures, but they're as beautiful and vibrant as any other creature really. You only see
"Weird to think about, eh? That weird conspiracy guy you were laughing at being more than a brainless moron, having promise?" He chuckled humourlessly. "Not that I do any more, of course. No, no amount of specialised knowledge matters if you don't have a high school degree. Not even if you know what you want to do, even if you've been doing it for years by yourself! All education is corrupt; it's just a load of hoops to jump through, and for what? To get kicked out of military school for standing up for what you believe in, to work in a bookstore and have to listen to some dumb fucking astrophysics major lecture you on what is and what isn't scientifically credible! Well excuse me if I don't have a double page spread in the New Scientist, I'm working with what I have!" Keith yelled, slamming a fist down onto the table, pain and fire in his eyes. Nearby, a stack of books wobbled dangerously and promptly collapsed, cascading down upon where Lance stood transfixed.

Ow. His mind registered, just barely. That hurts.

He blinked, and Keith's moment of passion had fizzled out, eyes no longer meeting his as he knelt down to pick up the books from the floor. Regaining his composure, Lance joined him to shift the landslide of pre-loved literature.

"I'm sorry." Keith said quietly. "You didn't need to hear all that."

"I'm sorry too," Lance agreed. "Hey, is your arm ok?"

"What? Oh, yeah, that. Nah, it's fine." Keith rolled up his sleeve to show him. "See?"

Lance saw.

"Can I... touch it?" He asked, realising immediately what an odd question it was to ask.

"Sure." Keith said with... was that... a smile? Yes, that was most definitely a smile, a Lance McClain approved smile, and if the boy hadn't looked handsome before, he sure as hell did now.

Lance reached a hand out, very tentatively, and touched Keith's arm. It was real alright, warm and fuzzy and definitely not crappy purple craft fur like he had first supposed. Perhaps he could have explained it away as say, a hair transplant but that was both highly impractical and very unlikely, given the rate at which it was growing and the fact that the affected area looked to have spread since the first video.

It was very soft indeed. Lance looked up, realised Keith was staring at him and stood up very quickly.

Then he was hit with an awful realisation.

"Oh fuck, Keith, your present!" He pulled a rather intimidatingly large and grim looking book about the second World War off the package, which was now looking more crushed than not.

"You got me a present?" Keith asked, eyes widening.

"Yeah dude, to apologize for being a shit. Damn, I hope it's not ruined."

"I'm sure it'll be fine." Delicately, Keith picked up the box from the bakery and lifted the bent card lid.

"Fuck." He said immediately.
Lance was immediately tense. Had he done something wrong? Did Keith have allergies? Oh god, Keith had allergies. Of course he did! He might kill Keith with baked desserts, oh goddamn fuckity fuck!

"Dude." Keith said again in a hushed tone. "I fucking love mince pies."

He took one out of the box, and thankfully it was intact though a little crumbly.

Keith looked at it like a goddamn godsend.

"Oh, cool cool, I thought you might." Lance had not thought that. Lance hadn't even known what they were. But it was the thought that counted, right? Or, in this case, the lack therein

Lance watched as he hungrily wolfed down two of the mince pies. Then he looked up and grinned.

"They're really good." He said, mouth full. "Thanks."

"Hey, you're welcome buddy, it was the least I can do after yesterday."

"True." Keith nodded. "You did mess up. Still, with enough mince pies, I'd forgive anything. It is my sole biggest regret that people only sell mince pies around Christmas time. That and the fact that I'm going to have to leave the bookstore forever in order to fly around Point Pleasant and torment locals as my mothy self."

"Couldn't you stay here?"

"And risk being taken away by spooks? Nah dude, it has to be back in west Virginia, so that people will just write it off as fake again. Anywhere else it'd create too much suspicion." Keith said solemnly. "It will be lonely, though."

"Hey, I could come visit you sometimes, maybe? Like, visit you in your natural habitat, bring some human food and we could have a nice time, yknow?"

Keith was silent for a moment, and Lance wondered if he had done something wrong. Then Keith grinned.

"I hope you know I'm holding you to that."

"Don't worry dude, I'll be there, hangin' with my mothbro up a tree. Hey, d'ya think we'll find more mothpeople like you?"

Keith shrugged. "It's possible. Then again, it's also possible that I'm the only one left. That each mothman lives, passes along their dna and then disappears forever into the night. Explains why sightings are so rare and time-sensitive." Keith looked a little sad over that, and, glancing at his phone, Lance realised they were technically both on lunch break.

"Hey, wanna tell me more about moths over lunch?" Lance asked tentatively.

"Lance," Keith said, beaming. "Sounds great."
Keith is a Gay Mothman

Chapter Summary

Keith realizes he is well and truly fucked.

Chapter Notes

The angst is over. Now we return to our regularly scheduled gay fluff

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The fur on Keith's arm had grown back quicker after Lance had pulled it out. Now his entire arm had ceased being what could be called fuzzy and was now downright fluffy. That had made things a little more difficult, to cover up for sure, but on the other hand, it kept his arm very warm. Keith had dreadful circulation, which had not bothered him back in Texas, but here with Shiro and the threat of snow, it was a more pressing issue.

Actually, Keith was quite excited. It was a little known piece of Keith Trivia that he did not like Christmas.
No, Keith LOVED Christmas. More than Halloween, Thanksgiving or anything else, Keith adored it.

He hadn't always. After being passed around the fostering system more times than he could count he had never really gotten the chance to become attached enough to anyone for the holiday to ever hold much meaning for him, though he did have one very fond memory of adorning the conspiracy board with a Christmas hat and tinsel after having bought it as a present for himself. He had also convinced his neighbor Jimmy to buy him some cheap shitty beer, and while Keith couldn't remember much other than drunkenly serenading his two friends with a drunkenly mumbled version of The House of The Rising Sun, he was convinced that it had been a formative experience.

Thus, when Keith was taken in by the Shiroganes he had been in for quite a surprise. His new mom and dad had delighted in sharing a proper family Christmas with him, and it had been so, so much more than he could ever have hoped for. It had been a very tearful day.

Unfortunately this year, Mr and Mrs Shirogane were off fulfilling their dream of travelling the world together, thanks to an unexpectedly large inheritance from a great aunt that Akiko Shirogane had barely even known. Keith was happy for them, and Christmas with his big brother and friends was a whole lot better than Christmas spent alone.

He had been surprised to find that Lance would be among the number spending Christmas alone. That was what Shiro told him anyway, and Keith found it decidedly odd. Lance seemed like the type to have friends and girlfriends revolving round him at any given moment, after all.

Then again, Lance did seem to delight in defying Keith's expectations. Every time he thought he had the guy pegged, something happened that totally changed Keith's perception of him. He was smarter
than he sounded, kinder than he looked, and though he did have a tendency for defensiveness (Keith would know all about that), he adapted surprisingly well to the unknown, and had apologized sincerely to Keith for being foolish enough to disbelieve that he was mothman.

With enough mince pies and cheesy jokes, Keith found that he had all but forgiven him. In fact, they were getting along better than ever. Lance had even joked about it when he asked if they were actually friends now.

"Whaddaya mean 'Are we friends?' Of course we are! What, do you want a friendship bracelet or something to make it official?" Lance had grinned widely at that

Friends. That sounded nice. He wasn't good at making friends, but when he did find someone he could depend on, he held onto them tightly. He liked the idea of being close to someone like Lance.

And that opened up a whole new can of worms.

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The first sign that Keith was fucked was when he and Lance had been tasked with reorganising the children's section. Shiro had discovered more works- an alarming number in fact- that were "clearly inappropriate for children" that Keith had moved there from their other "more appropriate" shelves. They weren't, incidentally- Keith maintained that restricting a child's selection of reads to so-called appropriate material was an unnecessary form of coddling, and was reminded that he was not, in fact, in charge. Shiro politely demanded a total reorganisation of the children's shelves, a task that took the most part of the day, especially after the arrival of several sets of the complete Robot Cats from Outer Space™ series (consisting of 33 stories in each set).

"'Robot Cats from Outer Space™ and the Cursed Watermelon Monkeys'? 'Robot Cats from Outer Space™ and the Zombie Space Plague? What the actual fuck?!"

Lance was certainly not a fan of the Robot Cats from Outer Space™ series. "Why does Matt even read this garbage?!"

"There's no knowing with that guy." Keith shrugged.

"Like, what even is the point of the series? If they were shorter comedies aimed at younger kids I'd get it but these are 100 pages long each and they're aimed at 10-15 year olds? Like, what 15 year old wants to read about watermelon monkeys? Let alone a 23 year old like Matt."

"When I was 15 I was reading 'The Moon Landing Hoax: The Eagle that Never Landed'."

"Of course you were." Lance said sardonically, but there was no malice behind it.

"Look at this one- 'Robot Cats from Outer Space™ and Ferocious Jetpack Gang'."

Lance smirked. "Lemme see that."

Keith handed him the article in question. Lance opened it to a random page and began to read out loud.

"The Space Rangers ran to the control room. Princess Flora was there. 'Rangers. We are under attack!' She shouted, 'Get to your Cats! Now!'"
Jiro nodded, 'Yes Princess Flora! Come on team. With strength, determination and teamwork we can defeat the jetpack gang!" Lance raised an eyebrow. Keith noticed how jaunty it was. "Wow, what an inspirational leader. How about actually giving your team some useful info before a fight, like, I dunno, an attack strategy".

Keith found the corners of his lips turning up slightly at this. "So what would you have the Space Rangers do?"

Lance hummed and took a moment to think over the question. "I don't know enough about the jetpack gang- what their strategy is, what their strengths and weaknesses are- stuff like that." Lance turned his attention back to the book and skimmed through a few pages. "It says here that there is a whole fleet of them, and they have a huge laser canon aimed at Flora's ship, which has already taken heavy damage. They've also captured Bird, the brown pilot."

"Oh, then I guess Jiro and the orange one-"

"You mean Hank."

"Yeah, him. They should rescue Bird, because they are the strongest so can easily break into the jetpack gang's mothership. The other two should take out the fleet."

"But that leaves Flora's ship exposed. I'd get Hank to defend the ship, since he has the strongest armour and defence power. Jiro should take out the laser canon whilst Leo and Karl- or the other two, as you put it- work on taking out the fleet. Once the canon is out Jiro should focus on the fleet while Leo and Karl get Bird. Karl is the fastest and good at close combat fighting, but isn't good at defence. Leo is the best long range shooter so he can cover Karl and get Bird out safely. They balance each other out."

"That's...actually a great plan." Keith contemplated, "How do you know so much about the pilots?"

"Matt." Lance said without hesitation. Ah yes. It was impossible to go ten minutes in a conversation with Matt without him bringing up his favourite book franchise. He would often go off on tangents about how Leo, the turquoise pilot, and Karl, the maroon pilot, were meant to be together, what with the fire and water symbolism, and how perfectly they balance each other out. Book 7 of the series included a rather romantic moment between the two after a tough battle, in which they held hands and gazed longingly at each other, and book 12 declared them "Space Ranger partners".

Keith pondered for a moment. Lance never ceased to surprise him. This idiot was just boasting about how many donuts he could fit in his mouth the other day (stealing Matt's donuts had become something of a tradition between the two of them) yet here he was now, having a perfectly serious and rational conversation with him (or as serious as a conversation about Robot Cats from Outer Space™ could be), making points that never would've occurred to Keith. Lance intrigued him, to say the least. Keith found that he liked that about Lance. He had always liked puzzles; mysteries to be solved. That was what first drew him to conspiracy theories and what was drawing him to Lance now.

Keith had suddenly become aware of just how long they'd spent reorganising the children's section when he caught a glimpse of the rosy sunset out of the window. He watched how the honey coloured light flooded in and danced across Lance's features, highlighting his sharp jawline and bringing out his ocean blue eyes.

'Fuck.' Was all Keith could think.
The second sign that Keith was well and truly fucked came a few days later. He and Lance were enjoying a pleasant lunch together at Coffee Corner, a lunch that included a new range of Christmas cookies, courtesy of Hunk, Lance informed him.

"I had no idea Hunk was such a great cook." Keith said, taking a bite out of his mince pie.

"Oh, yeah, he's always cooking something. The other day he made the best pancakes for breakfast, even after I woke him at 3am to watch YouTube videos." Lance smiled to himself. Hunk really was the best

Keith quirked an eyebrow at him. "What were you even watching?"

All of a sudden Lance decided his reindeer gingerbread cookie was the most important thing in the world, and cast his gaze down to stare pointedly at it, and definitely not at Keith. "Oh, y'know. Stuff."

"Lance." Keith sighed disapprovingly, clearly seeing through his bullshit.

"Ok, ok, so I may have found some videos of a guy claiming to be a famous cryptid, which I did not believe at the time because I was a fool, but now I've seen the light so it's all good now."

"Oh my God," Keith face-palmed, "Why did you decide to wake up him in the middle of the night for that anyway?" He couldn't help the slight smirk tugging at his lips.

"Hey! How was I supposed to know it was real? I thought you were just some weird guy making the video for a laugh." Lance retorted. Keith's almost smile faltered momentarily. Lance's eyes went wide. "Oh, but you're not weird at all! Definitely not! You're a really cool dude!" Lance's face turned scarlet. Keith felt his own cheeks doing the same.

"Oh, uh...You're really cool too."

His heart stuttered.

Oh God, Keith, don't get worked up over something as small as this! His mind raced. Change the subject before you make it awkward.

"So, uh, do you have any plans for Christmas?"

"Not really."

Damn it Keith, Shiro already told you he's going to be alone this year. Way to not make it awkward. Keith wanted to end that particular conversation there but his curiosity got the better of him.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Keith what the actual fuck?! Just stop before you fuck everything up"

"Well, usually I'd go visit my family in Florida for Christmas, but my parents are taking my younger siblings on vacation this year, and neither me nor my older sister have the money to afford the flight
there. It'll just be my older brother in Florida, running the convenience store." He said, scratching his head.

"Oh." Was all Keith could say. He turned his attention to watch Hunk at the Coffee machine chatting with Shay, the cute girl that he adamantly insisted was not his girlfriend ("Just a co-worker I admire very much" he'd said to Lance on multiple occasions ). Hunk spotted him and waved. He waved back.

"What about Hunk?" Keith found himself asking.

"Oh, Hunk's got a flight back to Hawaii to visit his moms in a few days."

_So he really is alone_

"I wouldn't say completely alone, I mean, I'm planning on Skyping my family non-stop from Christmas Eve to Boxing Day." Lance shrugged.

_Oh my God Keith why did you say that out loud?! Stop before you say something you'll regret_

"You could always join me and Shiro for Christmas. Shiro was saying he was planning on throwing a Christmas party at the bookstore sometime soon too."

_Why? Why did you do that? Oh God, I hope he says no. I don't think I can handle this yet._

"That sounds...really nice actually." Lance broke into an utterly beautiful smile. "Thanks Keith, I really appreciate it."

Keith gulped. "No problem."

_Holy shit Keith, get it together. Digest those butterflies. You're probably as red as Rudolph's nose right now. You can be gay later when you cry about it to your diary, not in the middle of Coffee Corner. Get your shit together._

If Keith could find it in himself to look up at Lance, he'd see that Lance too was as red as Rudolph's nose.

Lance's phone chimed. He checked his messages. He turned even redder, if it was even possible.

"Sh-Shut up, Hunk!" He cried, swivelling around in his chair to face the counter.

Hunk laughed and wiggled his eyebrows jauntily.

Keith decided not to ask.

Chapter End Notes

_Hope you enjoyed this chapter!

Hunk's text said: "Meeting the family already? Looks like things are getting serious"
between you and your moth boyfriend ; )"

If you thought this was gay you should see what we we have in store for you guys (°

Thanks for all your kudos and lovely comments <3
All I Want for Christmas is Mothman

Chapter Summary

Snapshot of a few days leading up to Christmas and Lance is only 75% sure he doesn't like Keith

Chapter Notes

This is over 4000 words of Christmas fluff, that gets progressively gayer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 18th

Lance and Keith found themselves once again treating themselves to lunch at Coffee Corner (Hunk's Christmas treats were too delicious to resist), however Lance insisted that they come when Hunk was on break, and not during his shift (where he could eavesdrop and embarrass Lance). As such, when they arrived Allura was the one to greet them at the counter, whilst Coran made their coffee. Lance noticed Allura was yawning again.

"Man, Allura, are you still having those weird dreams about the Space Cat series?"

"They're not about that stupid series!" She snapped. Guilt immediately settled on her face at her outburst. "Sorry, sorry. I'm just so tired."

"No worries, we get it."

"But anyway, they're not about that Space Cat series, although I do admit there are similarities."

"How are you enjoying the series so far?" Keith asked. She had come in every day to purchase another Robot Cats from Outer Space™ book for the past week. Everyone knew it was just an excuse to see Shiro. Everyone except for Shiro, of course.

"I'm not." She replied with such a finality that Lance decided not to pursue the subject any further. One quick glance at Keith told him he was thinking the same.

"In my last dream, I was a princess. Princess Allura." She chuckled softly to herself. "You two were there too, actually."

"Oh really? Let me guess, I was a dashing young prince ready to sweep you off your feet." Lance winked with a sly grin.

Allura gave him a bemused look, and she noticed that Keith looked quite...annoyed? Why would Lance flirting with her annoy him?
"No, actually, you were both Paladins."

"Paladins?"

"Yes, you piloted the robot lions."

"Oh, right."

"Sounds like quite the dream you had there." Coran interjected, handing Keith and Lance their drinks.

"Oh it was," Allura nodded, "But that wasn't even the strangest thing! The Paladins were all humans, but you and I- we were aliens!"

Coran froze. "Aliens?"

"Yes! We had pointed ears and coloured markings on our faces. What's even weirder was that I wasn't fazed by it- in fact it felt more natural to look like an alien than a human."

Coran stiffened up. He was quiet for a moment, before shaking his head, as if to scatter away the remnants of whatever thoughts he'd been having. "Well, that certainly is a strange dream, princess. But it's all just a figment of your imagination- it doesn't mean anything. Better not dwell on it. Enjoy your coffee lads." And with that he turned back to the coffee machine.

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"...Ok, so my sister was chewing on a pen lid and my brother was jumping on the bed, right. So I walk in and decide to just flop down on the bed, but that throws my brother off and he knocks into my sister, and she swallows the pen lid, and then he backflips out of the open window."

Lance had been telling Keith stories about past shenanigans with his siblings for the whole time they were there, and Allura noted that she had never seen anybody make Keith laugh so much before- not even Shiro.

"Why was the window open?"

"It wasn’t really open, per se, more like the glass had been removed."

"Oh my God! Why would you have a window with no glass?!"

"Because my Grandpa was making his own tombstone, ‘cause, y’know, paying for tombstone is ridiculous, so he took out the windows so he could move the tombstone outside. It wasn’t even at ground level…"

“Was your brother ok?”

“Oh, yeah. He was fine. But my sister may or may not have had to go to the emergency room…”

Allura smiled to herself as she watched the two of them. They were both flushed, and she wasn't convinced that it was purely to do with the fact they were laughing so hard.

"That reminds me of this one time when Matt was collaborating with me on a YouTube video."
Keith started.

"You and Matt making a conspiracy theory video together? You two can't even agree on whether or not Bigfoot exists! I have to hear this." Lance flashed a wide grin.

"Ok, ok, so basically..."

Allura no longer wondered why Keith was annoyed at Lance flirting with her.

"They're so cute together!" Allura giggled quietly to Coran.

"Ah, young love." He replied with a contented sigh.

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December 19th

It was the day of Hunk's departure. Lance had driven him to the airport to give him a heartfelt send off.

"Take care, man." Lance said, pulling his best friend into a hug, "Say hi to your moms for me."

"You too." Hunk gave him an affectionate squeeze before pulling away, "Enjoy your Christmas with Keith." He grinned slyly.

Lance groaned. He knew that look. "For the last time, there's nothing going on between me and Keith!"

"Hey, I didn't say anything." Hunk was still giving him the look.

"But you were thinking it!"

"But seriously, dude. If I come back to find you two making conspiracy theory videos together I'm gonna have to take him aside and give him the "don't break his heart or I'll break something of yours” talk."

Ah. Lance knew that talk well, having been on the receiving end of it severable times in the past. None of his past relationships had lasted very long though. And he doubted Keith would ever break his heart. Not that they were dating- nope! Definitely not. Lance didn't even like Keith like that- he couldn't. He was mothman, and Lance wasn't into moths. At least that was what he would tell himself when he found himself thinking about Keith in the middle of the night, in a way that was totally to do with the whole mothman thing, and nothing to do with the whole Keith being extremely attractive thing.

"Hunk, I can assure you that you will NOT have to give Keith that talk when you get back because I do NOT have a crush on him, I just appreciate beauty when I see it. Now get on that plane before the gate closes, and have yourself a merry little Christmas"

Hunk chuckled. "Ok Lance, whatever you say. Merry Christmas." And with that he picked up his suitcase that had been idly lying on the ground beside him and disappeared through the gate.

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December 20th

Business was flowing at a constant pace on the cold Tuesday morning before Christmas at the Shirogane Independent Bookstore, if not slightly on the slower slide. Lance would’ve thought that they’d be busy with people buying last minute Christmas presents (he himself had a few left to buy. Keith’s was not one of them).

He looked around the store blearily as he replaced one final book on the shelf he’d been reorganising. The store didn’t look any different than usual; same old book shelves, same old posters on the walls, same old Pidge typing furiously on her menacing laptop at her table. Maybe what this place needed was some Christmas cheer.

"Hey Pidge."

Pidge barely glanced up from her laptop, "What do you want?"

"Do you know if the store has any Christmas decorations?"

That got her attention. She raised an eyebrow jauntily. "Christmas decorations you say?" She rose from her seat, looking Lance straight in the eye. "Follow me."

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"What are you doing?" Keith was asking him.

Keith had just arrived back from his break, which he’d spent buying Christmas presents, only to walk in on the Christmas decorating whilst it was in full swing. Lance was currently standing on a rickety old stool attempting to hang some tinsel around the door frame leading into the break room. Pidge was decorating a fake Christmas tree (which Keith was certain was not his nor the Shirogane's property, so God knows where that came from) whilst Shiro hung Christmas lights and more tinsel around bookshelves. Even Matt had been convinced to put down his beloved Robot Cats from Outer Space™ book and was attempting to set up some speakers, from which they’d play Lance's Christmas playlist.

"Keith!" Lance hopped down from the stool, which was wobbling unsteadily now. "How do the decorations look? Does the store scream 'Christmas!' to you?"

Keith nodded. "It looks great! Where did you get that Christmas tree from though? I'm pretty sure we didn't have one before." He gestured to the tree in the corner. Pidge was currently attempting to hang baubles off of the higher branches, with which she was having some difficulty, given her size.

"What? It wasn't in the storeroom?"

"You've been in the storeroom before. Do you really think there's space in there to hide a huge Christmas tree?"

Lance scratched his head sheepishly. "I guess not. I have no idea where Pidge found that tree then."

"Pidge?!" Keith glanced back over to the Christmas tree. Somehow, she had managed to hang every single decoration on the higher branches in the short space of time he’d been talking to Lance, apparently without the aid of any person or ladder to help her reach. "You know what? I don't think I
wanna know anymore."

Just then Matt called them over. "I've got the speakers working. Go ahead and plug your phone in, Lance."

Lance whooped and retrieved his phone from his pocket. After fiddling with the cables a bit, the sounds of jingle bell rock began to fill the store. Lance began to dance to the music. Pidge looked up from the new box of Christmas decorations she had been opening, a grin appearing on her face.

"I love this song!" She put the box down and began to dance as well.

"Yeah, Pidge, dance with me!" Lance swept her up in his arms and spun her around. Her squeal of surprise soon turned into giggles as she and Lance spun around to the music.

Keith watched them, smile on his face. He barely even noticed when Shiro came to stand beside him, placing a hand on his shoulder. Some of the customers had begun to join in the dancing now, and laughter filled the air as the song faded out. Lance placed Pidge back down on the ground, the two of them still giggling.

The next song began with a twinkly few beats and Lance's eyes widened when he recognised the song.

"OH I," he belted out. "DON'T WANT A LOT FOR CHRISTMAS."

Keith chuckled at Lance's performance.

"THERE IS JUST ONE THING I NEED." Lance strode straight towards Keith. His eyes widened.

"AND I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE PRESENTS," Lance grabbed Keith by the hand and pulled him forward. "UNDERNEATH THE CHRISTMAS TREE."

"What-what are you doing?!" Keith managed to sputter out.

"Relax, Keithy boy. Dance with me!" Lance spun him around and Keith couldn't help a small squeak that escaped his throat. He hadn't expected that.

The song was in the first verse now, and Lance had begun to sing again. This was his song, his jam, and when he actually sung properly and didn't just scream out the lyrics, he was a pretty good singer, as many people had told him in the past. He wondered if Keith enjoyed his singing (he did) as they continued to dance. He was a good dancer too, which was obvious since he was good at everything.

The more they danced, the more Keith loosened up, and Lance could tell he was enjoying it. The huge smile on his face said it all. Keith wasn't a bad dancer either. He was doing well to keep up with Lance.

Until he tripped over a box of decorations Lance had forgotten to pick up earlier.

He was falling backwards and Lance reached out to grab him, still singing the song. Keith, in a last ditch attempt to stay upright, threw his arms around Lance.

They had ended up with Lance dipping Keith, which to the casual onlooker may have seemed intentional. Lance was still singing a quiet "make my wish come true" as he locked eyes with the
startled boy in his arms. He had no clue what possessed him to do it, but his expression softened, and still maintaining eye contact, he completed the lyric.

"All I want for Christmas is you."

Keith was silent, his face contorting into what could only be described as a look of pure awe—except, of course, if you were Lance, who had interpreted it as a mixture of surprise and confusion. And to a certain extent that may have been true too. But Lance didn't have much time to analyse Keith's expression before Keith turned his face away, cheeks slightly rosy. Lance felt his own face burning up, and as he turned his head to look away himself, he recognised the implications of the position they were in.

He was about to let out a string of profuse apologies when he heard a soft sniffling sound. Oh God. Was Keith crying? He hadn't meant to make Keith cry. The sniffling continued until it became...snickering? Ok, now he was confused. He dared to give Keith a quick glance, only to find him smiling that gorgeous smile of his, and the corners of Lance's lips turned up too. Before he knew it they were both giggling the embarrassment away.

Around them the small crowd of customers had stopped dancing. All eyes were on Lance and Keith now. It was general knowledge among regular customers that the new guy and the guy who was responsible for the conspiracy theory section were a couple, so nobody was particularly surprised at their little romantic display. In fact, a few people even cheered, though neither Keith nor Lance noticed.

Pidge, Shiro and Matt gave each other knowing looks, as they observed their friends from the break room.

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There were still several boxes of decorations left to put up at the end of the day, and Lance decided to stay late to get the final finishing touches up—some lights to go in the store window and sign outside, the star to be placed on top of the tree and a mistletoe to go be hung in the doorway of the break room.

Keith had taken one look at the ageing stool he had previously been using to hang the tinsel and had immediately procured him a ladder, which was then promptly stolen by Pidge and Matt in order to aid Shiro in hanging the lights outside on the store front. As such, Lance resorted back to the unsafe stool, and began hanging the mistletoe up whilst Keith placed the star on the tree and threw cautious looks his way.

Christmas music was still playing softly, and Lance felt the urge to dance again, doing a little shuffle on the stool.

"Be careful, Lance. Geez, do you want to fall?" Keith called out to him, satisfied with the placement of the star and now making his way over.

"Aww, Keith boy is worried about me," Lance smirked. "Relax, dude. I'll be fine." He began to shuffle-dance even more as the song hit its chorus.
"Lance, you're going to fall."

"Nah, the stool is sturdier than it looks, see?" He attempted to demonstrate said sturdiness by rocking purposefully side to side. He'd show Keith it was perfectly safe.

The stool was not sturdier than it looked.

The next few moments were a blur. Lance vaguely remembered falling backwards, Keith calling out his name, arms wrapping his torso and legs.

The next few moments after that felt like they were going in slow motion. He looked up to see Keith, concern lacing his face, and he finally registered that he was in his arms.

Keith had stepped forward and caught Lance, bridal style, under the doorway. They both looked at each other in surprise for a moment.

"Are you ok?" Keith broke the silence first.

Lance could feel a blush rise irrationally to his cheeks. There was no need for him to blush. All that had happened was that he had fallen, and Keith had caught him, just like how he'd caught Keith earlier.

Keith was staring at him now, violet eyes expectant with a trace of worry. Those eyes were so deep, so soulful. Lance had never seen eyes so intensely beautiful. They were framed by his dark thick lashes, matching his raven hair. Lance had never known a mullet could look so good on a person.

Maybe that blush wasn't so irrational.

"Uh, yeah. I'm fine." He finally replied. Keith look visibly relieved.

It was then, of course, that the tender moment had to be interrupted by a chime of the opening door as Pidge stepped inside.

"Hey, do you guys know where-" She stopped when she saw the two of them. Her gaze flitted upwards towards the top of the doorway, and then back down at Keith and Lance. She broke into a shit-eating grin.

"Mistletoe!" She cried.

Lance and Keith both looked upwards to see that they were, indeed, right under the mistletoe. They both looked back at Pidge, then at each other, startled.

"You know what that means!" Pidge wiggled her eyebrows as jauntily as she could, "You two have to kiss!"

"Wh-what?!" Keith stuttered out.

"I don't make the rules, Keith."

Keith looked at Lance, face burning bright scarlet. Lance searched his expression for something, anything that would make it ok. Something that could justify actually wanting to kiss him right now. Maybe if he saw Keith wanted it too, it would all be alright.
Or perhaps he could just convince himself that it wasn't a big deal, and he could just pretend that he wasn't currently in the arms of one of the most gorgeous people he'd ever met.

"It's just a tradition, right? It doesn't have to mean anything." He murmured, mainly to himself. Keith stared at him for a long moment, gulped, then nodded.

Lance leaned in.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! It was a fun one to write :D

There was a problem where one scene was repeated several times, but that should be fixed now

Tune in next time for the Christmas party!
Mothman Christmas, or, 'Mothmas'

Chapter Summary

It's time for the long awaited Shirogane Christmas party!

Chapter Notes

Sorry this was so late! We didn't get to see each other at all over Christmas, and I was having a bit of difficulty writing about relationships having just come out of one.

Hope this chapter is what you wanted! -Dean aka mothdads

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So, here they were. Christmas.
Hoo boy, Keith was in for a storm. He could just tell at this point; nothing in his life had been straightforward and simple since his parents had gone on holiday.

Honestly, things were only getting weirder. There was actually a steady grade of incomprehensible fuckery which he had plotted onto a graph to help him comprehend. #1, getting kicked out of the garrison. That had definitely led to happening #2, his search for bigfoot; the unbridled anguish of catching a glance of the beautiful creature scale the cliff as if it were nothing, climbing after it only to fall and wake up in hospital with an extremely concerned Shiro. That had lead to the next two happenings which occurred at roughly the same time: #3, being dragged home to work at the bookstore and #4, the discovery. These combined, led Keith to his strangest and most momentous occurrence yet: Lance. Lance, smugly beautiful event #5 that he was. The same boy that had befriended him, mocked him, and apologised on his own terms, not just because Keith was 'a troubled child' or the flight school prodigy, but because Lance had wanted to. It was funny because Keith did not feel like the problem case or the ace pilot with an attitude problem when Lance was with him. Lance did not humour him when he thought he was wrong. Lance would not coddle him, did not act under the watchful eye of his older brother.

Lance believed in him.
He believed in mothman. The mothman that Keith was yet to become, that he in equal parts aspired to and feared to become.

He feared how it would inevitably distance him from the ones he loved. He feared how it might bring out the anger and brooding solitude in his nature. The pain that his transformation was sure to bring.

He feared that at the end of it all, he might not be Keith any more.

This brought him to the event that he had not titled yet, because he was not sure if it constituted a new event, or merely a sub-clause of the 'Lance' issue.

Lance had kissed him.
Right there under the mistletoe, Keith Kogane, for the first time in his goddamn bitch of a sad life, been smooched by a cute boy.

This complicated things implicitly, as it gave Keith more baggage. Of course, the kiss had not been a sign of hidden intent, merely the result of ill placed Christmas decorations. In a way that was good, because if Keith were to develop an attachment to Lance it could complicate things, plus he could lose the best friend he had found in a long while, the only person that he had found he could connect with since Jimmy.

That was to say, lance was the only person he had found a deep spiritual bond with who wasn't a 70 year old unwashed ex-soldier with a drugs problem and a tin foil hat that he never took off.

Lance had also not accused Keith of being an alien (possibly Jimmy’s most insane prediction of all) and Keith was not sure he wanted to lose someone like that by making romantic advances.

Well, no matter what happened, Keith would grow to moth-hood having smooched a cute boy, and nothing he did now could change that.

He may not have lost his virginity yet, and perhaps the person that he was now never would, but hey, you can't have everything.

Somebody knocked at the door. It was Shiro, who obviously did not see fit to wait for a response before entering judging by the fact that he was now very much in Keith's room.

"Stop angsting and come enjoy Christmas!" Shiro called over to him, hurling a rolled up sock at Keith and looking more cheerful than was strictly necessary when it hit him in the face.

"Hey!" Keith pulled the socks from his face. Not his. Shiro must have planned out his sock offensive.
"For your information I was not angsting, I was- I was- contemplating stuff." Keith folded his arms and huffed loudly.

"Well, whatever it is, stop it! Come out and have fun, Matt and Pidge will be here in a minute!"

Keith sighed loudly, just to be sure Shiro was well aware of how utterly indignant he was (he wasn't actually but the point had to be proved).

"Fine."

Shiro grinned and ruffled his hair. "That's the spirit."

They walked back into the living room together. Keith paused for a second, hearing a loud clang from inside.

"What's that?"

"What's what?" Said Shiro, evidently unaware of the sound.

Was Keith going mad? Or, perhaps was this a side effect of his metamorphosis? Either way, he pushed the door open warily.

He had not been wrong. A face and a few wriggling limbs stared at him from the window, grinning
evilly. Matthew Holt, the Christmas nuisance, had decided to make his entry via the fire escape.

"Can you lift the window? It closed on him halfway." Said an irate voice from behind him.

He had brought Pidge with him.

Trying very hard not to laugh, he strolled leisurely over to the window. Shiro had tried significantly less to resist his mirth and was now collapsed on the sofa laughing uncontrollably.

Matt was still grinning like an idiot. Keith tested the window lightly, surprised when it just slid open, as if it had never been jammed in the first place.

"Thank you!" Wheezed Matt, sounding a little winded.

"You would be the worst housebreaker ever." Said Keith flatly.

"Hey, I was just unlucky!" Protested Matt. "Most of me was through as well!"

"Unlucky my ass!" Laughed Shiro from the couch. "That's the third time this month! And you still haven't managed to get past the window!"

He leaned over towards the tree, grabbing a tiny package and throwing it at Matt as soon as he was fully detached from the window.

"Oooh!" Matt exclaimed, tearing open the minuscule amount of wrapping paper and sellotape to reveal: a doorkey.

"So you don't need to break into my goddamn house anymore!" Shiro explained, still laughing slightly under his breath.

Matt treasured it in his hands. "It's beautiful, Takashi. I shall treasure it as if it were my own."

"He'll have lost it within the month." Pidge said from behind him.

Keith jumped slightly. How did she do that?

"Why're you over here?" He asked, puzzled.

"To let Allura and Coran in. I could see them coming down the street."

"Oh." Said Keith. It was all he could say, really.

They strolled through the already darkening bookstore and Keith belatedly wished that he had socks on. The floors were very cold.

Coran and Allura stood grinning at the door, faces pink from the cold.

Keith welcomed them in like the old friends they were.

"Merry Shitscram!" Pidge congratulated them.

"Excuse me?" Asked Coran, looking more than a little confused.

"It's a thing." Pidge explained, scurrying back into the house.

"Well okay then!" Allura called after her.
"Hey Keith!" She smiled at him, reaching out a large plastic box. "We brought dessert!"

Keith accepted the large box of USOs (unidentified sweetened objects) gratefully. Shiro might be a good cook, but a baker he was not. Time and time again had Kametaro Shirogane called his eldest son into the kitchen to share with him his repertoire of sweet treats. When they had worked together cakes, pies or anything sweet would appear with glorious abandon, but when Shiro baked on his own the results always came out slightly more char-grilled than you would hope- not that anyone would say so, of course. After Shiro was discharged from hospital, their father had put a great deal of effort into distracting his son from his predicament, using baking among other things to return Shiro's attention to the happier things in life, but one cannot use a whisk and hold a mixing bowl with only one hand. Frustration turned to anger, and despite Shiro's shiny new high-tech arm, neither father nor son had done much baking since.

Allura would not know this, which was probably why she was staring at him so oddly as he had his dessert based revelation.

"Thanks." He said quietly. "Shiro will love it."

Keith led Allura and Coran through the store to the Shirogane residence, baked goods in hand. Upon seeing Allura, Shiro turned a brilliant shade of scarlet, and waved shyly. She waved back just as nervously.

"Hi." Shiro managed to stutter out.

"Hi." Allura shuffled in place awkwardly for a moment. "Merry Christmas."

"Oh- uh..." Shiro looked guilty, as if he'd been caught staring at her (he had definitely been staring) before responding. "Merry Christmas."

They spent a moment just gazing at each other, eyes lost in each other's, when they were promptly interrupted by a hand slapping on Shiro's back and a cheerful voice booming in his ear, startling him.

"Merry Christmas, Shiro! And a very merry Christmas to you too Keith!"

"Merry Christmas, Coran." And with that, whatever small moment Allura and Shiro were having ended unceremoniously.

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Keith glanced at his watch for the sixth time in the past fifteen minutes. Lance had still not arrived and he was getting anxious, intrusive thoughts bombarding him with doubts as to whether he was going to come at all.

"So, are we doing gifts? Come on, who wants the honour of being the first person to give me a gift? I know you all want to!" Matt glanced around the room with all the poise of a capitalist vulture.

"Keithy boy! How bout it?"

"But... Lance isn't here yet." Keith frowned deeply at Matt. "You don't want to start opening presents without Lance... Do you?"

Matt gave Keith a sheepish grin as if to say that was exactly what he meant.

"Come on!" He addressed the group. It's like three in the afternoon! You can't make me wait even longer! It's agony!"
He clutched his chest, and began a terrible impression of someone who might either be having a heart attack or choking to death on a piece of cake. "See?" He croaked, falling unceremoniously to the floor. "I'm dying of lack of presents. Have fun being tried for murder, assholes."

Coran peered at the prostrate figure splayed out over their carpet, moustache twitching curiously.

"Oh for the love of-" Shiro tossed a present in bright blue wrapping paper over to Matt which hit him in the ribs, drawing from him what was by far the most realistic pained noise that he had made yet.

"Jeez Shiro, what's in here? A brick?"

"Oh just open it already." Pidge shot him a warning look from behind the laptop that Keith had definitely not noticed her bringing in through the window.

Huh.

Unable to resist any longer, Matt tore open his gift to reveal: a heavy looking hardback entitled The Hidden History of Animals in Space.

"God dang! Thanks Shiro!" Matt beamed, pulling out from his jacket a small square wrapped in the cover of a rather odd looking magazine which from a distance seemed to be called 'Entre Luxe and Prestige'. He hurled the thing at Shiro in much the same way that one might throw a frisbee.

"What... is this?" Shiro gazed upon it tersely. "Do I even want to know?"

"Cmon, open it!" Matt urged him. "You'll love it. Probably."

Peeling away the pretentiously glossy cover of what was now "Ent ux a d Pr s ige" Shiro stared down dismally at a clear CD case in which was contained a rewritable dvd titled Space Cats: Season Two.

"You don't happen to speak Taiwanese do you?" Matt asked cautiously. I mean, no pressure but half the times I've tried to play this thing it's come out in the Taiwanese dub."

"No..."

"Also, don't play it on your computer. Or at least if you do, make sure you have a reeeeeeal heavy duty antivirus. First time I played it on my laptop, Pidge had to exorcise it. Quite scary, actually."

"Hmmmm." Shiro looked somewhat less than impressed.

"Hey, you still like it though, right? C'mon Shiro, tell me you like it?" Matt grinned at him evilly.

Shiro frowned, and then noticed Allura watching him rather intently from the other sofa. He went a rather distinctive shade of red and coughed awkwardly. "I, uh... Thanks, Matt. I love it."

"Hey, maybe you and Allura could watch it together? Since you're both just getting into the series?" He waggled his eyebrows at Shiro, winking at Keith very briefly before turning to smile innocently at Allura.

Say what you would about Matthew Holt, but he had his skills, and being a good wingman was certainly one. At this point, the only thing standing in-between Shiro and Allura getting together was Shiro himself, who had, to use the colloquialism 'cockblocked' himself on more than a dozen occasions. This might make a thirteenth.

Allura looked, with what definitely seemed like interest, over to Shiro who took the opportunity to
adopt a rather hideous shade of puce.

"Oh, I mean, if you wanted to, that would be... lovely, to- to watch... Space Cats..."

Allura smiled warmly at him, and Keith could really see why Shiro liked her so much. She was stunning, after all.

"I would like that very much Shiro, if you wouldn't mind."

"Well, that's settled then... We could just spend a quiet evening at my place, watch a bit of that."

Keith could barely believe what he was hearing.

"Just me, and you. And Matt." He concluded, and Keith, Pidge and Matt sighed in unison.

That was Shiro alright.

"Keith!" Shiro said, much too loudly and intently for the tone of the conversation.

"Yes?"

"There's something for you from mom and dad. They asked me to make sure you opened it first."

"O...kay?"

Keith hadn't realised any of the presents in the rather small pile were from their parents. He was surveying them rather suspiciously as Shiro left the room.

Hmm. Strange.

"Was the gift his sudden departure? Because that sounds like a rather strange gift to me!" Coran tweaked his moustache. "Perhaps you'd like a more tangible gift!" Reaching back god-knows-where behind the sofa he pulled out a rolled up poster and handed it to Keith.

Keith unravelled it to see a picture of a landscape emblazoned with the title "New Zealand: Like Scotland but further." It was much like all the other 'Visit New Zealand' posters he had hanging in the café. Keith was still unsure if they were actually some strange form of practical joke.

"Thanks, Coran." He said, smiling slightly, but he could not help but to glance away as Shiro returned.

Keith...

Keith could not believe it.

Maybe his eyes were malfunctioning. Maybe it was his brain.

"Keith?" Someone asked. He did not know which one. He walked, as if in a dream, and put his hand over a handlebar he knew wasn't- couldn't be there.

The thing that could not possibly be what it was sat on the middle of the living room floor like the punchline to a joke he had not heard.

And yet- there she was. Sitting brashly before him, with a new coat of paint and severely less dented than she had been when Keith had had her.
Ariadne.

His hoverbike.

At that moment, Keith remembered something he had not in a long time. Sitting at the window in the care home, so many years ago. Seven, eight years old perhaps? He had not been too popular as a child, a theme which would carry way on into his adult life. The local teenagers would all gather out there, and race each other on hoverbikes, some the precious bounty of trust fund kids, others cheaper, or second hand models.

It had always struck him as something he had wanted to do. As a fifteen year old wandering the desert he had stumbled upon his Ariadne in the middle of Cheap Charlie's Scrapheap (later renamed Charlie's Scrapheap for a somewhat self evident reason). She had been an utter hunk of junk and certainly not in working condition but Keith Kogane had felt love for the very first time wrestling her out from under the chassis of a particularly untrustworthy Honda Civic, pushing her back, mile by mile to his shack in the desert. That was the place that had first felt like home to him, surrounded by inanimate objects, in place of a family that would love their odd quiet adopted son, a family that he had never thought he would encounter, let alone have the joy of being part of. Out in the desert, with his little shack and his collections of found objects and his neighbour Jimmy to yell cryptic metaphors at him from a measured distance, had been a place where out in the relative solitude of the sand dunes, he had worked out exactly who Keith Kogane was.

There was a note attached to Ariadne.

"To our Dearest son, Keith." The letter read. "I always thought travelling the world was the most fantastic thing I could do in my life. But out here, in the most breathtaking bay of Naples I find myself wishing of all things to be back home with my sons. No matter where in the world, or even the universe we travel to, you and Shiro will always be the most important thing to us. Both of us are so, so proud of you.
Your father says not to worry about the Garrison not working out- there are so many different paths you could take through life, and if this one was not for you? Perhaps it simply wasn't meant to be. It will be so very lovely to come back home to see our beautiful boys looking after the bookstore. It is a part of our family too, of course! Just like you used to say when we had just taken you in, places and things can be a family if you care enough for them. That is why we have tracked down what we think is your old Hoverbike. If it isn't, which is a possibility, blame your father. There were two others just like it where we found it- hopefully they haven't been sold off yet, so we could perhaps exchange it for the right one. Keep it in mind.

Most importantly, we hope you are enjoying your Christmas, and that you are happy where you are right now. Keep looking out for your brother- you know he needs a little encouragement to deal with his problems. Merry Christmas, my darling boy and a happy New Year!

From Mom!" It ended, with "and dad" scribbled underneath it in his father's characteristic illegible scrawl.

Keith needed a moment on his own.

"I..." He stared round himself wildly. "I need to go."

"Whatever is the matter, Keith?" Allura asked him tentatively. "Are you feeling unwell?"

Shiro gave her a look which said plainly not to worry about it.

He was actually quite suave when he wasn't thinking too hard about it.
"Take all the time you want, Keith." He patted Keith lightly on the back, and then Keith was gone, running back to a place where he could cry in solitude.

He was going to lose everything. After so, so long he had finally found something so, so special. He had found, for the first time ever, a whole group of people who really, truly cared for him, and liked him.

He had found a family, and now he was going to lose it all.

Then the sound of his own desperate sobs was muffled by another sound, one close by.

It was the X Files theme, played at 47% of the actual speed, and that meant only one thing. He was receiving a phone call. Pulling his phone out of his pocket, he had half a mind to throw it out the window, but catching a glimpse of the screen display, something slowed his hand.

Lance was calling.

Steeling himself, Keith accepted the call.

"Keith, buddy!" A voice that was very much Lance's rang out, calming Keith slightly. "Listen, I'm so sorry, I'm running late. Is everything okay on your end? Party going well?"

Keith nodded, then realised that nodding was not a tangible answer via telephone. "Yes." He said dully. "Everything's fine."

"Oh that's good because I have been having an absolute nightmare of a day, y'know? I've been on Skype like, all day and my niece keeps trying to ear the baubles off the Christmas tree, and then Dad had to intervene and it all just got kinda-"

Lance broke off. "Keith, are you okay?"

And Keith wanted to say nothing, to say no, nothing's wrong, what are you on about? Or something to that avail, but deep down he knew he was fooling nobody. Perhaps it would be better to come clean. "No." He said quietly. "I'm not."

There was a loud sound of rustling on the other end, which might have been Lance putting his coat on. "Hold on, buddy," he said, the sound of a door slamming reverberating through Keith's phone. "I'm on my way."

Chapter End Notes

To be continued...

Thank you again for reading! It means the world to us, and we love writing for you guys.

You can find us at mothdads.tumblr.com so feel free to ask us any questions or do whatever!
Under the Lonely Winter Sky

Chapter Summary

A hoverbike ride, and a much needed heart to heart.

Chapter Notes

Here we go, Christmas part two!
Happy Hunkday yesterday to all you lovely people!

Lance ran over to the bookstore as fast as his lanky legs could take him.
What had happened? What was wrong with Keith? Was he okay? Lance couldn't remember feeling
so worried about someone since Max had swallowed that pen lid and had to be taken to hospital to
have it removed from her throat. To have Keith so upset- this had to be serious. Slightly out of
breath, he reached the storefront.

"Lance?" Said a voice from behind him.

"Oh, hey." He said, a little breathlessly. "There you are. What happened?"

"I... had to leave." Keith said quietly.
His eyes were red.

"Hey, that's okay man. We all need to take a moment sometimes."

"Can I introduce you to someone? She's- she's quite important to me."

That came directly out of left field. Keith had never mentioned anything about a woman in his life?
Oh god, he had thought the man was gay for fuck's sake! Admittedly he could still be bisexual, but
Lance was a good judge of character and he had certainly not seen this coming.

"Is she... your girlfriend?"

Despite himself, Keith laughed a little.

"Kinda."

Damn. Deep down within Lance, the small part of him which had harboured the idea that maybe, in
the right circumstances him and Keith could maybe, maybe be a thing weighed down his stomach
like a force was upon it.

"Is she hot?" Lance grinned, trying desperately not to look disappointed.

Keith smiled at him, that perfect Keith smile from behind a tear stained, blotchy face and Lance's
heart melted a little. "Oh, definitely." Keith grabbed his hand, leading him round the side of the building and Lance hated how his heart beat faster in his chest, hated how much he liked being led along, hand in hand by this beautiful man with his warm hands and strong arms and cute smile who shouldn't be able to pull off a fucking mullet but did.

Lance was in over his head.

"Here we go." Said Keith with a wan smile. "The only girl I'll ever love."

It was a bike.
A beautiful, red painted gleaming hoverbike, but a bike nonetheless.

"Your girlfriend is... a bike?"

"You could say that." Keith murmured. "She's certainly a very old friend. I haven't seen her in years. I got her way back in Texas."

This was all both reassuring and confusing. "No way you were old enough to get a license back then!" He protested loudly.

"Why d'you think social services took her away from me? Even though I rebuilt her all by myself! Apparently I was 'riding illegally' and 'in possession of stolen property'. But she was still my bike, yknow? It wasn't like Cheap Charlie was doing anything with her but letting her rot."

Keith scowled loudly. It might have seemed to anyone that this was simply impossible to scowl loudly, and on any other occasion it might well have been, but Keith had a certain penchant for extremely potent frowns which defied all logic, and this was certainly one of them.

Oh fuck, Lance thought. He's hot when he's angry.

"So, how did you find her again?" He asked tentatively.

Keith swallowed hard, his throat moving irresistibly as he did so.

"My parents."
His voice came out quiet and cracked, and suddenly Lance was aware of how very vulnerable and small Keith sounded. "They tracked her down for me. Fixed her up and everything." 

"Hey that's great man! Must be good to see her again!" Lance squeezed Keith's hand comfortingly.

Keith squeezed his hand back, accepting his unspoken gesture of compassion. Yes, Lance used the word compassion instead of friendship because that was what it was, really. Whether platonic or not, Lance cared for Keith, had grown to think a lot of him in the past few weeks, and in that moment, Lance really thought Keith felt the same.

"Take a ride with me?" Keith gazed at him, imploring him with big, emotional eyes to say yes.

Lance could not have said no even if he wanted to.

-- -- --

To anyone who wanted to know, that hoverbike ride with Keith really felt like a defining moment to Lance. Roaring along the open road with no destination in particular, Lance felt so much freer. No talking, no distractions. Simply road and Keith, his hair blowing in the crisp, dry air of this Christmas day, Lance's arms wound tightly around his chest and stomach.

Wind howled past them, a cold bite to it, but it was not wet, and not yet too unpleasant. Scenery
rushed past them, sometimes trees, sometimes great open fields, giving way to the nothingness that came from sheer, uncaring bliss.

Here in the cold, out on a lonely road, all sense of bearing and location long since lost, Lance felt free. It was like everything worrying him had melted away some miles back.

It was a wonderful feeling.

Keith pulled up to the side of the road, parking his hoverbike on the frost tipped grass. He sat down beside it, and lay back against the grassy verge, which tilted upwards into a slight hill. Without really knowing why, Lance lay down next to him. Well, mama didn't call him her brave boy for nothing.

"What you were upset about earlier..." He asked. "D'you wanna talk about it?"

"I..." Keith murmured into the breeze a little distantly. "I don't know if I want to."

They lapsed into silence, and lying back, Lance had a clear view of the stars. When he was younger he used to keep a gap in the curtains and watch the sky from his bunk bed, waiting on countless foggy or clouded nights for a shooting star, or some alien spaceship to take him away, to make him finally stand out in front of all his brothers and sisters, something to set him apart, to make him different.

When that event came, Lance had found himself wishing so hard that it had never happened.

"Which one are you looking at?" Keith asked him quietly.

"I'm looking for the Pleiades, the seven sisters, but these girls are not out tonight." Lance breathed, caught in a sudden spot of nostalgia.

"Is that a quote from something? I think I recognise it." He raised an eyebrow which, though not carefully maintained, retained a certain jauntiness.

Lance nodded. "A Streetcar Named Desire."

"Huh." This appeared to spark some distant interest in Keith's eyes. "I remember doing that in school."

"I did it too." Smiled Lance. "I know it may sound a little cliché, but I'm actually kinda fond of it."

"I have always relied upon the kindness of strangers." Keith said in that solemn yet oddly accented voice of his.

"Exactly." Agreed Lance. "I love it, but it does make me sad. Sometimes I pick it up again, and I almost can't bear to read to the ending."

"I know how you feel." Keith agreed sincerely. "I get too wrapped up in these things, and then when they end badly it feels awful. It's why I don't watch films so often. I almost always cry at the endings."

"Do you?" Curiosity got the better of Lance. "Like really, cool guy Keith watches movies and bawls like a baby at the end?! Really?"

Keith blushed furiously and Lance suddenly felt very bad about himself. "Hey, I didn't-"
"You think I'm cool?"

"Uh? Well, yeah, I guess I do." Lance grinned at him. " Fucking weird, don't get me wrong, but still. Cool."

"Really? I never really thought-"

Lance rolled his eyes at him. Was he really so blind?

"C'mon, of course you are, just look at you! I mean, you wear fingerless gloves and leather jackets and have your weird 'strong, silent type' mojo! And I mean, you have an unfashionable haircut but you pull it off, which gives you some serious style kudos, actually. Everyone thinks you're cool! And it's not even because you're hot! You're lucky, man. Seriously."

Lance blushed a little, aware of Keith's eyes upon him. "I mean, objectively speaking, that is."

"Uh, yeah, thanks." Keith smiled at him. "Means a lot, coming from someone like you."

"Someone like me?"

"Yeah. I mean, you just seem so sorted, you know?? You have it all going for you, I mean, you're good-looking, you get on with people, you know what you want to do with your life."

Lance winked at him. "Good to know I only look like a hot mess on the inside." Behind his smile he felt very strange indeed- though not in an unpleasant way.

"I bet you're not." Keith chuckled "You're only saying that to make me feel better."

"You haven't seen me on a bad day." Lance laughed. "I'm a raging turmoil."

"Yeah." Keith agreed.

How rude.

"But, you still have people who love you, right? Friends, and family, and girlfriends, probably. People who love you."

"I guess so." Lance agreed. "Friends, girlfriends, boyfriends, whatever. It seems like a lot when you list them but looking back, there's a lot of people who were only close to me because I saw them five times a week."

Keith nodded. "I guess I wouldn't know about all that, but I get what you're saying."

He grew quiet for a moment, gazing wistfully off into the cosmos.

"It's funny, I spent so long being alone that I didn't feel like I was missing anything. And then..." He tailed off, "Then, I came here, and after a while these people started gathering around me, and it felt like the most special thing in the world. But now, I have to leave."

"Do you?" Lance asked quietly. Deep down, he really really didn't want Keith to go. Nothing about the bookstore would be the same without him there, curating the moth section while recounting the last episode of ancient aliens in intense detail.

Sighing, Keith pulled up his sleeve. underneath, the clumps of fur had spread along his arm, a fine layer of fuzz which now spread from his mid forearm up to his shoulder, thickening around the elbow joint. Lance ran a hand through it, curling his fingers through the thick, warm fur.
"It's growing really quickly." He said quietly. "At this rate, I'll be 100% moth by the time my parents get back. I might not even see them again. And I'll have to leave Shiro as well, and Matt and Pidge and, and you!"

Lance put a hand on Keith's, watching helplessly as Keith collapsed into sobs, clutching at Lance's hand for assurance.

"I know what I have to do, and I'm going to do it, but I don't want to leave everyone! Not after all this! I wish I'd never met you, I wish I'd never come here because then I'd never have had friends, or family, and I'd never know what I was leaving, or w-what I'd miss!"

Lance curled an arm around Keith's prone frame, pulling him closer, so his head lay on Keith's shoulder.

He lay in silence as Keith trembled, not knowing what to do, or say, but doing the only thing he could think to do to calm his friend.

"Hey." He said quietly, after Keith's tremors had died down, and they lay still upon the grassy verge. "Listen, Keith. I know that it hasn't been very long that we've known each other, but I promise you, I'll do everything I can to help you out. I won't leave you all alone. But in return, could you do something for me?"

Keith sat up abruptly. "Like what?"

Lance looked up at him, calm in the emptiness of night. "Tell your family."

"I can't." Keith said brusquely, voice emotional and uneven. He turned away.

"Why not?" Lance asked, frowning.

Keith glared out into the middle distance, angry tears forming in the corners of his eyes. "Because they'd worry! They'd worry way too much and I don't know if they'd try to stop me!"

"Well of course they'll worry, they'll worry one way or another!" Lance argued back with passion. "They're going to worry a whole lot more though if they come back to find that one of their kids have gone missing. Do you have any idea what that does to people? Because I do! I do, and I don't wanna see that happen to your family, because they seem like they really care about you a lot! They're your family, Keith. They need to know this, and I think that if they really love you as much as they seem to, they won't stop you. If this really is what you need to do, that is."

"What do you mean, 'if'?" Keith asked angrily. "You said you believed me!"

"I do." Lance agreed. "It might take them a while to accept though. In the end though, they're your family. If they're anywhere near decent as parents they'll accept who you are, even if they find it difficult to begin with. It's all about unconditional love, y'know."

"And what if they don't?"

"Then maybe leaving was for the best anyway." Lance said sadly. The thought of it brought a lump to his throat, for a reason he did not want to disclose. The subject was closer to home than he would have liked.

"Hmmph." Keith rumbled. "I, I guess so." His voice shrank to barely more than a whisper. "If you really think I should then-"
"Absolutely."

"-I'll do it."

They dwelled in silence, just looking at each other.

"Hey, Lance?" Keith said awkwardly.

"Yeah?"

"Did you... Lose someone?" The words rang in the air. So familiar. So horribly, intrusively familiar.

"...Maybe." Said Lance finally.

"Do you... wanna talk about it?"

"No." Said Lance with an air of finality that he really hoped Keith would leave alone.

He did.

The night was getting colder. There was a profound chill in the air, and it was windy, probably due to the lack of cloud which might otherwise act as a buffer for blusterous air currents. There was nothing to protect him from the icy gusts biting into the bare skin of his face and hands.

Lance heard something vibrate. He looked round at Keith. He had his phone in hand, an outdated android phone in a battered red case. So very Keith.

Sticking his tongue out unconsciously, Keith proceeded to type out a response to the text, using only one thumb, taking considerably longer than it would have otherwise.

"Shiro." He turned back to Lance, looking a little sheepish. "Just checking that we're okay."

Lance nodded distractedly. "Like I said. He cares about you."

Then Keith stepped towards him, and Lance found himself wrapped in a tight, warm hug, which seemed to melt his chilled body.

"I don't normally hug strangers," he said. "I'm sorry if I come off too strong."

"I think we're a little past being strangers, Keith." Lance smiled, leaning his head against Keith's, glad that he couldn't see how flushed his face was.

Keith was strange, and sad, and he was wonderful.

He chuckled quietly. "I guess so." He agreed. "And you are cuddly."

"Thank you."

They stayed like that for quite a while, greatly exceeding the boundaries of what could be considered a hetero man-hug, but Lance had never taken Keith as the kinda guy to be bothered about all that, so he let it happen quite contently.

As they pulled apart, Lance could not help to notice that Keith was blushing quite fiercely.

"We oughta head home in a minute." He said bashfully, all weights upon his shoulders vanishing for a brief moment. "You need a ride home?"
"Do I look like I wanna walk back? I'm freezing my ass off here Keith." He rolled his eyes. "Jerk."

"Don't sass the driver."

"Hey, I could drive! I used to play all those holo-simulation flight games and everything!" Lance protested, feeling deeply insulted. Admittedly he had never ridden a hoverbike before but he could drive and he could ride a normal bike, so how hard could it be?

Keith raised an eyebrow at him suspiciously. "Last time I went into Coffee Corner your friend there told me that last time you drove him anywhere you nearly caused a seven car pileup."

Oh, Hunk was dead. "It's not my fault!" He protested loudly. "He puked in the footwell! It threw me off my groove!"

"Still." Keith regarded him with a faint smirk. "The only one who gets to ride Ariadne is me."

"You're making it sound gross." Lance wrinkled his nose at the thought of it. "Stop giving me freaky mental images."

"Stop reading too far into things!" Retorted Keith, but both of them were grinning happily. "Just get on the back and shut your dumb mouth."

Lance rolled his eyes, but clambered onto the hoverbike anyway, wrapping his arms tightly around Keith's waist and it occurred to him that he didn't know if Keith actually had a license.

Ah well. He had gotten them so far.

"Drive on!" He commanded his handsome chauffeur, and the two of them drove off, back into the empty night from whence they'd came.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! We'll be updating regularly again from hereon out, though maybe not daily like we were doing earlier, it all depends on how much work we get and how long the chapters will be.

As always, you can find the mothparents on mothdads.tumblr.com
Thanks for reading!
Almost like brothers...

Chapter Summary

Lance pays the Shirogane residence a long-awaited visit.

Chapter Notes

(the autocorrect on my tablet is very weird. If you see a word that looks wrong in context, do tell us)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The time between Christmas and New Years was a liminal space. It was one of those times in which you existed on all astral planes except the one which you thought you really ought to be on.

2:00 AM on the 27th of December was as good a time as any for a midlife crisis. There was a lot in Keith's life to have crises about, of course. But was Keith going to take this time to have the long needed talk to himself about what the hell it was that he was going to have to do? No. He was not.

He was going to watch Ancient Aliens, eat mince pies and try his damnedest not to feel like garbage. This was unfortunate because feeling like garbage was one of his only skills. It was not one he had tried to cultivate, far from it, but the point was, it was there.

Gathering a collection of declassified government documents from his bed, which he'd downloaded from the Internet for his next YouTube video, he dumped them on his desk haphazardly and buried himself under his duvet, arranging his mince pies around him. His glance flitted over his desk, resting on a stack of Christmas presents. In addition to the poster from Coran and his bike, he had received several other gifts: an encyclopaedia on different moth species from Shiro; a sweatshirt with Twin Peaks' very own Agent Cooper on it from Pidge; a coupon for a meal for two at Coffee Corner (given with a wink and a not so subtle look at Lance) from Allura; a Robot Cats from Outer Space™ charm from Matt, the maroon cat- although it looked more red than maroon to Keith- matching the turquoise-ish blue one that Matt had given to Lance. And from Lance he had received Odyssey by Home, a vaporwave album that was on his wishlist, and a bracelet.

A friendship bracelet.

*Whaddaya mean 'Are we friends?'. Of course we are! What, do you want a friendship bracelet or something to make it official?*

Lance's words from before had reverberated in his mind as he had opened up a small black box on
Christmas Day to reveal an intricately braided red and black bracelet, adorned with small yellow and white beads. He deadpanned when he first saw it, partly from the beauty of the bracelet and partly from the irony.

He then gave Lance a small white box containing a blue and white friendship bracelet with yellow and green beads.

Great minds think alike, Keith supposed.

That had been just before they received Matt's gifts. Upon Lance's insistence, they swapped space cat charms to attach to their bracelets, as a testament to their now official friendship. Keith ended up with a red bracelet with Lance's blue cat charm attached, and Lance ended up with a blue bracelet with Keith's red cat charm.

Keith was brought out of his reverie when his phone buzzed, startling him so much that he almost fell from the side of his bed where he was perched.

He had a text?

That was all his phone was going to tell him, helpfully enough. It was functional enough just... outdated. For some time now. He couldn't get Pokemon Go on it or anything, because the OS was too old. It suited him well enough most of the time, as the screen was still unbroken and there was enough space for all his pictures of Cryptids, alien sightings, and pictures of Ludwig Wittgenstein (who Keith felt a deep personal affinity with, thank you). Thusly he had never thought to ask his parents for a new one. Now, he supposed, he'd never get to.

But the text.

With a grunt he heaved himself out from under his mountain of blankets and snacks, lazily trekking over to his desk where his phone lay waiting patiently. Turning it on, he squinted at the caller ID as the bright light from the screen permeated the dark room.

Lance.

He hadn't seen him since the Christmas party.

Keith's fingers fumbled whilst eagerly typing in the password and entering the messages app.

-- -- --

Lance: Hey, sorry to text you so late at night but I wanted to talk to you.

-- -- --

Keith's heart skipped a beat.

-- -- --

Keith: it's fine. What's on your mind?

Lance: I just wanted to make sure you were ok after what happened with your bike and all that the other day

Lance: you seemed OK after we went back to the bookstore but I just wanted to make sure

-- -- --
Keith gulped. Lance had been worried about him?

---

Keith: yeah, I'm ok now
Lance: Sure?
Keith: yeah
Lance: good :)

---

He took a deep breath and sat down on the edge of his bed. He stared at his phone for a few seconds before typing.

---

Keith: thanks
Keith: for before, I mean
Keith: it means a lot to me
Lance: what are friends for :)

---

He glanced down at the bracelet on his arm and his cheeks warmed up slightly. He hadn't taken it off once since he first put it on. He didn't plan on taking it off any time soon.

---

Lance: I'm glad you're ok though
Lance: so what are you up to?
Lance: wait dumb question you were probably asleep
Keith: actually I was about to watch some Ancient Aliens
Lance: at 2am?
Lance: God, when do you sleep?
Keith: I'll sleep when I'm too tired to function
Keith: anyway, you're one to talk. Why are you up?

---

There was a short pause after that. It was about a minute before Lance answered, but to Keith it felt like hours.

---
Lance: couldn't sleep

Keith frowned. He supposed that this was probably where he should change the subject, seeing how brief the answer was, but, as usual, his curiosity got the better of him.

Keith: why not?

Another pause.

Lance: I was worried
Keith: ...
Keith: about me?
Lance: ...
Lance: yeah

His heart skipped a beat

Keith: Lance...
Keith: I'm ok now. I really am
Keith: talking to you really helped me out. I know now what I have to do, and even though telling my family seems daunting, I'm not as worried as I was before. I guess I just needed a push in the right direction.
Keith: Don't worry about it. You've already done so much for me
Lance: I know but I can't help it y'know?
Lance: but I guess I feel better now that I know that you really are alright
Lance: but if you ever need anything
Lance: literally anything at all
Lance: I'm here for you
Keith: thanks.
Keith: it's good to have someone to talk to.
Keith: Shiro's great but sometimes he seems more like a dad than anything else. I don't wanna worry him.

Lance: dw man, I know the feeling. I have loads of siblings, but I'm not really close enough to confide in them, yknow?

Keith: really? I assumed you'd all be really close or something.

Lance: well, it's not like we don't like each other, it's just that most of them are a lot older or younger than I am. I love em to bits, but we don't always see eye to eye.

Keith: so you're kinda alone in the middle? That's a little sad.

Lance: well, not exactly. I have a sister who's not much younger than me. We were inseparable as kids.

Keith: and you aren't now?

Lance: I guess you could say that.

---

That was mystifying, and Keith couldn't help but feel like there was something Lance wasn't telling him.

---

Keith: what happened?

Lance: let's not talk about this

---

Keith frowned. Yeah, there was definitely something strange going on there.

---

Keith: are you sure you don't wanna talk about this? I'm here for you, Lance.

Lance: I know, but still.

...

Keith: okay.

Lance: don't get upset man, please. It's not like I'm avoiding talking about it because I don't like you, I just find talking about it really hard.

Lance: Don't be mad? :/

Keith: don't worry. I get it. I won't press you to answer questions you're not comfortable with

Lance: cool ;)

Keith: anyway, I have something very important to ask you

Lance: ?
Keith: Lance McClain

Keith: would you do me the honour of

Lance: are you asking me to marry you?

Keith: collaborating on a conspiracy video with me?

...

Lance: well that wasn't what I was expecting, but

Lance: sure! B)

-- - --

Keith tumbled out of bed the next morning, having had a measly 3 1/2 hours of sleep. It was lucky that he did not seem to need the same amount of sleep as most normal people did, but reliably getting four hours of sleep or less would take its toll on anyone.

Ah well, he thought. He would have plenty of time to sleep as a fully fledged mothman. Besides, he had other things to do, like re-watch Gormenghast or finish that book he had been reading, 'The behaviour of Moths'.

Keith peered at the clock in the corner of the room. Eleven thirty. Late. Putting on his dressing gown (the kitchen could be very crafty in winter) he ventured out in search of food.

He was very disappointed when he reached the kitchen. That was another downside of their parents being away; it left Keith and Shiro to do the shopping.

Hence why all the cereal they had in the house was way healthier than anything Keith wanted to eat. It wasn't that he had an unhealthy diet, Keith looked after himself well enough. However, eating muesli for breakfast was a clear mark of someone who had given up on life many years before. Keith was not one of those people; he liked existing and he also liked eating breakfast cereals which did not taste like regret and childhood abandonment. Sighing, he pulled the muesli box down from the cupboard where cereal boxes (or more accurately, the cereal box) was stored, and in doing so managed to pull something else down with it, which narrowly avoided hitting him in the face, landing on the kitchen counter with a light thump.

He considered his options. Heck, porridge was superior to muesli any day. He'd just have to add enough sugar and it would be a perfectly reasonable breakfast.

He was just about to turn on the hob when something in his pocket started vibrating. Frowning, he reached into the pocket and pulled out his phone.

Five unread texts. All from Lance.

-- - --

(At 10:24)

Lance: hey

Lance: we were meeting today, right?

Lance: also, where do you wanna meet?

Lance: text me back when ur awake
(At 11:38)
Lance: im at coffee corner right now. I'll get something for u if ya want?
Keith: you don't have to get me anything
Lance: I know. But do u want anything

...  
Keith: could u get me a hot chocolate?
Lance: sure ;)
Lance: do u want whipped cream and marshmallows?
Keith: that would be nice
Lance: so, where we meeting? to conspiracize and all that
Keith: at the bookstore?
Lance: really? Ok then
Lance: I'm on my way ;)

-- - --
Keith resumed his breakfast. Hopefully it would be done by the time Lance got here.

-- - --
Keith was literally one mouthful into his breakfast when he heard Lance enter the break room. Sighing, he deserted his food, tumbling out through the landing and downstairs into the break room.

"Lance!" He called over to Lance, who was in the act of pinching one of Matt's donuts.

"Keithy boy!" He responded, smiling broadly, sticky sugar dusting his lips. "Nice pyjamas!"
Keith looked down and blushed. Maybe today hadn't been the best day for his Star Wars pyjamas.

"Thanks." He said, trying very hard not to look embarrassed. The look came out as a strained looking grimace. He would have to practice that look.

Lance smirked at him, before handing him his hot chocolate.
Keith took a sip. It was a damn fine hot chocolate.

"Hey, do you want to come upstairs? I was in the middle of breakfast."
Lance looked at him as if he were mad. "Wouldn't Shiro mind? I don't wanna come in without being invited."
Weird. Lance was weird. Still, which of Keith's friends wasn't?

"I'm inviting you."

"Well, if you're sure." Lance gave him an uneasy look, but followed him back upstairs anyway. He hovered awkwardly next to the fridge as Keith sat down to eat his now slightly tepid bowl of porridge.

"What's wrong?" He asked curtly.

Lance regarded him with worried eyes. "Keith, I'm really not sure employees are allowed up here."

"Not usually, no."

"Then shouldn't we, y'know, leave? Go to your place or something?"

"Lance."

"What! What is it, Keith?"

"I live here."

Lance gaped at him.

"Oh."

"Yeah." Keith stared over at Lance. "You really didn't know?"

"Uh, no! How would I? Nobody told me you lived here?"

"Well, why else would I be here in my pyjamas? On a day off?"

"Matt does it!" Lance insisted. "Please tell me he doesn't live here too?"

Keith frowned. "Of course not. Matt is just, well, Matt. He is what he is."

Lance nodded in agreement. "That's true. So, anyway, how did you and Shiro end up being roommates?"

Well, it made some level of sense that Lance didn't know that they were brothers if he hasn't even realised they lived together. It was still very weird though.

Before anything could be said, they were interrupted by the man himself.

"Keith?" Shiro called from the corridor.

"I'm in here." Keith responded loudly.

"Ah." The door swung open. "Hey, Keith, do you know where I put that DVD Matt got me?"

Keith shrugged. "Not since you opened it. It might be in the living room?"

Shiro's shoulders sagged slightly. "I've checked in there at least three times already. It's like it's totally disappeared. I wouldn't usually care, but..."

"But Allura." Lance winked at him. Shiro went red and muttered something unintelligibly.
Lance snickered in a way that Keith couldn't quite manage to be annoyed by anymore.

"Hey man, I'll help you look for it, no worries."

"But we were-" Keith protested.

"No worries, Keithy boy, I'm sure we'll have time for that once we've found Robot Cats from Outer Space: The Animated Series so that Shiro here can finally make a move on Allura."

"Wh-" Shiro mumbled with a look of despair. "How does everybody know that I like Allura?"

"Because you're pretty obvious about it, dude." Lance grinned, which faded a little as Lance most likely remembered that Shiro was, in fact, his boss.

"I am?"

"Well, uh... yeah." Lance looked a little sheepish. "You two are masters of wistfully gazing into each others eyes and then never doing anything about it."

"Huh." Said Shiro, giving Keith a Look (with a capital L). "Guess it's not just me then."

"Oh yeah, Allura's just as bad at this as you are." Said Lance, completely missing the point of what Shiro was saying.

Shiro was giving Keith a very, very intense look which said something along the lines of 'you and me both, little brother'. Keith took a rather intense level of interest in his breakfast in response.

"Say, Shiro if you don't mind me asking, when was your last relationship?"

Shiro and Keith froze.

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, as Lance looked from Shiro to Keith which shared the general sentiment 'oh fuck'.

"My last relationship ended about three years ago." Shiro said quietly. There was an unspoken end to that sentence which hung in the air about them. Lance wouldn't know. Lance wouldn't know what happened three years ago.

He was in dangerous territory.

"Well, that's the issue then!" Lance said, filling the brittle atmosphere with a smile that seemed too wide not to be fake. Or that may have just been Lance's face. It was very angular after all. "See, you need to get back in the game, Shiro my man! Take it from me, i'm an old hand at this. Not to mention, I know what Allura likes."

Lance winked at him, and Keith was actually quite amused by how utterly bewildered Shiro looked.

Standing up, Lance sauntered towards the door. "Alright." He said confidently. "Shiro, we have Space Cats to find, and we can have a little.. chat while we're at it. Worst case scenario where we can't find it? I'll give you Hunk's dad's Netflix password."

"But what about-"

"Keith, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Eat it before it's cold. Me 'n Shiro will be done before you know it." Lance said in such a big-brotherly manner that Keith found himself powerless to disagree.
"Come on, Shiro. You have a beautiful woman to woo."

Shiro shrugged at Keith, before following him out into the corridor, leaving Keith alone.

---

Naturally, things were in no way as simple as Lance had suggested. They spent hours searching for the accursed Space Cats animated series, after which Shiro insisted on cleaning the house. Lance, being one of however many siblings was an old hand at cleaning, though he did have a nasty habit of complaining. He had disappeared very suddenly after receiving a phone call from someone or another, leaving Keith and Shiro alone in a clean but empty house.

Keith collapsed on the sofa next to Shiro, head slightly addled by cleaning products.

"Fuck." Shiro said loudly, completely out of nowhere.

"What?"

"I left Matt in charge of the bookstore. Alone." He used his one human arm to massage his temples.

"It'll be okay. He had Pidge with him. She'll look out for the place if she needs to." Keith reassured him.

"Yeah." Shiro sighed. "I know. I'll give her a bit of money for it when they're on the way out."

"Are you doing okay?" Keith looked at him solemnly.

"I..." Shiro breathed deeply. "I don't know. What Lance said- I'd like to believe that. That I could just ask her out and it'd all be happiness and smiles and nothing would go wrong, but.."

Keith gave his brother a much needed hug.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I'll talk to Lance if I have to." Shiro hugged him back, human and prosthetic arms wrapped around his back as if they were one being, as if Shiro had always been like that. "I know I like Allura, and that she likes me too. I just don't know if I'm ready. She shouldn't get mixed up with me. For God's sake, it's been three years! I should be used to this now! I should be able to cope!"

Keith could feel warm, salty tears running down his scalp. He remembered after the incident, visiting Shiro in hospital and finding a different man from the big brother that he had known, a strange, emotionally desolate man who barely remembered his parents and had taken a long time to remember that he had a brother. It had been hard, but Keith had loved this new Shiro too, had stood by when his girlfriend had left him, had been by his side when the Air Force had given him an honourable discharge. It had taken Shiro a long time to even resemble the Shiro that they had seen only months before that, but Keith had been there through all of it.

He loved his big brother so much.

"Shiro. I don't know what you've been thinking, and that's your business alone, but I think you're doing a great job. Don't pressure yourself to start dating Allura, but if you do? It doesn't have to be a perfect relationship. It doesn't even have to be good, but it might at least help you put the past behind you a bit. It'll be okay, Shiro. I'll be here."

Shiro held him even tighter, almost crushing the air out of his lungs, but Keith did not make a single
sound of protest. After all, his brother needed this.

"Don't you go anywhere. Please, Keith, I don't know what I'd do if you weren't here." Shiro's sobs wracked his body, and Keith's heart froze in his chest.

He didn't have the heart to tell Shiro that he would have to leave.

Chapter End Notes

If any of you out there reading this are having a tough time, or are recovering from a traumatic event, just know that you are doing great. There is no schedule on recovery. It can take months or years, sometimes even more. Just keep going- you'll get there someday.

I'm proud of all of you for overcoming everything standing in your way. Being here today is an achievement.
Well done.
-mothdad

Find the mothparents at mothdads.tumblr.com! Thanks for reading!
Well well well. New Year's Eve.

Spending New Years with Keith was sure to be a change of pace from what Lance was used to. It'd probably be a small affair, quite laid back. If he was honest, Lance expected little more than to sit on the sofa together and watch Star Wars or something like that.

Then again, after last year, that was probably a welcome change from last year, when Lance had consumed around twelve ciders and a quart of vodka and had woken up the next morning with the worst hangover of his life, the numbers of no less than four individuals in his phone, and the knowledge that he would probably never be able to look at a Kopparberg in quite the same way ever again. After a few very awkward conversations he had later learnt that the numbers belonged to two girls he had only met that night, his brother Dale's ex-girlfriend and the guy who had been his secret crush throughout highschool. While no relationship had been forthcoming of the evening, Lance figured that the anecdote of having woken up inside a washing machine at his local laundromat with all his clothes (and he meant all of them) folded up neatly on the bench adjacent was definitely a plus.

This year would not be anything like the previous, of course. However that did not mean that Lance had any intention of looking anything short of fantastic.

Hence why he was making his way over to the bookstore in an outfit that was entirely inappropriate for the middle of winter, skinny jeans and sky blue Doc Martens which matched his eyeliner.

He was wearing a jumper, which said "I'm a luxury few can afford." It was a good look.

It didn't make him feel any warmer though, as he hurried through the cold, wet streets towards the Shirogane Independent. Hurrying up to the front door, he knocked loudly, hearing it reverberate through the cold empty store.

A light flickered on in the other room and before he knew it, Keith was at the door.
"Good to see you." He said with an easy smile, pulling him into a brief hug, before leading him in, through the break room and upstairs. Before they went through into the landing, Keith turned to him with a slightly strange expression.

"There's been a slight change of plan." He said hurriedly. "Matt and Shiro's friends cancelled on them, so they're here instead. So is Pidge. She just appeared in the house like, half an hour ago, set her laptop down on the dining table and told me she was attempting to create a sentient AI."

"Sounds like Pidge." Lance agreed.

"Also," Keith's voice took on an air of urgency. "Allura's here as well! Matt invited her over!"

Aaaaand that would explain why Keith was so worried about things. Shiro may have been the most self controlled man on the planet but with Allura? One man disaster machine.

"So what's happening?" He whispered, awestruck.

Keith led him along the corridor, tip-toeing past several different closed doors until they reached an open door from which light and music poured. "As soon as she got here, Shiro chugged like half a bottle of Sambuca."

"And?"

"Just look!" Keith whispered quite loudly in frustration.

Tentatively, Lance peered around the door. Inside, a rather retro looking CD player was booming out rather ambient French music at a fairly inappropriate volume. But that was not the half of it. In the middle of the room, Allura and Shiro were slow dancing.

"Oh my god!" Lance mouthed to Keith. "Oh my god! They're dancing!"

Keith nodded, and then made a series of gestures to Lance which he did not in the slightest bit understand. Lance shrugged. It was all he could really think to do.

Then Keith took him by the hand and led him back through along the corridor back to his room.

The light was on in Keith's room. It cast a dim glow on its surroundings. The Curtains were open, and so was the window, brisk air and distant lights fluttering gently into the room. It felt serene. Secluded. Very, very Keith. His bed lay directly under the window, opposite a moderately sized TV so that he might sit on it like a sofa or lie on his side and still be able to watch one of the many DVDs stashed next to it. His mom and dad had never allowed them anything like that, either due to austerity of the pocket or the heart, Lance did not know. Nor did he really care. They were not as close as they had been.

Keith's parents cared a lot, that was evident from every orifice of the room. They must have wanted a second child for a very long time indeed, from the looks of things. It was a well furnished, and fairly spacious room, with the conspiracy board standing proudly near the door. It, and to a lesser extent the walls were pasted with images, strange incomprehensible diagrams and arrows crawled on them. It spread from the board across the room like a spiderweb of eclectic images, most of which he recognised. Some of which he didn't.

He recognised a photo of Keith though, tiny and frowning, surely no older than three, a rathe
bedraggled toy rabbit dandling from one pudgy hand.

"Oh my gosh," he breathed, "tiny Keith!"

Keith looked down at his feet embarassedly. "Yeah."

"Oh don't be embarrassed, it's adorable! You look like such a sweet kid!" Lance beamed at him, enthused. He had never considered how cute Keith would have been as a kid, it had never really crossed his mind. But now it had-

"I am reliably informed that I was a uniquely unpleasant child." Keith grimaced, sitting down on the bed. "Never got on with all the other kids. Apparently I frightened them."

Lance frowned. "There's no such thing as a bad kid, not at age three. Writing a kid off as a lost cause is the mark of a bad parent, not anything else."

"Thanks, Lance." Keith smiled. "I was a bit of a menace though."

"Well, I refuse to believe you're any worse than half my siblings." Lance winked at Keith, who looked away very quickly. "My big brother Ricky, he used to destroy any toys that even came near him. One year, my parents got sick of it and bought him a big plastic fire truck that was meant to be 'unbreakable'."

"And what happened?"

"He put it in the oven."

Keith gaped at him. "That's-"

"Crazy, right? I know. My parents were so angry! He wasn't allowed in the kitchen for a year after!"

"Your brother sounds crazy." Said Keith.

"Yeah, but he's mellowed out a lot since he had a kid." Lance smiled wistfully. "Most of 'em are still pretty crazy though. We had such a bad reputation at school, you don't even know! The teachers automatically assumed I was a lost cause. That hurt a bit, but I guess they had reason to be careful."

"Did they?"

Lance actually laughed at this. "Oh boy, you don't even know! My sister got expelled at fourteen for setting off a controlled explosion in the parking lot!"

"Whoah." Keith breathed, awestruck. "That's-"

"Crazy, right? She was a local legend. Forget El Chupacabra, we had Samantha McClain. Once got in a fight with a professional rugby player- and won. Stole a car from a local landfill with no seats, no suspension and no brakes. She used to drive it around on the mountain top. Passed her driving test in it too- while pretending to the instructor that the breaks worked. He figured it out, but still gave her a pass- said she was too good a driver for him to fail."

"Your sister sounds awesome!" Keith said, eyes glazing with excitement. "Scary though."
"Yeah, that's Sam." Lance agreed. "Very caring but I wouldn't want to get in a fight with her. Ever." He said, as if he hadn't argued with her a million times before. "You two would have a lot in common. Y'know, you like bikes, she likes bikes, and you both left school early and all that. I think you'd really get on."

"You think?"

"Oh yeah. So long as you don't try to flirt with her, in which case I'd be peeling parts of you off the wallpaper."

Keith snorted. "I'm not you, Lance."

"I don't know what you mean." Grinned Lance.

"Oh, really?" Keith raised an eyebrow at him doubtfully.


"Yeah. Right." Keith gave Lance a very pointed look, to which Lance sighed.

"Maybe you have a point. Maybe." He conceded.

Keith grinned, a rare expression on his sculpuresque face. "Thank you. So, is there anything you really want to watch? Or play, or... something?"

Lance shrugged. "I dunno. You?"

"Well, I was going to watch the second Lord of the Rings film, but I don't know if you'd want to watch the first one first, or if you've seen it and-"

"Keithy boy." Lance said plainly. "Do I look like the kinda guy who hasn't watched The Fellowship of the Ring? Who do you think I am, Keith?"

"Then do you... wanna?" Keith looked at him hesitantly.

"Yeah- sure."

Smiling slightly, Lance perched himself on the left half of Keith's bed, taking off his shoes as Keith put the first disc of the film into his DVD player.

-- --

Lance awoke to the sound of music pounding and people laughing. That hadn't been there before, had it? The last thing he remembered was watching Lord of The Rings with Keith. He remembered how warm Keith was next to him, how relaxed he had felt. He remembered closing his eyes for just a moment. He must have fallen asleep. But the music? Was Shiro having a party? He listened to the sounds of people cheering and talking nearby. It was muffled, as if it were far away, and he couldn't hear it as clearly as he could hear the soft sounds of Keith breathing right next to his ear. He turned his head to the side to come face to with the man in question, his head resting on Lance's shoulder, still peacefully dozing, and seemingly undisturbed by the rambunctious party downstairs. He shuffled slightly, trying to remove his phone from his pocket without disturbing Keith, turning it on to check
the time.

10:56pm. He had 36 new notifications.

-- --

Matt: Hey can you let me Pidge and Coran in
Matt: Keith isn't picking up.
Matt: We left to go get some snacks and meet up with Coran but now we're locked out
Matt: I lost my key
Matt: Don't tell Shiro
Matt: nvm Allura let us in

-- --

Matt: Hey Coran is inviting some of his Swedish pals from his bingo club over
Matt: Can you tell Keith? He still isn’t answering
Matt: His phone is probably dead again ;/
Matt: Also Keith is now in charge because Shiro is shitfaced

-- --

Shiro: LANCE ATE YOH ABD KEURG JUSSUBF???
Shiro: KISFY KIDSY
Shiro: COME MEER COEAMS FEUWBDS THWURE FUN
Shiro: BRIMH KEORH
Shiro: I RELLSU LIKE SWEFIN FISH CAMDY SVEN HSVE E ITD SO FCKUNF GOOD.
Shiro: ALLUEA IS HOTTTT SO PFETRU
Shiro: MATT ID BRINIINF SOMR MOAR FEINDS
Shiro: TELL SVEN RO BEING MOEE FGROENS TOO
Shiro: AMD SWEDINS DISH CANDY

Shiro: This is Pidge. I have confiscated Shiro's phone. Can you and Keith get your asses over here please? Coran's bingo buddies are inviting more people over and Matt invited his entire engineering class.
Shiro: Please help I'm the only sober one here

-- - --

Matt: LANCE

Matt: THERE ARE LIKE 20 COSPLAYERS HERE AND I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY CAME FROM

Matt: I THINK MY BUDDY SLAV INVITED THEM YOU NEVER KNOW WITH THAT GUY

Matt: WE'RE HAVING COSPLAY CONTEST COME HELP ME JUDGE

-- - --

Coran: Hello Lance. Matt informs me you are in charge now since Shiro is intoxicated and Keith isn't answering his phone. I'd just like to ask you where you'd like us to put the chocolate fountain?

-- - --

Pidge: Lance seriously what are you and Keith even doing?

Pidge: Come downstairs

Pidge: I just wanted to work on my robot in peace

-- - --

Coran: Hello again. My good friend Sven would like to know if you have any screwdrivers

-- - --

Matt: HI KANVR :)))

Matt: DO UYOU KNOE WJRTR KWITH IS??!!??!

Matt: HW AHOU;F REU DIME IS RJID SWDISJ FUAH CANDU

Matt: Sorry Shiro got a hold of my phone

-- - --

Coran: Good news! Sven found the screwdrivers!

-- - --

Pidge: heLP ME

The last message was sent at 9:33pm.

Shit.
Lance began to get up quickly when he was suddenly all too aware off Keith still leaning against him. He looked so peaceful in sleep that Lance could dare say Keith's resting face was as adorable as that pout that he did that made butterflies flutter in Lance's stomach. For a brief moment, Lance wondered if Keith ever looked at him and got butterflies in his stomach. Or moths. It was probably moths, with him being mothman and all. A damn fine mothman at that. A damn fine mothman that was leaning most of his weight on him and causing his arm to go numb from what was probably several hours of circulation loss. As much as Lance was enjoying admiring the sleeping Keith, his arm was numb, Shiro was fraternising with bingo players, 17 year old Pidge was left to supervise a bunch of drunk college students, and something about cosplayers and chocolate fountains did not bode well with him. Maybe it was best he woke Keith.

"Keith," He tried to extract his arm from under his sleeping friend. "Keith, wake up. Pidge needs help."

Keith stirred.

Lance placed his free hand on Keith's shoulder and gently shook him.

"C'mon Keith. Wakey wakey"

Suddenly Keith's eyes snapped open and he jerked forward. It took a moment for him to register the hand on his shoulder, and then, with all the speed and accuracy of a ninja, flipped Lance on his front and pinned him down with his knee.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my house?" He snarled. Lance felt Keith lean more of his weight on him, as well of the press of something cold against the nape of his neck.

"Woah, woah, cool your jets, Keith! It's me! Lance!" He managed to garble out.

"Lance?"

"Yes. It's me. Lance. Your bestie? We have friendship bracelets and everything."

Lance felt Keith slowly shift his weight off of him and he moved away. Lance got up and turned around to see Keith staring fondly at the bracelet on his arm and-

"Holy shit, is that a knife?!"

"What?" Keith's gaze flicked to the weapon in his hand, "Oh yeah. I thought you were an intruder. Sorry about that."

"OK yeah, but..why-" Lance was still slightly bewildered by the whole incident, "where did you even get that thing? Like, do you keep one under our pillow or something in case of emergencies?"

"Yes." Keith deadpanned.

"Haha, very funny. But seriously dude." Lance looked Keith in the eye. Keith stared back at first, then wavered.

"Uh...is- is that weird?"
"Wait, you're serious? You actually keep a knife under your pillow?"

"...Yes?"

This explained so much.

"Oh. Well, that really is something. But you do realise that the chance of someone actually attacking you in your sleep is pretty small, right?"

Keith sighed. "Yeah...it's just a habit. When I lived in the desert it was pretty unsafe, so I kept the knife near me at all times, just in case. Usually, if I did get intruders, it'd just be a stray cat or something. Or sometimes my neighbour Jimmy. He was convinced I was 'not of this world', and would try to catch me 'contacting the mother-ship'. He thought I was an alien, or something. He was wrong though. I'm obviously not an alien."

Lance snorted, raising his hands to air quote. "Or something?"

"I guess mothmen fall into the 'or something', category then." Keith smirked

"So anyways, Shiro is drunk and Pidge is trying to calm down a bunch of college students, cosplayers and, uh...bingo players I guess? Also Sven has a screwdriver."

"Who the fuck is Sven?"

-- --

Lance and Keith arrived fashionably late to the party (which they had not been invited to) and were instantly ignored by the party goers. The bookstore was overrun with at least 50 people, some in Waluigi cosplay, some chugging chocolate straight from the chocolate fountain, all of them at varying levels of drunkenness. Lance could feel the music pulsing through his body and had to resist the urge to dance. He needed to find Pidge. He was worried.

Not for Pidge, of course. He was worried for whatever drunken fool went too far and tried to mess with her robot.

Lance decided that navigating through the hoards of people would be just as difficult as he had anticipated, and climbed up onto a chair to see if he could spot Pidge amongst the crowds.

"See her anywhere?" Keith called up to him.

"Nope." He took a big breath. "PIDGE!"

No response.

"HEY PIDGE!"

"I'm right here, Lance." She said from behind him.

Lance could swear he felt his soul leave his body for a moment.

"PIDGE. You gotta stop scaring me like that! Fuck, I almost fell of the chair."
"Nice of you two to finally join us." She rolled her eyes.

"Sorry Pidge. We fell asleep watching Fellowship of the Ring." Lance said, climbing down from the chair.

"Is that all you were doing?" She grinned slyly and raised a jaunty eyebrow.

"...Yeah? Why? What did you think we were doing?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What do you need us to do, Pidge?" Keith interjected

"I need you to go get Shiro and take him back upstairs. Put him to bed. He's had enough partying for one day. He's in the break room."

"Sure thing."

Lance and Keith began to squirm their way through the masses, staying close to each other all the while. At some point Lance grabbed Keith's hand, so as not to get separated from him (and for no other reason whatsoever), and they stayed holding hands even after they reached the break room, in which they found Shiro, heavily leaning on Allura, Coran, three men standing very close together and at least twelve Robbie Rottens dipping doritos in a giant chocolate fountain.

"Keith! Lance! get- get over here!" Shiro babbled at them.

"Shiro!" Keith rushed over to him, "Are you OK? How much have you had to drink?"

"Two of these," Allura held up an empty cider bottle, "And some of those." She pointed to some shot glasses littering the table.

"Woah, Shiro. I think you've had enough. Let's get you upstairs." Lance began to pry Shiro off of Allura when Coran slapped him on the back.

"Boys! Glad you could make it. Have you met my friends, Sven, Sven and Sven?"

"Wait, there are three Svens?"

"Of course!" Coran gestured to the three men beside him wearing matching red sweaters. They were standing very close together. It was almost as if they were all sharing the same, massive sweater, but it was dark and Lance supposed he was just imagining things. He glanced over to Keith, who looked like he was sizing the Svens up.

The Sven collective turned their attention to him, and one of them, whom Lance had decided to call Sven 1, held out a fistful of candy. The wrappers read "Swedish Fish Flavour". So that's what Shiro had been talking about, he thought, remembering Shiro's undecipherable messages form earlier. Lance politely declined the candy, whilst Sven 2's phone rang. He answered in an unintelligible tongue, that Lance doubted was Swedish. But then again, he couldn't speak Swedish, so what would he know.

"More are coming." Sven 2 stated ominously after hanging up. Lance decided he had had enough of the Svens. He was about to turn away when Sven 3 grabbed his hand and firmly placed a
screwdriver in it. It was sticky and generally very unpleasant to hold, so Lance cautiously put it down on the table and decided to locate Keith, who had been whisked off by a rather impressive Victor Nikiforov cosplayer. He found Keith at the chocolate fountain, being handed a cup filled to the brim with the rich, melted chocolate.

"Hey, that looks good! I wanna try some of that." Lance strode up to the fountain, picking up a plastic cup on the way, and began to dip the cup straight into the chocolate, scooping it up. He took a small sip to taste it.

"Woah. It's got a kick to it. Try some, Keith!"

"No thanks, I'm good." He had a skeptical eyebrow raised. It was quite jaunty.

"Why not? Don't like chocolate?"

"Chocolate is OK. I just don't want any."

"You know what? Fine. I bet you wouldn't be able to drink much of this stuff before getting sick."

"What?! I bet I could drink more than you!"

"Oh, you're on!"

-- - --

It was only after chugging many cups of the molten chocolate (and a great deal of substances else) that Lance and Keith realised that the whole chocolate fountain had been spiked with a bottle and a half of tequila. They had somehow made it back upstairs, but unfortunately half of the party goers followed them.

And that was when he saw her.

Lance sauntered up to a beautiful girl with shining golden hair and shockingly bright magenta eyes and began to work his charms.

"Hey there," He threw a finger gun in her direction, "Often here? I- I mean, do you come to this place. A lot?" His charms had a significantly lower chance of working when he was pissed off his ass.

"You mean, do I come here often?" The girl looked him up and down.

"Yeah. That. The name's Lance. Is- is your name gorgeous, 'cause...y'know...you look like you're gorgeous." He winked.

The girl giggled. "My name is Nyma, and you're not so bad on the eyes either." She winked back.

"Are- are you, like... an angel? Or something? 'Cause you look like... looks like you fell. From the sky. Ouch. Tha- that must have hurt." He tried to wiggle his eyebrows jauntily, but it honestly did not look as suave as he'd hoped. Nyma started to giggle, but stop abruptly as Keith appeared and shot her an angered scowl whilst draping his arms around Lance's shoulders.

"Lancie- what...what are you doing?"
"Oh! Keithy! This is- this...this is Nyma. Say hi."

Nyma was visibly uncomfortable. "Oh, sorry. I didn't know you two were...Oh you know what? I think I hear my brother Rolo calling me. I gotta go. Nice meeting you." And with that she dashed off.

"Wh- why do you do that?!" Keith asked incredulously, as Lance blew a kiss in Nyma's direction.

"Do what?" Lance addressed an innocent shrug to the two Keith's who insisted on wandering past his eyes every now and then. Very... Oh, what was the word?

"Irritating!" Lance blurted out, completely cutting off whatever Keith was saying.

"What?"

"Oh- no I was just... to myself. I was, I was talking." Lance explained vaguely. "What were you saying?"

Keith gave Lance a slightly bewildered scowl. "Well, it's just... Why do you only flirt with girls? You told me... You said you'd had boyfriends? Didn't you?" Keith leaned over the back of the sofa, swaying dangerously as he snatched someone else's shot glass of fake Bailey's from the coffee table.

"Well, I... I don't." He paused. "I did, I just... I did have boyfriends. It's just..."

"Just wha?" Keith slurred, sipping delicately from the shot glass. Huh. Weren't people not meant to do that?

"Safe." Lance blinked in response. "S' safe to flirt with girls." Leaning in close to Keith, he wound an arm round Keith's waist. "Don't be- like- offended! If I was gonna flirt more with guys I'd totally flirt with you. Cuz, cuz you're cute."

"Are you afraid of yourself, Lancie? Are you? You shouldn't... do that... Right? You have a great face. Look at it. It's so good, Lance. Pretty, pretty Lance. Your face. Great." He gazed at Lance with solemn eyes which couldn't quite decide where Lance's face actually was. Keith put a hand out, smushing Lance's face a bit until it found a comfortable position along his cheek, thumb just brushing the corner of his mouth. "All great."

"But no, I- I like who I am. Don't..." He had forgotten his words again. How careless. They had to be there somewhere. "I'm not afraid of who I am, Keithy, I just gotta be," he considered carefully. "Careful. I gotta be careful."

"No you don't!" Exclaimed Keith. "I'll protect you. Yeh." He said, clearly having decided that this was what he was doing now. He patted Lance's face gently, offering him the remaining half of his shot glass of knock-off Bailey's. Lance shook his head, and Keith took another tiny sip.

"I'll protect you." He slurred, a big goofy smile stamped across his face."I'll protect you. And then! You can flirt with me all you like! So much."

Lance grinned. He liked that idea. Then suddenly, all around them a chant rose up.
"Ten!" The people chanted, and Lance got up, wobbling a little, pulling Keith up with him. "Nine! Eight!"

Lance, and then Keith joined in. "Seven! Six! Five!"

Closely intertwined, they angled themselves nearer to the window, where fireworks, gigantic fuzzy things which moved too fast for Lance's befuddled eyes.

"Four! Three!" Out of the corner of his eye, Lance could see Allura and Coran cheering, Allura's arm wrapped smugly around Shiro's waist.

"Two!" The crowd chanted gleefully. "One! Zero!!!!!!"

The room erupted into celebration, as Lance looked back at Keith, whose arm ran around the small of his back, pulling him in close.

"I'm just-" Keith declared something which soon became utterly unintelligible, because in a space of no more than a few seconds, the distance between the two of them disappeared, and Lance felt Keith's hot lips pressing against his, desperate and gratuitous. Groaning slightly he met Keith's embrace with just as much intensity, grabbing him tightly around the waist, embroiling them both in a wet, sloppy kiss with entirely too much tongue that Lance might have turned his nose up at three drinks ago, but pressed with alcohol and the culmination of his recent, annoyingly persistent craving of Keith, was absolutely fucking terrific.

"Mmmh" moaned Keith, breathing deeply in through his nose, before meeting Lance's lips once again with determined vigour.

They separated for a second, as Lance pulled apart, his need for oxygen apparently as urgent as his need for Keith Kogane and his damnably sexy goddamn face. He took a second to admire his handiwork- Keith was panting, eyes wide and lips red and swollen, gazing at Lance as though he had just discovered the secrets of the universe in a cereal box.

And then Lance leaned in again, feeling utterly radiant as Keith entangled himself around him, arms clutching him ever so tightly as Lance's own hands marauded down to Keith's ass, giving it a squeeze.

Blissful.

Lance could hear someone from behind them whoop loudly. He was not bothered enough to break away from Keith to confront it however, and even if he wanted to he was far too wrapped up in limbs for it to be practical.

Right here with Keith was all his drunken mind could process, all that he could think of wanting, clutching at him dearly as though he might dissolve into a cloud of smoke. Luckily for Keith, he had no intention of going anywhere.

They shifted, hitting a wall and not even caring, sliding down it gradually for who knows how many minutes until they ended up in a tangled and very uncomfortable position at the base of the wall, and were forced to separate.

"Lance!" Keith gasped. "Lance!"

"Keith." Lance waggled his eyebrows at him seductively, or in some manner resembling what the
word seductively is meant to mean. It was probably the jauntest thing Keith had ever seen. Wobbling, they managed to get to their feet, and with Keith in the lead, departed the room, tumbling into Keith's room in an entirely undignified fashion.

-- -- --

Lance McClain passed happily into the new year as he lay curled around Keith. His strange mothly body, so delicate and perfect in his arms, asleep in all his clothes without a care in the world.

Now this, Lance thought, this had been a night to remember.

Chapter End Notes

This was such a fun chapter to write!

Translations of Shiro's texts:

Lance are you and Keith kissing?
Kissy kissy
Come meet Coran's friends they're fun
Bring Keith
I really like Swedish fish candy Sven gave me it it's so fucking good
Allura is hot so pretty
Matt is bringing some more friends
Tell Sven to bring some more friends too
And Swedish fish candy

-- --

Hi Lance :)
Do you know where Keith is?
He should try some of this Swedish fish candy

As always, hope you enjoyed, and find us at Mothdads.tumblr.com

-Mothmum
Hangover Time!

Chapter Summary

It's time to suffer!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Keith awoke, he felt strangely well rested. This was unusual for Keith. Not even because he had filled his body with cheap, shitty alcohol the night previous. After all, Keith had always found himself immune from selective effects of alcohol (Jimmy had insisted that this was part of his alien biology, which Keith maintained was entirely ridiculous).

Besides, that was hardly the first thing Keith thought when he turned to his right.

Oh. His brain thought uselessly. Help.

Lance was in bed with him.

Keith attempted to discern what level of mathematical sorcery it would take to explain this logically. Then he remembered that he had dropped out of school at fifteen years old, and if there was some complex equation which might explain this particular situation, it was certain to elude him.

Not to mention the fact that even getting there would be a trial, since Keith remembered a solid 'fuck-nothing' of what had happened the evening previous. Was there even an evening previous? What day was it? Did he still exist?

Eugh. Alcohol might not be able to give him a hangover, but it sure could make him feel sluggish.

Lance looked pallid, and sweaty. Despite this, he was still very cute looking. Perhaps even TOO cute. Not that such a thing would be possible for this perfect asshole. Honestly, Keith didn't know what could have happened last night that ended with him in bed with the fucking epitome of handsomeness Lance McClain. Honestly, it was probably some terribly anodyne reason. To think of it, he had probably just been too drunk to walk home.

Still, Keith couldn't deny that he yearned for some other explanation. That Lance thought of him as something more, that perhaps Keith had a chance at the kind of relationship he had always secretly craved, to no avail. Well, if that was true (and Keith knew in his heart that it couldn't be), Lance would be okay with what he was about to do. If not, it would be a memory to take with him to his mothly seclusion. Leaning in, very gently, he placed a light kiss on Lance's forehead, desperately relieved as Lance did not stir.

Groaning, he rolled out of bed onto the floor and stood up unsteadily, stumbling out of the room and into the bathroom. He turned on a tap, splashing cold water on his face in the hope that it might wake him up a little. Perhaps he would take a shower, clear his head a little. Keith started to undress, had just taken his shirt off when out of the corner of his vision, he saw something move.

Spinning around he dropped into a battle stance, ready for anything, be it cryptid hunter, social worker or even a drunk party-goer.
If danger was here, make no mistake, he would be ready and eager to punch it in the tit.


...Wait. There was something wrong with this picture. Something very, very wrong.

Shiro.

Bath.

Shiro in bath.

Ah. That would be it, then. Leaning over, he attempted to check his brother's pulse just in case he was secretly dead. Then Shiro made a noise like a beached whale, and Keith promptly decided that it wasn't necessary. He was probably not dead.

Instead, Keith patted him the cheek rather firmly. Blearily, Shiro's eyes opened and he stared upon the world with a distinctly unimpressed look.

"Keith..." He slurred. "Where am I... what..." He lifted an arm up, clutching Keith by the hand.

"You're in the bath, Shiro." Keith answered plainly.

"Oh." Said Shiro "I am..." He squinted up at Keith, groaning with discomfort in the light.

"Do you want to get out of the bath?"

Shiro considered. "I'm not moving." He decided. Damn.

"Keith." Shiro said, very solemnly. "If I die, I want you to take over the bookstore."

"You're not going to die of a hangover, Shiro." Keith insisted.

"Are you willing to bet on that?" Shiro raised an eyebrow, that was thoroughly unjaunty.

"Yes. You won't die of a hangover." Keith assured him, rolling his eyes.

"Keith... what I remember doing last night..." He asked slowly. "Did it actually happen? Or am I going mad?"

"Yes, and, yes." Keith confirmed. "If you remember getting blind drunk with Allura and waltzing for a prolonged amount of time, then yes."

"Wow." Shiro said quietly. "Wow."

"Hey Shiro, do you remember anything happening between me and Lance last night?" Keith asked solemnly, dreading, yet somehow excited, electricity running through his veins.

"Nothing." Shiro said decisively. "I remember nothing... you and Lance... not after Waluigi."

Perhaps it was for the best.

Then Shiro looked him over, did a double take and sat up immediately. "Keith!" He said, suddenly panicked, "What happened to your arm?"

Fuck. Fuck, fuck fuckity fuck fuck. Ass.

Well, that proverbial cat- or mothman- was really out of the bag now. Keith wasn't ready. He really wasn't ready.

He panicked.

"I'm turning into a moth!" He yelled, right at the moment that Lance came running, practically threw himself across the bathroom and proceeded to vomit violently into the toilet.

Oh boy. It was going to be one of those days.

-- - --

This was not going to be a day to remember for Keith Kogane. In fact, if he had the opportunity to erase it from his memory as well as the events of the previous night had been erased, he would be a happy man indeed.

Perhaps he would get a lobotomy, and remove this whole sordid affair from his mind permanently.

Of all the ways to spend New Years Day, scrubbing vomit out of a bath towel had not been one that Keith would have chosen, if given the choice.

"Keith, my boy!" Coran burst through the door, looking far too cheerful for his own good. "Fancy a bit of smoothie? It has garlic in!"

"No thanks, Coran." Keith insisted. "I don't have a hangover, so I don't think it'd do anything for me."

"Are ya sure? It'll work wonders for you!" Coran thrust a glass in his face in a manner which Keith found rather threatening.

"No, thanks."

The smoothie, after all had had quite a potent effect on both Lance and Shiro, which was to say, there was no alcohol left in their systems whatsoever. Neither was there anything else- Keith had never seen someone throw up quite so much in his life. Between Lance and Keith, there had been possibly Keith's own bodyweight in- well, you get the picture. After all, it could be worse; most of it had gone in the sink or the toilet. Or that was what Keith was telling himself anyway; somehow it didn't make the job any nicer.

Keith sighed, and threw the towel back into the bathtub with a dull 'plop'. He would deal with it later, whenever 'later' might be.

Drying his damp arms on his shirt, Keith wandered back into the living room, where Coran, Shiro and Lance all dwelt in various states of disarray. Coran was his usual, cheery self. Between Lance and Shiro it was hard to know who was in a worse state; both were lying on their respective sofas
and looking like they had been pulled from a watery grave some hours hence.
Shiro took the victory though, nothing could compete with the sheer quantity of alcohol he had
imbibed.

The living room itself was tidy, which was very strange, considering that it should by all means have
been a tip after what had reportedly happened on New Years.

"So... How did this place get so clean?" Keith asked slowly. Look, even the mantelpiece had been
dusted, and neither Keith nor Shiro had been bothered to do that in like, forever...

"Oh, Sven, Sven and Sven are very accommodating guests!" Coran chattered away in response.
"We had a whole tidying effort in here last night at about four am! We removed all the unwanted
house guests, piled them up outside very neatly. Slav even plumped the pillows!"

"Oh." Keith's goopy mind struggled to find a response to that. "Well, tell them thanks."

"Oh absolutely!" Coran tweaked his moustache charismatically. "I also fixed your thermostat! Not
only does it adjust your temperature to three decimal places, it also sings a little song when you
whistle! Watch this!"

Coran whistled a shrill, high note, and the thermostat on the wall buzzed into action, reciting 'Coran
Coran the gorgeous man!' from speakers which by all means shouldn't exist on a thermostat.

Behind him Shiro made a noise like a soul escaping through someone's ears. It might well have been
his soul escaping through his ears.

None of these sounds were making life any easier for him.

"Hey Lance, want me to drop you home?" He asked politely.

Lance nodded silently from his sofa.

Well, there was his ticket out of here! Keith was more than happy at this point to make an exit.

"Is your place close? Close enough to walk?"

Lance nodded again.

"Please don't leave me..." Shiro croaked desolately from the other sofa.

Coran leaned over him. "Don't you worry, Shiro! You're under my care now!"

-- -- --
Lance and Keith made a quick exit, trying their hardest to avoid Shiro's imploring gaze as Coran
continued to demonstrate their new thermostat's functionality, which apparently included lasers.
Wow.

Shutting the front door behind them, Keith and Lance shuffled out into the cold. For the first time in
the year (or since last summer which was more accurately Keith's sentiment, because anything
happening on the first of January was likely to be an annual first) it was snowing. It was light,
wonderful snow that would most likely be sludge in a few hours, but right now? Their little town
looked like a fairytale.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" He asked Lance.
Lance did not answer.

Looking to his side, Keith discovered that his companion was shivering violently, bitter with cold in only his vintage jumper and skinny jeans. Of course. Lance hadn't brought a coat.

"Well why didn't you tell me you were cold?" Keith demanded, removing his coat and putting it around Lance's shoulders. As Lance fumbled with the sleeves, he also took off his earmuffs and stuck them daintily upon Lance's head, even offering his fingerless gloves, which Lance declined.

Funnily enough, Keith felt as warm as ever, which had to be a moth thing because it certainly wasn't a Texan thing. An extra layer of fluff did seem to take the edge off the cold, which Keith was certainly not complaining about. It made sense. A mothman wearing a parka would look extremely odd.

"Thanks, Keith." Lance said quietly, still shivering a little. "Are you sure you'll be warm enough?"

Keith crossed his arms in a way which he really hoped made him look cool and nonchalant. "I'll be fine."

They trudged through the building layer of snow in silence, walking down a street that Keith didn't usually walk down, which was throwing his sense of direction way off.

"Hey, Keith?" Lance asked quietly, almost as if he didn't want Keith to hear.

"Yeah?"

"Last night..." Lance began, and then faltered. "We... we didn't do anything did we?"

"What?" Keith answered, a little louder than he had expected, making Lance wince. "Shit, sorry. No, I don't think we did..."

He hesitated. "Why?"

Lance blushed slightly. "Because I don't remember a thing. When I woke up, in your bed I kinda thought-"

"Don't worry about it." Keith patted him on the shoulder kindly, though something inside him didn't seem quite right. "We're just friends."

They came to a large, fairly old looking house which stood several storeys high. The numbers on the door said 112A, 112B, 112 C, in pretty golden lettering and underneath that 112D which was written on laminated plastic and stuck to the windowsill.

"Well, this is me." Lance said quietly, sounding like he wasn't quite there in spirit. "I'll see you, Keith."

Keith leant in for a hug, but Lance just patted him on the shoulder, before disappearing behind the black lacquered door.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed suffering!!!
The thermostat also plays dubstep opera music if you blink twice at it ;)

Find us on the tungler at mothdads.tumblr.com!
Hope u enjoyed!!!
Lance McClain had not been looking forward to going back to college this morning. Not at all, nuh uh. It wasn't that he didn't love what he was doing- no, astrophysics had always been his dream and college had not yet managed to dampen his passion for it. But, he thought, he would miss the bookshop. He was going to miss it, and most of all, he was going to miss seeing Keith every day. The others too. There was something about the Shirogane Independent that felt a bit like family, and family wasn't something he had really felt in a long time, despite the fact that up until lately it had been all he had thought about. Nowadays, with Keith and Hunk and all the other weirdos that hung around the bookstore, he had felt at home, thousands of miles away from his family as he was.

He wasn't concentrating the whole way through his lecture. As hard as he tried to think of anything at all, his mind brought him back to those two solitary subjects. Keith. Max. Strange emotions which he did not want.

He missed his little sister so, so much. For so many years she had been his life, taking care of her, looking after her in school, being her best friend. Big Brother had been a full time position for him from the day she had been born, and though he had resented the lack of attention at first, he had quickly grown to love his strange, different sibling, his Max. Two sides of the same coin. Watching, the proud brother as she was moved up into his class, still proud as she quickly surpassed his ability in every subject, taking her along whenever he went out with his friends.

He would have given anything to get her back.

Now, there was something else in his life too, and that was thoroughly unexpected. Keith had never quite been what he had expected, no matter how his expectation had changed, he had always managed to be more somehow, so strange, so unpredictable, so... so Keith.

Lance's feelings on the subject were his own fault entirely. He knew he got attached to people way too easily, and that was fine, so long as he kept any romantic interest to cheesy flirtations with women he wouldn't remember the next day, and who with any luck wouldn't remember him either.

He could not afford to get involved with anyone. He was at college to learn, and he was damned if he didn't have a whole lot riding on this. Without Max here, he would be the first in his family to go to University and he wasn't going to fuck his chances up, not for anything.
'And yet,' an insidious voice in his mind whispered to him, 'you still want him.'

Which was true. Sadly, pitifully true. Lance knew he shouldn't, but he didn't have a hope in hell of denying it to himself, not anymore. After new year’s, he had really, actually hoped that something had happened, like waking up in a friend's bed meant something other than courtesy, and not that Keith hadn't wanted to make him sleep on the sofa.

'Then again,' the insidious voice reminded him, 'Keith will be leaving soon.' It wouldn't be far off now, it was now or never, and in the words of Tennyson "Tis better to have loved and lost: Than never to have loved at all"

But could Lance bear losing someone else? The question hung over him like a rain cloud even as he walked home, bag in hand.

"What's wrong bud? Mothman got your tongue?" Hunk jabbed him in the ribs with an elbow, and Lance remembered all of a sudden how much he had missed his best friend.

Lance jabbed him back, knocking him sideways towards the road, to which Hunk responded in kind, almost sending him flying into somebody's flowerbed. He caught his balance at the last second, avoiding the Petunias by a hair's breadth. Served Lance right for forgetting how totally jacked Hunk was. It was an easy mistake to make, though not one anyone made twice. Except Lance apparently, who was so used to seeing Hunk on a daily basis that he found it perfectly easy to forget that his friend could probably bench press twice his weight if he really wanted to.

"Really man, you've been all weird since I got back! You're too quiet, dude. It makes me nervous."

"That has to be the first time anyone's asked me to talk more." Lance grinned back at him, but deep down, he knew Hunk was right. This past week he had been distracted, and quiet. He knew this. He felt guilty.

"Did something happen whilst I was away?" Hunk placed a reassuring hand on Lance's shoulder.

"Well...maybe?"

"Did...did something happen between you and Keith?"

Lance's cheeks turned a bright shade of pink.

"Oh, so something *did* happen!" Hunk grinned slyly, "Tell me EVERYTHING."

"Alright, alright," Lance groaned, fishing his keys out of his pocket as they approached their apartment, "Don't worry, you'll get all the deets. Just give me, like, an hour to wallow in self-pity a bit more."

"No no no, you've been wallowing all day. Time to spill the beans, dude."

"But Huuuuuunk!" Lance pushed the door open and immediately sauntered up to the couch, falling back on it dramatically and throwing an arm over his eyes. Hunk just rolled his eyes at his best friend’s antics.

"Tell you what, I'll make us some hot chocolate and we can watch Say Yes to the Dress whilst you tell me what happened. That sound fair?"
"Hmm," He considered the proposal, and decided that Hunk's hot chocolate was one offer he couldn't turn down. "Yeah, OK."

He sighed, thinking about everything that had passed between him and Keith since Hunk had left. Before things had gotten...complicated.

Yeah. He should probably prepare himself for the inevitable "I told you so" coming his way, he thought.

-- - --

"OK, so remember how I said I don't have a crush on Keith?"

Two hot chocolates later Lance and Hunk were curled up on the couch, binging Say Yes to the Dress, as Hunk had promised.

"Yeah?"

"I have a crush on Keith."

"I know. I'm proud of you for finally admitting it though. Acceptance is the first stage of learning to cope with our crush."

"Ughhh." Lance threw his face in his hands.

"But I don't think you realising your crush is the only thing that happened over the holidays. Am I right?" Hunk raised an eyebrow jauntily. Lance's lack of response prompted him to poke him playfully in the side.

"C'mon, you promised the deets!" Hunk gave him a Look™ that was a cross between a reprimanding glare and puppy dog eyes; something that only he could pull off.

Lance groaned again, but eventually relented. He never could resist that Look™.

"OK, OK. So the day after you left we decided to decorate the bookstore to increase everyone's Christmas spirit, right? And Matt found a way to hook up my phone to some speakers to play my Christmas playlist. So I started dancing with Pidge, and then I danced with Keith..."

"Go on..."

"And then he fell over a box of decorations and I caught him but I kinda dipped him in the process?"

"Oh my God! That is adorable."

"That's not even the half of it..."

"Oh my God, Lance."

"So later on after the store closed we were still putting up decorations, and Pidge, Matt and Shiro were outside and they had the ladder to put up some more lights so I had to use this old stool to put up the mistletoe."

"Uh huh..."

"I mean, the stool looked pretty safe at the time but obviously Keith didn't think so, and he was all like 'You're gonna fall' and I was like 'nuh uh, it's sturdier than it looks'. But I guess Keith was right-"
don't tell him I said that though- and I ended up falling and he caught me-

"Like how you caught him?"

"Eh, not exactly...it was kinda- kinda more like, uh...a bridal carry?"

"Oh my God!"

"...And then Pidge decided to walk in and point out we were right under the mistletoe-"

"OH MY GOD!"

Lance blushed. "Soo... yeah..."

"Wow. Said Hunk, who looked faintly embarrassed himself. "That's... that's pretty gay, dude."

"Oh, you think? That's not even the worst bit!"

Hunk gazed at him, shocked. "You serious?" He took a sip of his hot chocolate and stared at Lance expectantly.

"Yeah! I have this weird ass goddamn memory of us, like totally making out, but I don't know of it really happened or I just had some nasty-ass dream when we were in bed together, no less! And, that means either he's regretting it and he's in denial, or he just let me sleep over and I had weird dreams about him, which may even be worse!" Lance yelled, suddenly realising how loudly he had been shouting.

Hunk paused for a second. He sighed. "Sounds like you need a hug pretty bad, dude."

Lance shrugged. "It's no big deal."

"It sounds like it's a big deal to you, though. C'mon, I know you, my sad Lance senses are tingling! You sure you don't want a hug?"

Lance's bottom lip may have trembled, just a little bit. Of course, Lance McClain didn't do things like that, he wasn't the type to go all soggy over one unfortunate crush.

"Fine." He shrugged, acting like he didn't care much either way as Hunk pulled him into a big, warm hug.

Oh boy. That felt really, really nice. He had missed having Hunk around so much, it was like he had been missing a part of his soul. It wasn't like he was lonely, of course. Lance McClain was rarely alone and never lonely. He was a team player, a sociable guy, it was in his nature, just like caring too much was in Hunk's. But theoretically, if he had been lonely, a hug would be making him feel way, way better.

"Hey man, you wanna get pizza?" Hunk said kindly.

Lance smiled. How could he say no to an offer like that?

-- --

"Long time no see, Lancelot!" Called Matt as he walked into the bookstore on wednesday morning.

"What?"
"Oh, y'know!" Matt was stood by a shelf with a stack of animorph books beside him, patiently slotting each book neatly into the highest shelf. "It's your full name, right?"

"No!" Lance stared at him. "My name is literally just Lance!"

"Told you y'aint right about that." Said Keith, setting himself down behind the desk. He looked at Lance and blushed uncharacteristically.

"Hey." Lance smiled at him. "I haven't seen you in a while."

Keith nodded. "How's college?"

"Honestly? I need another break from it already." Lance laughed. It was not that funny. This astrophysics major was probably going to be responsible for his death at some point or another. Humour was merely a way of ignoring the pain at this point.

Keith nodded. "I know the feeling. When I was at the Garrison it was just relentless, all that studying and lessons and remedial stuff to make up for stuff I hadn't done. I don't miss it at all."

"Good to know you're not too sad about leaving." Lance grinned at him.

Keith laughed, which was possibly the most incredibly pure thing Lance had ever seen in his entire life. His sweet smile- the way his eyes crinkled slightly at the edges- it was absolutely more than his poor bisexual heart could bear.

"I miss cryptid hunting over the holidays more than anything else about the garrison." He agreed.

"Well, you don't need to go far to hunt cryptids now!" Matt added. "All you gotta do is like, look in the mirror and- boom!"

Lance chuckled at that, though Keith looked less than amused. Suddenly, he looked anxious, furtive perhaps, as if deeply bothered by something.

"Hey uh, Lance. Can I talk to you for a minute?" He asked, glancing around them as if there could be a number of mysterious individuals around the corner listening intently to their (vitally important) conversation.

"Go ahead. Talk as much as you like." Lance grinned at him.

Keith grabbed him by the wrist. "Not here."

Ah, this would be one of those conversations that needed to be had from the secrecy of the break room, eh? Well, that was ok. Lance was just fine with it. After all, it meant spending time with Keith and honestly, you could pull Lance's 'Keith time' out of his cold, dead hands.

Keith sat him down at the table in the break room, nestled between two precarious stacks of books, both of which seemed entirely comprised of paperback literature. Smutty paperback literature.

Oh look. There were even doughnuts.

Taking a bite out of what was almost certainly Matt's doughnut he looked at Keith expectantly, wondering what he was going to say next.

Keith, defying all expectations upon him about social impropriety and what was or was not correct manners within a bookshop, took his shirt off.

"Lance." Keith looked at him with imploring eyes. "Look at me."

Lance really didn’t need to be told twice.

There was a sparkly pink emergency button in his brain which was emblazoned with the word ‘GAY’ and boy, it would be physically impossible to press any button quicker than he had pressed that one. In his mind. He wasn’t good at metaphors when he was busy ogling mothmen: it required simply too much brain power. Keith’s chest was paler than his face, a residual tan line the artefact of warmer times, and wow, Lance found it astonishingly cute how original and lived-in Keith’s body looked, from the light smattering of freckles to the splodgy birthmark that coloured his stomach just above the waistline of his pants.

And of course, there was the mat of purple fur that seemed to be eating the side of his body like a ravenous maroon tribble.

"The transformation- or infection, whatever- it's getting faster." Keith said, voice ragged.

"Yes." Lance agreed. He didn't really know what to say.

"I have two things that I want to ask of you, Lance. Please hear me out."

Lance nodded, well aware that he could not object even if he tried.

"First thing is," Keith gave him a grim look. "If this transformation doesn't end up being what I think it is, I want you to take everything, all the evidence and monitored stuff I've collected about what's happening to me to someone who can help- a doctor, or a scientist or whatever. In which case we shall call this- thing- Keith syndrome. After meeee. Keeeeth."

Lance nodded, trying oh so very hard not to laugh. Keith was taking this whole matter very seriously after all. He couldn't help that he made everything sound quite humorous.

"And. Secondly," Keith looked him in the eye, deadly serious. "I may not have much time left to do this. So, Lance, can we... Can we go out? For lunch?"

"What?" The world spun before Lance's eyes. Was that an invitation for a date? Sirens went off in Lance's mind. "Uh-"

"What?" The world spun before Lance's eyes. Was that an invitation for a date? Sirens went off in Lance's mind. "Uh-"

"I just thought- we could go out to get lunch together like we used to?" Amended a rather conflicted looking Keith.

Of course. He only meant as friends. Lance exhaled deeply. Wow, that had really caught him off-guard.

"Sure, Keith. Sure." Lance watched the expression of worry fall away from Keith's face to be replaced by an uncharacteristic grin. He pulled Lance into a warm embrace, which happened to be quite uncomfortable for Lance as Keith was still very shirtless. Not in a bad way though, not in a bad way...

Then the door flung open and Shiro appeared in the threshold, regarding them both with an intense interest.

"You're needed out front, Keith." Shiro grinned at them. Keith scowled at him in response.

"Come on, soldier, no excuses!" Shiro smirked at the both of them. "Hey there Lance, good to see you again. Don't distract Keith from his job too much, will you?"
He left. Probably a good thing because Keith's glare might have caused him to spontaneously combust if he had stayed there any longer. As it was, Keith sighed loudly and started buttoning up his shirt.

"You'll be okay stamping and distributing the shitty romance novels on your own?" Keith asked once he finally looked presentable enough to man the front desk.

“Oh, absolutely.” Lance winked at him. “Shitty romance is my speciality, don’t you know?” Grinning at Keith he picked one of the books and started reading from a random page.

“Her embrace made his manhood swell like week-old road kill on hot asphalt in the Georgia sun.” He paused. “Wow. That’s really dreadful.”

“Sounds very high-brow.” Keith waggled an eyebrow at him. "I guess I'll leave you to it then." Smiling, Keith leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

Then, he disappeared out through the door before Lance could so much as comprehend what had happened.

Calm down, he told himself, as he began to ritually stamp the inside covers of the books, sitting down at the table in a stunned silence. Wow. Keith was so... so... surprisingly affectionate.

It was almost like he liked him for real.

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That lunchtime, he and Keith snuck out to visit one of the other little cafes in the area, which did very nice pizza, and much to his own chagrin, Lance managed to drop a jalapeno down his shirt, and was very glad that none of their other friends were there to laugh at him.

It was a surprisingly chilled friend-date, actually. They sat, and ate, and chatted like the past weeks since New Years hadn't happened, and if Lance found anything a little odd about their little non-date lunch date, like Keith's quiet insistence upon holding his hand the whole way there and back, then he didn't say anything. He was content to let it be.

Chapter End Notes

Lance is so clueless hahahahaha
Once again, sorry about the delay. Hope you're all still enjoying!
We, the mothparents continue to be at mothdads.tumblr.com
A Jaunty Escapade through Uncharted Territory.

Chapter Summary

Keith and Shiro argue, and Keith goes on an impromptu date.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for uploading this a day later than I said I would- I had a bit of a crazy day yesterday, so I hope you'll forgive me

-Mothdad

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith was having a long, hard look in the mirror. It had reached the point where this was necessary, much to his own chagrin. Every day, he looked a little bit different, and of course these changes required documentation.

It was very strange, even for a profound believer in the supernatural, to see his body overrun by this oddity. Looking in the mirror, he could barely recognise himself. Purple fur spread like a plague across his body, leaving only his head and various other extremities covered. It had totally enveloped his chest now.

He didn't have much time left, he thought as he gazed, unseeing at the same spot on the wall as he stood in the shower, water running in rivulets along his strange, purple body.

He didn't have much time left.

In as little as a month, he would be gone. Out in the lonely forests of West Virginia with only the local wildlife for company. It would be a lonely existence, so could anyone blame him for taking the opportunity to do as much as he could with his life as long as it was truly his, and not dedicated to the legend of the Mothman? Could anyone blame him for taking his final few weeks to date the cutest boy he'd ever been in a three mile radius of? Surely not. While he was here, he intended to fulfill every possible desire of his, purely because very soon, he would not be able to.

And how wonderful it felt! That first date with Lance had been everything he could have wanted, everything he could have hoped for. Just sitting together in that little Italian cafe, watching Lance get pizza toppings all over his shirt had seemed so personal, so wondrously unique. Three days later and Keith could still think of nothing else but Lance's smiling face, rimmed slightly at the mouth by tomato sauce (the pizza incident had been quite devastating in its effects) and looking at Keith as if he were the only other human (or mothman) alive.

"Keith!" Called a voice from outside. "Are you okay in there? You've been in the bathroom for an hour now, and I don't hear running water."

"I'm fine." Keith called back, pulling on a pair of pants and opening the door.

Shiro stood outside, looking fairly dishevelled and very sweaty. He was still in his running gear, and
Keith felt slightly guilty for hogging the bathroom for so long.

"Well." He said shortly. "You really weren't kidding about the whole 'turning into a giant moth' thing."

"Mothman, Shiro." He corrected.

"Fine, Mothman, whatever you say, Keith."

His tone annoyed Keith somewhat. How could Shiro doubt what Keith had told him? He scowled. "Would it hurt you to take what I think about this seriously?"

Shiro frowned at him. "I'm trying Keith, but my suspension of disbelief is suffering just slightly, considering that you expect me to just take the fact that you're turning into a cryptid at face value! Please, Keith, try to see this from my perspective- what the hell am I gonna tell mom and dad?"

Keith saw red. "Don't act like this is your problem, Shiro!" He yelled, taking Shiro by surprise. "Don't act like I wanted this, like this is something I'm happy about, because it's not, and telling you about it has been so damn hard! And yeah, maybe it wasn't at first, maybe I was excited about it but now I have to deal with all the difficult fucking parts! And I hate it! And I hate everyone for making me feel so fucking happy here, because now- now I have to leave!"

They stood in stunned silence, viewing each other through the crackling force field of emotion that had built itself between them.

"You know, Keith," Shiro said gently, "you don't have to leave. We will always want you here."

"You don't know that." Keith glared harshly. "Look at me! Look! I don't know who I am anymore, Shiro! I don't look like me, I don't feel like me! I don't even know if I'll still think like me! In a month I won't be the same person- I won't be like your brother anymore, Shiro."

A droplet of water hit his hand. He regarded it to realise with horror that it was a tear. His own tear.

"Keith." Shiro said, and he scarcely looked in a better state than Keith felt. "Keith, no matter what happens to you, you'll always be my brother. Please don't forget that."

"I..."

"Please, Keith. I don't give a damn about what you look like. Nothing on earth could stop me being your brother. You know that, don't you?"

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Keith needed a moment to clear his head. A lot of moments, if that were possible. He was out on his bike, the chilled wind blowing through his mullet. He needed to calm down, to breathe, and there was nothing like the open road to do that. But, he was not on the open road yet. He was just driving around the local streets, trying desperately to avoid any that might lead him back in sight of the bookstore. He wasn't ready to deal with that yet. He wasn't ready to talk to his parents, he wasn't ready to see Shiro again, and he certainly wasn't ready to see a doctor, like his older brother wished. Which led him to his ultimate coping mechanism- ignoring everything and running away to lick his wounds in peace. Don't question it- the system worked. Kinda.

He was just driving along, when who should he see wandering along the street with a Latte and a scowl, wearing a beanie with- is that- a Dragon Age motif on?
"Lance!" He pulled up to the curb, grateful for the empty roads around their area. Lance looked up from his phone with surprise.

"Oh, hey Keith. You not working today?"

Keith shook his head. "No. I- needed a break."

Lance smiled wryly. "Same here. I'm up to my tits in coursework, man."

Keith's mind struggled with what to say. Luckily, Lance filled in the silence.

"So, I see you're on a date with Ariadne? Just you, a scowl and the open road?" Lance raised an eyebrow.

"I- uh... exactly." Keith stared at Lance. Jeez, this boy really completed him. "That's the plan."

Lance wore a sheepish sort of grin. "Hey, would you mind... would you take me with you?"

Keith's mind blanched. "I thought you had loads of work to do?"

Lance grinned. "Course I do. Does it matter?"

Keith looked at Lance. And looked, and looked. Perhaps it was a more responsible thing for him to do to tell Lance no. But, had he ever been a responsible adult?

Hahahahaha.

No.

Keith blushed, watching Lance regard him with those gorgeous eyes. He was so weak, dammit.

"Sure. You can come along." He smiled wanly, as Lance clambered onto the hoverbike behind him.

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It was a fairly nice day for mid-February. Clear skies, dry roads- if a bit windy. But, there was no flaw to a day that couldn't be solved with Lance's arms wrapped tightly around his waist.

Incredible.

Despite all the anxiety of the morning, he felt warm in his heart, like all he needed was Lance, and everything else just seemed to melt away. He didn't need to say anything- just his presence made Keith feel better. He didn't care where in the universe he was. If Lance was there, he was sure he'd be just fine.

The empty roads roared past, accentuated by the gentle hum of the bike. They were out in the countryside now. There was a village nearby, if his sense of direction was steering him right.

Perhaps it was. A fork in the road approached, with a rock salt bin and a small cottage in the middle of it, built on a steep inclination of land. Keith took the left path. As he drove, the hilly verge increased, perpetuated with a line of trees and a short, very steep field containing a few drowsy-looking sheep. To the left, the hill led down, and Keith could see the ground below. The road had little driveways connecting, leading to more cosy cottages and farmhouses, one by one by one. A particularly long driveway came up to meet them, with a sign attached. 'Coach House Nature Reserve & Tearoom', the sign read. How very intriguing.
Keith slowed. He had not planned for such a destination. And yet it looked... nice. He braked on the hoverbike, coming to a halt just along from the driveway.

"What's happening, Keith?"

"Do you wanna check this place out?" Keith asked, summoning his courage.

Lance cocked his head to the side, considering. "Yeah. Why not."

Keith nodded. "Change of plan, then. Let's check out the nature reserve."

He started the hoverbike, and drove it round back through the gate, which had a sign on it saying "Beware Of The ."

Keith would be sure to beware of ' ', whatever ' ' was.

They parked in an empty, gravelled car park. The Tearoom was just down the way. It looked very pleasant indeed, though somewhat out of place. It looked old, yet also charming. A little cobbled path led down to the front door, with an old brass knocker on the front in the shape of a woman's face. It had large windows, a dormer roof and a balconied roof-terrace upstairs. There were candles in the windows, and the house was surrounded by flowers on every side.

By all means, it looked like something out of a storybook.

"Huh." Said Lance insightfully from beside him.

Keith smiled, and reached for his hand. "Fancyin' the Tearoom or the Nature Reserve first?"

Lance paused, considering. "Nature reserve, I think. I've already had a green tea latte this morning."

"Well okay then." Keith smiled.

Together they walked down the path leading to the nature reserve, tranquil and fringed with trees, out into a small clearing. Tall grasses that had survived the winter stood up to their knees. There was a gigantic tree, next to a diminutive woodshed which stood impossibly tall, proud against the dim backdrop despite its lack of foliage. One gigantic branch stuck out above them, an old wooden swing hanging off it.

"You know, this place reminds me of the village in Twilight Princess." Lance said, staring up at the tree.

"Really?" Keith said. He didn't know who, or what Twilight Princess was, if he was completely honest and was a little confused with what a village would be doing inside it.

"Yeah. Y'know, Ordon village? All peaceful and friendly, with the really big trees? It's the starter area?" He stared at Keith, noting his confusion for the first time. "Have you ever played Twilight Princess?"

Keith shook his head mutely.

"Aww man, really? It's like, my favourite game from when I was a kid!" His face broke into a smile. "My uncle gave me and Max his old gamecube for Christmas when we were small, with like, three games on it and we used to play it religiously. Zelda Twilight Princess, Resident Evil Four and Starfox Adventures. I always loved Twilight Princess the most, but Max didn't like it. We got to the bit where you go back to your village as a wolf and none of your friends recognise you and Max
found it like, way too sad. So, she always played Resi instead. Dunno how she managed it, she was only like, seven and it scared the pants off me."

"Oh, Shiro has a copy of that. I've played some of it. How'd a seven year old manage to play that without getting nightmares?"

"Dude I don't even know! I couldn't play it through until I was thirteen and it still kinda terrified me then. I remember, I had the weirdest crush on Luis Sera. She always used to tease me about it."

Keith watched as Lance's face fell. It wrenched his heart to see him like this, honestly. Something had happened, he could tell, but he absolutely wouldn't dare to ask. Telling him was Lance's choice alone.

"Keith." He said quietly. "I miss her."

Keith put an arm around his shoulder. "I know."

They walked on in silence, or relative silence if the local wildlife had anything to do with it, but it was a peaceful sort of noise, and it felt welcome enough.

How had Keith never known that this place existed? It seemed such a pity that he had spent five whole years in the area without being aware of such a thing. Did Shiro and his parents know? Perhaps the fact that they had never taken him here was proof enough. As such, Keith prided himself on having discovered the location himself. It was a lovely place for a date, after all.

"Hey, isn't this place kinda weird for a nature reserve?" Lance said, bending down to look at one of the flowers. "Aren't Cyclamens only native to Europe?"

Keith shrugged. "Maybe they were introduced and have become part of the eco-system?"

"Yeah, but look! They have Fuchsias as well! And Honeysuckles, and Delphiniums! They're all plants native to Britain, aren't they?"

Keith did not know. "I... uh? You'd know better than I do, I guess."

"I could be wrong, I guess."

"Well maybe it's meant to be a kinda replica village or something."

Lance considered. "Like a folly?"

"A what?"

"Y'know, a folly! They're buildings constructed primarily for decoration, they were very popular for rich nobles in the 1800s to build. Come to think about it, all the houses we've seen have looked a little... un-american, don'tcha think?"

Keith considered. "I... I guess?"

"Yeah, the architectural style is of distinctly European origin, I'm sure. French?" He frowned "No. Scottish? Maybe?"

Wow, thought Keith. Lance really is smart.

"You know a lot about architecture. And plants and stuff."
Lance shrugged. "You think? It's all circumstantial knowledge really."

"Still." Keith smiled. "You're pretty damn smart."

Lance blushed. He gave Keith a really goofy smile. "Thanks, Keith!"

Keith smiled back. Together they wandered on through the nature reserve, around the edge of a small lake.

"Fancy a swim?" Lance elbowed him, as they walked along the reedy banks.

"What, in February?" Keith chuckled. "I'll pass."

Lance laughed. "Okay, Texas Kogane. You'd make a terrible surfer."

"I'm sure I'd be great as long as it wasn't like, ridiculously cold." Keith huffed.

Lance waggled his eyebrows at him in an insufferably jaunty fashion. Not that it actually annoyed him, but Lance couldn't know that. "Oh, and I suppose you're a master surfer then, are you?"

"You kidding? They call me the tailor, because of how I thread the needle!" Lance exclaimed.

Keith looked at him doubtfully.

"C'mon man!" Lance insisted. "I'm majestic, like a dolphin! Don't tell me you don't believe me!"

"I'll believe that when I see it." Keith laughed.

Seeing the look of disappointment on Lance's face his laughter quickly stopped. Shit.


Appeased, Lance stared off into the distance. "Just think of it- I wouldn't have to wear pants..."

"That's the first thing you think in the scenario that you turn into a dolphin animorph? Weird."

Lance shrugged. "Hey, why not? What was your first thought when you realised you were mothman?"

Keith considered. "I think it was whether or not I should start learning to sleep upside-down."

"Isn't that for bats though?"

Keith scowled. "I was turning into mothman, Lance, I wasn't very coherent."

"But aren't you still turning into mothman?"

"Well obviously, but it's not the same." Keith looked down at his feet. The grass was thick, soggy beneath his feet, as if it had rained recently, though Keith couldn't remember it having rained for a few days now.

"Huh." They walked off, through a vast thicket of bare shrubbery, with brambles that stood as taller than they did. This piece of land was in a hilly inclination, and if one looked at the right angle, one could see all the way down the valley, as far as the two houses that sat atop the opposing hill. A train line perfectly bisected the view, dividing the land below and above. There was a scattering of
houses, some whitewashed, and others in more natural, stony colours. The scene was idyllic, though perhaps a little alien? In a way that Keith did not quite understand the quiet tranquillity of this rural scene unnerved him a little.

"Hey, look Keith! Check that out!" Lance pointed over to their right. From amongst the treetops rose the silhouette of a distant mansion.

"Late 1800s, do you think? That's almost certainly English architecture as well, don't you think?"

Keith grunted in response, as he certainly didn't know anything about architecture except the definition- or a vague approximation of the definition, more like it. But, that raised an interesting question too. Lance seemed to know all about that stuff, so had he actually been there? Everywhere he'd talked about?

"You've been to England, then?"

Lance nodded. "A few times. Usually we go to visit Magdalena in London, but she likes to take us to different parts of the country to change things up a little. Always weird historical places, like Tintern Abbey or Verulamium or Sutton Hoo."

Keith frowned. "Sutton what?"

"Hoo. It's an Anglo Saxon burial site from waaaay back. I think a Hoo is what they call these big mounds of dirt? They're like tiny hills? I dunno man, I haven't been there since I was like seven. It has a kick-ass playground outside it though." Lance waved a hand as if that explained everything.

"And who's Magdalena?" Keith asked tentatively.

"Oh, she's my granny on my dad's side. Crazy old woman by all accounts. Would never let us call her granny because it made her sound old." Lance grinned. "Always demands that we visit her so we end up in England maybe even as much as we end up in Cuba, even though she's the only person there." He paused. "In our family that is, not just in the country. That'd be weird."

Keith was, dare he admit it, a little jealous. Lance talked about jetting across the globe as if it were nothing! "You travel a lot then, I guess?"

Lance shrugged. "You could say that. It's usually just to visit family but I've got kinda a shitton of family so it really adds up. My mum was one of nine, you know, so I have relatives in every continent except maybe Antarctica, though that could change! My second cousin Nina is a pilot for Cathay Pacific so if I can just persuade her to take her next long distance flight for a little detour I would have a relative in Antarctica for a little while!" Lance's face took on a look of childish excitement.

Keith tried his best not to laugh. "Lance, I think that's illegal. And dangerous. Really illegal and dangerous."

Lance pouted. "Fine, spoilsport. Why don't you ever tell me about your weird moth family? What are your mothparents like?"

"Lance, I'm an orphan."

Lance panicked. "Oh, oh my god Keith, I'm so sorry."

Keith smirked. "Lance, its fine, don't worry."
"Are you sure? I don't wanna-"

"Lance, it's fine." Keith reassured him. "Believe it or not, I'm used to it. You can't miss what you never had, after all."

"Hey, but you have like, normal parents right? How are they?"

Keith ignored him. "Do you think we're allowed to climb the trees here?"

Lance looked confused. "I mean, I guess. But wh-"

Keith pointed to a particularly large tree across the way from them. "How about that one? I'll race you to the top."

Before Lance could say anything, Keith rushed off in the direction of the tree, relieved to hear the rhythmic thud of Lance's feet hitting the ground as he hurtled along behind him. He had the advantage of time, sure, but Lance had longer legs and arms- he was catching up.

Keith reached the tree first. With no time to spare he jumped for the lowest, most promising looking branch, using it to haul himself up, hooking his legs around it and then pulling himself upright. No time to lose, he grabbed at the next branch, and then the next, climbing up at a fair pace through the tree. A quick glance revealed that Lance was hot on his heels, climbing from branch to branch with absolute ease, and looking great while he did it. And intermittently getting hit in the face by a particularly daring branch or two. Perhaps looking slightly less graceful with a twig in his mouth. Maybe.

With a yelp, Keith himself received a faceful of tree branch and realised with a start that he was falling behind. Lance McLegs was about a head higher than him within the tree. Desperately, Keith attempted to catch up with him yet to no avail. The more he climbed, the more of a lead Lance gained on him.

Finally, Lance came to a halt, his foot wedged firmly between the last decently sized branch of the tree and the trunk. He could go no further, and neither could Keith.

"I win, Keithy boy." He grinned charmingly (did he say charmingly? He meant annoyingly). "What do I win?"

"Um..."

"Does this mean you'll stop avoiding my questions about your family and stuff?" Lance winked at him.

Keith groaned. "Definitely not."

"Well, what then?" Lance pouted at him playfully.

"You get a free lunch. No more, no less. At the tea place maybe?"

Lance beamed like the broke college student he truly was. "It's a deal. Want to head up there now?"

Keith nodded. "Why not. I was beginning to get hungry anyway."

Lance nodded, and a devilish look crept into his eye. "I'll race you there. If I win you have to buy me one of the desserts too!"

"And what if I win?" Challenged Keith.
"You won't!" Lance exclaimed, and the race began.

-- - --

Keith, as it turned out, would be paying for a lot today. Not only had Lance beaten him hands down on their way back to the entrance (curse his unnecessarily long legs) but he had saved Keith from a potentially humiliating dunking in what he assumed to be 100% organic mud. Worst of it all, while Keith looked quite considerably worse for wear, Lance appeared, apart from a light speckling of mud on his left cheek, to be spotless. How annoying.

Keith was trying his very hardest not to trample mud into the teahouse. Fortunately there were no less than two different doormats for one to wipe their feet on, and they proceeded into a hallway. A woman hurried to greet them.

"Table for two?" She asked.

Keith nodded.

"Upstairs or downstairs?"

Lance shrugged. "Uh, upstairs maybe?" He glanced at Keith. Keith said nothing. "Yeah, upstairs sound good."

The woman smiled. She seemed like a kindly sort of person. Definitely the type you might expect to be working in a quaint little place like this. "Of course." She said smoothly. "Follow me."

They followed her past the downstairs tables, which stood mainly empty with the exception of one table in the distant corner where an extremely thin man with very oddly shaped ears regarded his scone with all the poise of a feral cat. They took the stairs up, which overhung a cosy little nook with a roaring fireplace in the corner and several little sofas, and headed upstairs. It turned out upstairs was where most of the guests were sitting. There was a couple at the nearest table, three people sharing a booth in the corner, and a large group of people sat round a table just visible on the balcony outside. Their conversation was raucous, though Keith could not make it out for the life of him. They seemed to be talking in a language totally alien to his own.

The woman indicated a booth near to the window and they took it. There were several menus on the table. They were surprising thick, and when Keith picked one up he discovered that this was because it was filled with dozens of variations on the same menu, each in a different language (only two of which he recognised).

Lance too was staring at the menu with a degree of incredulity. "Quonvar soup? What the heck is that supposed to be?"

Well, that was a question, and not one he knew the answer to either.

"I assume it's a soup." He offered.

Lance rolled his eyes. "Thanks Keith. Helpful."

"Well I don't know! I'm just making a suggestion!" Keith glared reproachfully.

"Now now!" Came a voice from outside their booth. "No need to argue, this here is a peaceful establishment, yes."
Keith looked to his right to discover a rather colourfully dressed man of about seventy. He had a rather lurid yellow shirt on, with tartan suspenders and three eyes. Three eyes? No, surely not. That must've been a figment of his imagination.

His teeth looked unusually sharp.

"Mr Yuan Kroznar, at your service. Me and my wife run this fine establishment."

"Oh, nice to meet you, I'm Lance." Lance grinned at him. "And this is my friend Keith."

Keith nodded curtly at the man.

"Well, it is nice to meet you both." Mr Kroznar beamed at them, revealing yet another row of sharp white teeth behind the first. He had obviously had some very poor dental work in his youth. "I must say, I am very pleased to see such a nice young couple stopping by for lunch. We do have a tendency to attract more... antiquated visitors." He glanced out of the window at the group outside and gave a sort of snorted, wheezing chuckle that sounded more like steam being emitted from a kettle than human laughter.

Lance laughed too, all too obviously socially adept, while Keith sat awkward and silent in the corner.

"So... Keeeith," He enunciated heavily, as if the name was treacle on his tongue. "That's an odd name for a Galra. Where you from, Lad? One of the Marmora lot? Or maybe not? Planet Doom? The Ophelia Cluster? The vast galaxy of Zondim?"

"Texas." Keith said a little feebly.

Mr Kroznar's dark, piercing eyes regarded him with an increased interest. "Never heard of it." He proclaimed. "Now, Keef, I won't beat about the grondix bush. We're a peaceful lot here, and we don't want any trouble. Galra are welcome here, empire, marmora or whatever else, we don't need to know. But," He pointed a finger severely in Keith's direction. "For everyone's sake, keep yourself to yourself and don't cause trouble. We won't be having any violence here, okay?"

Keith felt confused. Very confused indeed, nothing the man had said had made any tangible sense whatsoever- it put him in mind of Jimmy, almost...

And then the penny dropped.

Keith leaned back casually. He laughed. "Absolutely, Mr Kroznar, sure. You'll have no trouble from me."

He nodded, apparently satisfied.

The woman from earlier appeared behind him. "Yuan." She reproached sternly. "You're not scaring our guests again, are you?"

Mr Kroznar huffed loudly. "As if I would ever."

The woman, who Keith assumed to be Mrs Kroznar smiled at the two of them. "Don't mind my husband. He's not from around here."

"No indeed!" Mr Kroznar spouted with a distinct sense of pride. "I moved here about thirty years ago, all the way from Xanxor."

Lance frowned "Aaaaand, where's that?"
Mr Kroznar puffed his chest out. "Far, far away in the-
"Mid-Wales." Mrs Kroznar interrupted. "We're both from Wales."
"Then this whole place really is modelled after Britain?" Lance looked smugly at Keith.
"Oh, absolutely." Mrs Kroznar nodded. "Glad you noticed. We have a-
"Reconstructed sub-dimension of a certain location that reveals itself only to those of alie-
"A little piece of home right here with us in America." Mrs Kroznar interrupted her husband loudly. "Now is really not the time, Yuan. Why don't you go check on our bingo players? I'm sure they're up to something- they always are."

Mr Kroznar harrumphed loudly but obliged her regardless, plodding sulkily out of the French doors to the roof terrace. He could be heard loudly disagreeing with someone outside almost immediately.

"Well now, I'm sorry for all that." She apologised sweetly. "Would you two be ready to order?"

Oh fuck. Yeah. They were meant to be ordering food.
Keith desperately scoured the menu for anything which even looked vaguely familiar to him.

"I'll have the Quonvar soup then, I think." Lance decided boldly. "And, uh, a glass of lemonade with that? If you have it?"

She nodded. "And for you, my dear?"

Keith bit the bullet. "Um, I'll just have a cream tea please."

Mrs Kroznar nodded. "Good choice. Not many of the folks that we have in here ever take an interest in my scones. Well, more for me I suppose!" She laughed, and scurried away, most likely to have yet more strange conversations with whomever life might choose to throw her way.

Lance looked just so slightly shell-shocked. "I... You... Do you know what either of them were talking about?" Then it was Keith's turn to nod smugly.

"What, isn't it obvious?" He grinned amusedly at Lance who didn't seem to think it was obvious at all, judging by the look on his face. "Lance, they're conspiracy theorists! Alien enthusiasts! This whole village must have some kind of strange alien charade going on! That's why the menus are so odd."

Lance breathed an outward sigh of relief. "That's good. Kinda took me by surprise, y'know? It's not what you expect from such a chill looking elderly couple running a chintzy little tearoom out in the middle of nowhere."

Keith nodded sagely, reaching out a hand to grasp Lance's over the table. "The middle of nowhere is always where you find the most eccentric folk. Y'ain't really in a rural area if there ain't anyone hurryin' about muttering about how some alien wearing an Area 51 hat stole their favourite cow."

"Huh." Lance appeared very much placated. "I guess this is just one of those places like Roswell where everyone is like, an alien hunter or something."

"E-xactly." Keith said happily. I wonder if they have special conspiracy theory wednesday's like the diner I used to go to did?"

Three figures shuffled up to the table. One of them opened up his palm to reveal a sweet with strange
yellow writing on, which it placed gently on the table. "For Shiro." Sven, Sven and Sven chanted in unison, their voices sounding not like they came from within themselves, but emanated through the room, punctuated by the roaring winds of the open sea during a storm and more sand than you might think would be generated by such a simple sentence. He turned about and left.

Lance and Keith- could they help it? Erupted into giggles. Everything was simply so very strange here. It almost needed the addition of laughter to fully realise itself.

Their food arrived- and what food it was! Lance stared in hopeless desperation at his soup as it sat in front of him hissing slightly. Alas, staring at it did not seem to be working- no matter how much he tried it, the soup did not seem to become any less neon.

Keith tried very hard not to look as amused as he felt. Before him sat a very normal, albeit appetising scone, complete with clotted cream, a little jar of strawberry jam and a delicate little tea set. Lance looked at it in desolate envy. Well, that was his fault entirely for choosing an unknown option and not sticking with a safe option. Keith did not feel sorry enough for him to sacrifice his lovely scone to appease him.

"Well you did order it." Keith grinned as the strange flakes of something or another adorning the surface fluttered enticingly at Lance. Lance meanwhile had taken on the appearance of somebody that suffered so badly from motion sickness that even standing still made them feel distinctly queasy.

"Yes." Said Lance simply. "I did."

They sat in a peculiar fashion, deadly silent, Keith waiting for Lance to start eating so that he didn't appear too rude, Lance waiting for the mental fortitude to begin.

Finally, he dipped a spoon into the soup. He raised the spoon to his mouth. Ignoring the brittle tension in the room he resolved himself.

He took a sip.

Slowly, carefully he put the spoon down.
It sat, poised on the table, as did everything else in the room from pure, unadulterated apprehension.

"It tastes," said Lance after a long pause for deliberation, "like Crab."

The entire room seemed to exhale.

"Is it... Good?" Keith asked quietly.

Lance nodded enthusiastically, unable to speak properly as somehow the spoon had rematerialised in his mouth.

"S'great." He said as soon as he was able. "Better than it looks, y'know?"

Keith nodded, slathering clotted cream onto his scone.

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If Keith were asked, he was a very biased party, but he could not deny that today had ostensibly been the greatest date he had been on (out of the seemingly unassailable grand total of two). It had been a great morning, a very enjoyable walk and an immensely enjoyable lunch in the teahouse. So great in fact that even encountering Coran walking in from the balcony in a pair of bright pink pants (and nothing else) could not ruin the magic of the experience. He had stared at them, they had stared
at him. He had asked them what on earth they were doing there, and before any of them could answer Mr Kroznar had launched into a long pre-prepared speech about accepting one's alien brethren no matter what their kind, after which they had all laughed, although Coran did seem to be looking at Keith in a different way since the encounter. Keith decided he would put that down to being caught in such a compromising outfit. True to form, he had made the both of them promise him they would not inform Allura that his 'harmless bingo tournaments' were actually a code word for what apparently seemed to be called 'Hardcore Altean strip poker'.

Keith was not even going to ask about that one. Nuh uh.

It was mid-afternoon by the time they managed to set off back home, along with two packets of homemade Welsh cakes and a piece of Swedish fish candy from the Sven's.

Keith didn't think anyone could have had a better day that day, not for all the money in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this chapter! It ended up being a lot longer than I thought.

Hopefully it will answer some of your questions about what's actually going on in this series. ;)

As always, thank ver muchh for reading and we are at mothdads.tumblr.com for all your other moth related needs!
The Bonding Moment

Chapter Summary

In which conspiracies and mullets are discussed.

Chapter Notes

Long time no see! Sorry this chapter took so long, we've both been super busy these past few months. Hopefully this chapter makes up for the long wait.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Well. Here he was.

Standing outside the Shirogane Independent Bookstore once again, Lance mentally prepared himself for the intense theorising and conspiracy hatching that he was about to subject himself to in order to aid Keith's noble cause of informing the world of the existence of mothman, among other cryptids. For several hours. Alone. With Keith.

Oh, and Matt would be there too.

And Hunk.

Hunk had insisted upon tagging along with him to meet "mothman Keith" to either give him his blessing or prevent a romance that never started (unbeknownst to the oblivious Lance, the romance had already bloomed).

He gave the door a cautious knock and swallowed. He and Keith had hung out so many times before, this would be no different. Really, there was no need to be so nervous. Right? Perhaps he was worried about what his oldest best friend would think about his newest best friend? Yeah, that was it.

Before he could get completely lost in his worries, Keith appeared at the door and let them in. Lance's heart skipped a beat at the way Keith's eyes lit up and broke out into a huge grin when he saw him. Damn. Why was he so cute?

"Hey Lance, glad you could make it." Keith pulled him into a hug and buried his head in Lance's neck. Lance wrapped his arms around Keith's waist and held him close. They stayed like that for what might be considered too long for a platonic bro hug, but Lance found he didn't care. He was just content to be in Keith's arms. He didn't want to pull away, but supposed he should introduce Hunk, who was currently watching their display of affection and shuffling awkwardly on the spot. He slowly pulled back, and the fond look Keith gave him butterflies (or moths) in his stomach.

"Keith, this is Hunk, my room mate and best friend- other than you of course. Hunk, this is Keith." Lance gestured between Hunk and Keith. Hunk gave Keith a friendly smile.
"Hi, I know we've seen each other around before but we've never been formally introduced."

"Oh, yeah. You work at Coffee Corner, don't you? Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too. I've heard so much about you, Keith." Hunk gave Keith another smile and subtly side-eyed Lance, raising an eyebrow jauntily. Lance turned bright red and grabbed both Hunk and Keith, dragging them into the store.

"Okay, you've met, now we've got a conspiracy theory video to make." He sputtered out quickly.

It was half an hour after closing time and the store was empty except for Pidge, who sat in her regular spot, laptop whirring noisily. Her brow was furrowed as she typed furiously, and when the contraption emitted a low beep she threw her arms up in frustration, then grabbed her red bull sitting on the table and chugged it. Lance relinquished Keith and Hunk from his grasp in favour of waltzing up to Pidge from behind, dropping a hand on her shoulder.

"Y'know, Pigeon, the store closed a while ago. Whatcha still doing here?"

"Geez!" Pidge tensed up, not expecting the sudden abundance of Lance in her personal space, "Well, I should be asking you the same thing, Lancelot." She adjusted her glasses and gave him a scowl. Lance just laughed, subtly pushing the can of red bull away from Pidge. He had a nagging feeling that it hadn't been her first can, and had he not confiscated it, it probably wouldn't have been her last.

Lance waved a hand nonchalantly. "Oh, you know- someone has to keep these nerds from killing each other over Nessie's honour."

"Did the astrophysics major in the room just call me a nerd?" Matt appeared through the door with incredible timing.

"Yeah I did." Lance smirked. "What are you gonna do about it?"

"Hypocrite."

"Nerd."

Pidge regarded them dismissively through her glasses. "I don't know how to break it to you two, but we are literally all fucking nerds."

"What, even Shiro?" Lance raised an eyebrow at her.

"Oh Lancelot, Lancelot you naïve youngling." Matt crooned. "You've never experienced the glory that was Shiro Shirogane the tabletop gaming master. The best player that Call of Cthulhu ever saw, the ultimate dungeon master, the hammer of Warhammer. He still has all the equipment somewhere."

"What, seriously?" Lance squinted at him. Serious, down to earth, Shiro? That same Shiro? This wasn't some sort of weird mistake?

"You kidding? Shiro practically invented nerddom, back in the good old days." Matt winked at him. "When I moved to the school there were these flyers everywhere for tabletop gaming club. That's how we met, actually. He was an icon. Shirble the mighty, we called him."
"Quit telling everyone about that, Matt. It was embarrassing enough at the time without you telling everyone we meet about it." Shiro called out from a few rooms away. "Also, if I may be so bold, what the hell are you all still doing in my house?"

"Your little brother has challenged me to a meeting of the minds, Shirpo. How could I deny him? And a battle needs spectators- otherwise he might start getting thoughts like he might win."

"You talk the talk, Matt, but you sure ain't walked the walk." Keith leered at him. "I don't need witnesses to prove me right."

Shiro sighed loudly and theatrically, shoulders sagging. "You kids don't break anything or it's coming out of your pay. I'll leave you some money for takeout."

That, Lance could very much appreciate.

"Where ya going, Shoehorn?" Matt called over. "You're looking pretty smart."

That wasn't untrue- Shiro was dressed very nicely indeed, from a purely aesthetic point of view that was. He looked very, very dapper.

Shiro looked away from all of them and blushed slightly. "I have a date." He blushed even more as Matt decided to give him a standing ovation, complete with snarky grin.

"Fucking finally, Shitoto! I had almost lost hope for you!" He crooned loudly, hustling over to drape himself over Shiro's shoulders. "Give her flowers and serenade her with the Space Cats opening theme- she won't be able to keep her hands off of you."

Shiro looked done. "I should hope not! We might get kicked out of the restaurant."

"Now you kids have a fun night, but don't have too much fun. Be back by ten, and be safe!" Matt called after Shiro, who was already halfway to the door.

"Ten? Matt, we're adults. We don't need a curfew."

"I'm just looking out for my precious child, going on his first ever date."

"Don't you have some conspiracies to argue with Keith about or something?"

"I just wanted to tell you how proud of you I am, son. Also, try not to mess things up with this girl, she's a real keeper. I'll be expecting grand babies from you two soon."

"That's it. I'm out," And with that Shiro rushed out of the front door, sparing one final look at his odd group of friends. "And there better not be any cosplayers or chocolate fountains in the back room when I get back."

"Bye sweet pea!" Matt cooed as the door shut, before turning around to face Keith.

"You ready, mullet man?"

"Born ready, glasses"
Lance watched them race up the stairs, before shooting a slightly puzzled glance in Pidge's direction.

"Are they always that...intense?"

"Oh, you have no idea. I usually stay out of these nerd sessions of theirs. I've got better things to do." She had some how regained her can of red bull and took large swigs of it in between pressing the keys on her laptop aggressively.

"Like shouting at computers?" Lance raised a jaunty eyebrow.

"For your information, Lance, I'm building a robot assistant for this place. His name is Rover, and when he's finished he'll make an even better employee than me, and I've been employee of the month here since May last year. I don't even work here!"

At the mention of a robot, Hunk's eyes lit up.

"Wait, wait, wait, you're building a robot? That is so cool!"

"Wait, I never told you?" Pidge furrowed her eyebrows at Hunk's surprise.

"Nope. I kept meaning to ask you whenever you'd come in for your regular order, but that time of morning is always busy and I never get a chance. And to be honest, you don't really do much talking until you've had your morning coffee," Hunk situated himself beside her and peered at her laptop, before turning his attention to Lance.

"Hey dude, I'm gonna just check out Pidge's robot for a while. You go on up without me, I'll join you guys later."

"Alright man, cool beans." Lance shrugged and started towards the stairs, trying to ignore the giddiness in his stomach. Now it really would be just him and Keith.

Oh, and Matt.

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"Look at this! Look at this! Look at the direction the sunlight is coming from. Now look at the shadow. They don't match up! It's clearly a doctored image!"

"No, no, no, no, look. Look at the inclination of the hill, it doesn't look steep but it is-"

"What has the hill got to do with anything?"

"Let me finish. Okay, so you can tell the hill is actually pretty steep from the placement of the rocks, see?"

"Yeah, but-"

"SO, for a shallow hill the shadow looks disproportionately large- but it's not- it's not a shallow hill, it's steep, so the shadow is the right size!"
"Yeah, no. That still doesn't make sense since the sun is directly ABOVE it, so the shadow should be smaller."

"But you just said the shadow was too small!"

"NO, I said the sun was at a different angle."

"Yeah, and from that angle it would cause a bigger shadow, LIKE THE EXACT ONE IN THE FUCKING PICTURE."

"It's not even- the fucking jersey devil isn't even ON the ground so the shadow-"

"It doesn't NEED to be on the ground to cast a shadow-"

"No, listen! Listen-"

""I AM listening-"

"Nope, no you're not. Listen, okay? Sheesh, let a guy talk-"

"Do you ACTUALLY have a point to make, or-"

"YES, yes I do, actually. So basically..."

Lance looked down at his watch. Matt and Keith had been arguing over the same photo of the jersey devil for over half an hour now, snatching a laser pointer off of each other to point out minute details in the image, whilst he just sat and watched, glancing over at the camera every so often to make sure the battery hadn't died. He hadn't expected them to get so...passionate. Especially not about some kinda winged monstrosity of the night. Not too long ago he would've considered Mothman a winged monstrosity of the night too, but now he knew better. Mothman was dauntless, intelligent, and hotheaded, and he was stubborn, and sweet, and determined, and funny, and Lance loved his smile, and his moody pout, and the way he looked at him when it was just the two of them together. Lance loved spending time with him, be it messing around in the break room, getting lunch at Coffee Corner or riding his hover bike to to strange villages in the middle of nowhere. He loved making fun of space cats with him, he loved dancing with him, he loved him when he-

Oh.

Lance's brain short circuited. He loved him.

He loved Keith.

As in, he was IN love with him. In love with his personality. In love with his face. In love with his mothiness. In love with his mullet-

"Lance!"

And now Keith was in his personal space, looking at him expectantly. Keith. Whom he was in love with.

"I love you." He mumbled, more of a dazed admission to himself than to Keith.
"What?" Keith's eyes widened a fraction.

"Oh, uhhh, I said 'I lost you'," Lance realised his mistake. "Yeah, 'cause I lost you there for a moment. I space out, sorry. What were you saying?"

"Uhh, yeah. So..."

If Keith looked slightly dejected for a moment, Lance didn't notice. He refused to make eye contact, for fear of turning as red as a tomato. Luckily for him, Keith regained his composure first.

"What do you think about the shadow? Is it edited or not?"

"Well," Lance inspected the large image pinned to the conspiracy board of a slightly blurry goat-like creature hovering about 10 feet off the ground in a hilly, forested region. "At first, it *does* look like the sun is directly above it, so the shadow should be way smaller than that, even with the inclination of the hill taken into account."

"Aha!" Matt let out a triumphant cheer whilst Keith pouted.

"However," Lance took the laser pointer from Matt and pointed at the sky. "Since we can't actually see the sun in the picture we can't just assume it's above the jersey devil here. And actually, if you look at the shadow again, it's at the same angle as the shadows of the trees, and they're all in proportion to the size of the objects making them, so the sun would be coming more from this angle," Lance gestured to the corner of the image. "So in reality the shadow is the right size and shape, and therefore the image can't be fake. Well, at least the shadow isn't."

"Thank you, Lance." Keith smirked.

"Yeah, yeah, okay. This round goes to Team Lancelot and McMullet," Matt rolled his eyes. "But just because the image isn't edited, doesn't mean that jersey devil in the photo is real! It could just be a fake jersey devil- y'know, like a guy in a suit..."

"What are you insinuating?" Keith glared at him.

"Nothing. I'm not insinuating anything"

"You are! I know you are!"

"Well, if you can tell I'm insinuating something, then you must also know what it is I'm actually insinuating."

"So you admit that you are insinuating something!"

"Hey, guys, knock it off." Lance's attempts a diffusing the increasingly tense situation went ignored.

"I just wanna know what you are insinuating that I'm insinuating"

"Stop changing the subject. You know I know."

"I know, but I wanna know if what I think you think you know is actually what I was insinuating in the first place."
"Well then, just tell me what you were insinuating."

They had reached a stalemate. Silence hung in the room like a heavy fog. Lance braced himself for inevitable shitshow that was about to go down, hoping that whatever the "insinuation" was, it wasn't about Bigfoot. Bigfoot insinuations always led to Bigfoot discourse, and nobody wants to get involved in Bigfoot discourse.

Lance prayed it was a Mothman insinuation instead. He could deal with those.

"...Bigfoot is just a guy in a suit-"

"I KNEW IT-"

Lance sighed. Bigfoot discourse it was, then.

"He is, though! He's just a guy in a-"

"NOPE. Fuck you, Matt. I know what I saw."

"Do you really, though? You're hiking up a mountain trail, allegedly see some fuzzy purple bipedal or some shit, and fall off a cliff trying to snap a pic. You mean to tell me that THAT is conclusive evidence for Bigfoot? It was probably a beaver, and you're probably colour blind. We need to take you to the optometrist."

"It was 7 feet tall!"

"A bear, then."

"It was wearing clothes! What animal wears clothes?"

"A Yogi bear cosplayer. You saw a really tall Yogi bear cosplayer. He was going to meet up with Boo Boo for a teddy bear picnic in the woods but you scared him off."

"Matt! I'm serious!"

"He probably went to tell his best bro Winnie the Pooh about some crazy hiker with a mullet who fell off a mountain screaming 'BIGFOOT'."

"I'm not listening to this-"

"There's probably a whole group of cartoon bear themed furries who just go to yiff in the forest and talk shit about conspiracy theorists."

"Oh, you can talk! Just last week you were trying to convince me that the space cats stories are base on actual events that happened, like, 10,000 years ago, and now one of the cats is being held at a Garrison research facility in the desert!"

"Don't you bring Space Cats into this, I'm warning you, Mullet man!"

"What is it with you and my hair? Why do you keep insisting it's a mullet? It's just a bit long at the back!"
"Hair that is longer at the back than at the front IS, by definition, a mullet."

"Well that means you have a mullet too!"

Matt gasped dramatically and unconsciously reached a hand up to feel his hair, before hurriedly striding over to the door throwing it open.

"PIDGE," His voice cracked slightly. "PIDGE GET UP HERE."

"What?" A slightly annoyed voice called back up.

"HELP ME DEFEND MY HONOUR."

"Nah, I'll pass."

"KEITH THINKS I HAVE A MULLET, KATIE"

"...I'm coming."

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The recording light on the camera blinked. The camera itself lay forgotten, knocked over during the scuffle. The conspiracy board had been moved to the centre of the room for all to see. Gone was the photo of the jersey devil in the forest, now replaced by a large flow diagram, entitled "MULLETS" in bright red ink and angry handwriting, branching off into a whole range of subcategories of mullets. Photos of Billy Ray Cyrus and David Bowie were heavily annotated, and coloured strings connected pictures of Keith, Matt, Lance, Coran and Shiro to different mullet types. Pidge's laptop displayed two windows open side by side: one was a tumblr blog devoted to documenting all the iterations of Bono's mullet through the ages, and one was Photoshop, with images of Keith and Lance with their hairstyles swapped. Post-it notes covered in equations were scattered all over the room, calculating the exact business to party ratio required for a hairstyle to be considered a mullet, based on an individual's hair thickness and length. Matt was curled up on Keith's bed with a pained expression on his face. Pidge sat on the floor with her laptop, surrounded by red bull cans. Keith sat at the desk, his head in his hands, whilst Lance stood behind him, using Keith's head as an arm rest. All eyes were on Hunk, who, laser pointer in hand, was about to present the results of their 3 hour long investigation into "The Nature of the Mullet Hairstyle and its Long Reaching Effects on Popular Culture From the 1980's-Present" (AKA "Who here has a mullet?").

"okay, just so we're all clear: Keith has an Asian mullet but it's kinda got, like, a Joe Jonas from Camp Rock vibe. Matt has either an early U2 Bono mullet or a Duran Duran mullet. Either way, it's a short, European mullet from the '80s. Lance's hair is 1 centimeter too short to be a mullet, but his hair grows quickly, so provided he doesn't get a haircut in the next few weeks he'll have a mini modern European mullet. Coran has a standard business mullet. Shiro is an outlier and should not have been counted, in my humble opinion, but you guys all seem to think he has a reverse mullet, since his hair is party at the front and business at the back. But since he has an undercut and there isn't actually any hair at the back, he technically doesn't have a business. Thus there is no business to party ratio, so it isn't really a mullet, but, y'know. That's just my opinion. Everyone happy now?"

There was a collective groan which Hunk took as a "yes".
"Alright, let's call it a day then. Let's order pizza or something."

Lance breathed a sigh of relief as he stood up straight (ha ) and stretched his arms behind his head. Keith began to look around him on the desk and on the floor, searching for something.

"Lose something?" Lance put a hand on his shoulder.

"I can't find my pen." Keith checked his pockets (fanny packs) with a puzzled expression on his face.

"You mean the red one? It's up there on the conspiracy board, dude."

Keith looked up, and lo and behold, there was the pen. Sitting on top of the conspiracy board. The very high conspiracy board. He walked over to it and made a futile attempt to reach his pen. Why was it even up there? And who the hell adjusted the height on the conspiracy board to be so high? He was suddenly very aware of someone with a tall, lanky frame behind him.

"Need some help there?" Lance grabbed the pen with no difficulty whatsoever and handed it to Keith.

"I almost had it..." Keith turned away, blushing.

"Mmhmm," Lance raised an eyebrow jauntily. "Whatever you say."

Keith turned around to face Lance, and Lance was suddenly all too aware of the lack of space between them. He felt his face heat up as Keith stared up at him through those thick eyelashes of his.

"Well, uh, if you ever need help reaching something else, I'm your guy." Lance winked, while internally cringing at his own attempt at flirting. Why he felt the need to flirt whenever he was embarrassed in front of a cute person, he didn't know. His motto in these situations had become "When in doubt, flirt it out." Luckily, it seemed that Keith hadn't noticed (or he had and was playing along, but that was unlikely).

"Thanks. I can think of a few things you might be able to help me reach." The corner of Keith's lips turned up.

Lance's heart skipped a beat. Did Keith just flirt back?

"You two get a room!" Matt interrupted their moment, throwing a pillow at them and missing miserably. Lance made a mental note to put the Space Cats book Matt was currently reading on a high shelf somewhere, where Matt couldn't reach.

"This is MY room, Matt. You get out." Keith flipped him the bird.

"Yeah, yeah, fine. Another point to Team Keith and Lance. Team Klance."

"Klance?"

"Team Klance may have proven that I have a mullet, but you haven't proven that Bigfoot isn't just a furry in a Yogi bear fursuit."
"Fuck you!" Keith threw the pen at Matt.

Matt threw an unopened red bull can back at Keith. He missed his target completely, the can instead hitting the base of the conspiracy board, causing the already unsteady leg to buckle, and the whole board started to topple forwards. Lance's protective instincts kicked in and he shoved Keith away from the board, allowing it to fall solely on him. He hit the floor with a thud, as the heavy board pinned him down.

"Lance!"

Keith got up from where he was pushed to the floor and immediately began to lift the board back up, off of Lance. He was shortly joined by Hunk, and once the board was upright he abandoned it, leaving Hunk to push it away, as he rushed to Lance's side.

"Lance," He knelt, offering a hand to help Lance up. Lance simply took it in his own and held onto it tightly. "Are you okay?"

Lance turned to give Keith a soft look and a gentle smile.

"We did it. We are a good team."

Keith smiled fondly back at him. They maintained eye contact for a while, before Keith glanced down at their clasped hands. They were both still wearing their friendship bracelets. Neither had taken them off once.

"That's pretty gay you guys."

Lance sighed. Trust Matt to ruin the moment. Again.

"Oh yeah?"

Before Lance could register what was happening, Keith's lips were on his. They were chapped, and Keith kissed roughly, but Lance didn't care. Keith was kissing him. Keith. Whom he was in love with. His eyes fluttered shut and he kissed back, before he could chicken out. Oh God. Why had he never done this before?

And then it was over. They parted with a smack, and Lance was in a daze.

"How's that for gay?"

Matt just whooped, whilst Pidge and Hunk gave each other knowing looks.

"I'll, uh, go order that pizza." Keith got up, bringing Lance with him. He was blushing wildly, as he walked away to grab his phone, sparing one look back at Lance and grinning. Lance found himself giggling like a school girl, as Hunk approached him, wiggling his eyebrows in a very jaunty manner.


Chapter End Notes
Hope you enjoyed this chapter. It was a lot of fun to write ;)

Go check out Dean's tumblr at mothdads.tumblr.com

I've got a tumblr too now, so hmu if you want to scream about Klance with me at raumikins.tumblr.com

-Mothmum
Lance Makes a Realisation

Chapter Summary

In which Lance realises some things, and decides to take action.

Chapter Notes

It's been a while, guys. Sorry we don't have a regular updating schedule- we have both been super busy. Hopefully once our final exams are over at the end of June we will be able to update a lot more :) 

Hope you enjoy this chapter!

-Mothmum

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Honestly, since the events of last week, Lance hadn't known where he stood with Keith. Aside from having totally embarrassed himself and wounded his manly pride, he was certain... well, maybe not certain...

He had a suspicion.

After the conspiracy board had toppled him over, Lance was sure he had seen something. Something strange and alien and beautiful in Keith's eyes and he was like, 90% sure it wasn't even moth related. From his position, which admittedly hadn't been one of great advantage, he couldn't quite be sure, but he thought... he thought maybe he saw affection in those eyes.

And Lance McClain was not someone who was good at dealing with affection, believe it or not.

Sure, he flirted a lot. But when did anyone return those attentions, when was it ever something that anyone saw as more than just Lance being funny, or Lance being annoying?

He hurt, on the inside. He hurt because this was who he was, and hurting was what Lance McClain did when nobody was looking.

If he was honest, he had been in denial for months now.

He knew very well indeed that he had been harbouring feelings for Keith. More than that, he believed Keith might like him back.

He worried that he might be looking too much into it, or that the way he saw Keith looking at him was more than wishful thinking but that was paranoia talking, and he knew where that paranoia came from.

A future with Keith was a scary thought, and Lance honest to God had denied that there was
anything between them for so long because he wanted Keith to become disinterested, wanted him to move on and Lance could continue in happy solitude, throw himself into the future that he had dreamed for himself, with a home and a job and a family and no pesky local madmen to distract him with feelings that he by all rights shouldn't be having.

But Keith was not that type of person at all, and he devoted himself so pitiably easily that Lance couldn't help but to adore him just a little more. With every day, stale dreams seemed to evaporate, feeling more and more like what everyone else wanted him to feel, replaced with a sort of fizzy trepidation, the unspoken knowledge that there were two paths out ahead of him. One led down an embellished, white picket fence smiling future, full of predictability and longing. The other led somewhere entirely unknown. He knew in his heart which one he wanted, knew it very well. He wanted change, he wanted Keith, and damn every fibre of his body that warned against it. It was worth a try.

Lying awake at 3am watching North & South play on his shitty second-hand dvd player seemed very much like a Keith thing to do. He could just make out the sound of Hunk snoring from the other room. The sounds melted together, with the occasional beam of light permeating from the open window, as vehicles passed by every so often. The curtains fluttered, the window was open, light and sound dancing out in little patches through the dark room. He was letting the cold in, and would absolutely regret it tomorrow, but he was so comfortable huddled in his pile of blankets that he couldn't be bothered to do anything about it. The cool lights and warm sounds lulled him into a quiet reverie, and he thought of nothing more than the glare of Mr Thornton's mother, disconcertingly like his own grandmother, and the pearly pink and blue of the scarf he was knitting.

He wondered if Keith thought of him much.

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Less than a mile away, the very same Keith Kogane sat up in bed. He had a headache, the same one that he had been suffering from for days now. Groaning loudly, he rolled out of bed, hitting his head-"Fuckity fucking ow!"- and laying despondently on the floor.

He wondered if Lance was awake. He wondered why the sides of his head hurt so fucking much. He felt very much like someone might after wandering along on a wintry day in Alaska without a hat on, his ears full of cold and ache. He wondered if Lance would come over and hold him if he asked very nicely. He wondered if that would be pushing it.

He wondered a lot of things. He also wandered, to the bathroom specifically, turning the lamp on and wincing at the light. There was a reason he was animorphing into a nocturnal creature. That reason was obviously that the bathroom light was too fucking bright.

He looked at himself in the mirror. He regretted this immediately. Perhaps it was the dreadful blue-grey light of the LED bulb, but Keith Kogane looked at himself and found someone staring back at him who looked, almost, but not quite, completely unlike Keith Kogane.

He had known about the ears thing. He had seen it coming. They looked weird, though not too visible. From a distance they looked like hair, and concealing them with a hat was another option. The fact that his ears no longer looked like ears did not concern him in the slightest, but something else did.
And holy shit.

Fucking- wow. Keith had facial hair. Facial fur? Facial whatever- it was still there regardless of whatever he called it.

To be quite honest it was fucking cool. Keith dug the look. It was quite distinguished in a 'holy shit my face is fuzzy and purple' way. He would be perfectly happy with this sudden emergence if he never had to appear in public again. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

Keith had bought a packet of disposable razors a long time ago now, with the rather ambitious hope that he might someday need them. Contrary to popular opinion it seemed this day had actually arrived.
He rooted around in the bathroom cabinet, displacing just about everything you might typically find in a bathroom cabinet and a good deal of things you typically wouldn't.

At the very back of the top shelf, behind what seemed against all odds to be a bookmark and part of a trumpet, he discovered what seemed to be the packet of razors, along with an unreasonably large accumulation of dust. Excellent! Keith would run a shower and then remove some of the more obvious furry growths from his body.

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This was, in retrospect, a very bad idea. Not just a little bad, or somewhat bad this was what those in the business might be inclined to dub a 'colossal fuck-up'. Keith emerged from the shower, his face feeling as if it were on fire, and bleeding not profusely but still a lot more than he would have wanted. He regarded himself in the mirror and became quite aware that he looked far worse than before, though definitely less purple. He looked like a pulpy mess, true, but a human pulpy mess was better than the alternative for the moment. Keith dropped the razor in the bin gladly, padding back to his room and leaving a thinly muffled trail of ows and ouches behind him. He collapsed back onto bed, knowing very well that it would take him a colossal amount of effort to near the state of sleep.

All he could do was hope for the best, and perhaps indulge himself in some visions of brown-haired boys with beautiful faces, and smiles that could reignite a dying star.

-- - --

The first thing that Keith happened upon that morning at the shop was, unfortunately, Matt.

He stared agog from across the store room, eyes bulging in their sockets as he made what was possibly the world's most feeble attempt not to laugh hysterically.

"Oh my god, Keith! What happened to your face?" He wheezed, almost collapsing completely onto the table, and causing at least two towers of crime thrillers to shudder precariously.

"I was shaving." Keith glared at him.

"You shaVE?" Matt laughed in much the same way as a man drowning in a vat of Nitrous Oxide. Keith sure hoped he'd drown.
"Well obviously," Pidge said from within a shadowy corner. "He had to do something about all that pesky skin on his face."

"Hey, fuck you Pidge-"

"Language!" Shiro called loudly from upstairs. As he descended down into the store room, his eyes went from Matt to Pidge, and then to Keith himself. Keith winced as a pair of stern eyes locked onto his.

"Keith, what on Earth-"

"Hey Shiro, Allura's out here!" Lance barged in, noble knight of the Shirogane Independent, saving Keith's day once again. "She says she needs to talk to you about... stuff."

Shiro's face went red, then white, as he struggled to process the connotations of what Lance just said, before hurrying out of the room at great speed.

Lance hurried over to Keith as business returned to usual, and Matt, realising it was his turn to take the front desk, hurried out, along with Pidge, what looked like part of a doomsday machine in her hands.

"What was that about?" Keith asked hesitantly. "Did you mean 'talk', or just 'talk-talk'?"

"Actually neither." A faint mischievous light illuminated Lance's features. "Coran wanted a little chat with Shiro about dating his niece. I think they're gonna be out there for some time."

"Ah."

"Also Keith, are you okay?"

Lance was staring very intently at Keith's face, with a look of concern.

"I had to... shave. I'm getting the hang of it."

"I can see that! Did you even use shaving cream?"

Keith hesitated.

"I'll take that as a no, then." Lance gave him a reproachful look, though the familiarity of it created something warm, something special between them, and Keith wanted to say something. Anything.

"Keith we need you on the fucking floor! Get your fuzzy ass out here, pronto!" Came a voice that could only be Matt's and, suddenly made nervous by the electric feel of the room, hurried out without another word.

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Lance had to get Keith alone, he knew he did. There was something happening here, and Lance had to do something, to make it happen or he'd live the rest of his life with the knowledge that he had been so ashamed to take a risk that he had let Keith Kogane, the man, the moth, the legend, slip
through his fingers. The only problem was, this had ended up as an unseasonably busy day and Lance had barely been able to see Keith through the throng of customers, let alone talk to him where they wouldn't be disturbed.

In fact, it had taken him til the very end of their working day, when they were shutting the store down, to find a good opportunity.

"Hey Keith?"

"What's up?"

"Do you…like anyone at the moment?"

"What?" Keith paused for a moment. "I mean, I've got my brother, and you guys are all my friends, so yeah, I like you guys."

"No, I meant, uh…you know…LIKE like…". A rose colour splashed itself across Lance's cheeks

"Like…like?" Keith's eyebrows furrowed in contemplation. What did Lance mean? Does he LIKE like someone? LIKE like as in-

"Oh!" Keith gasps, finally grasped what Lance was asking, eyebrows shooting up. Was Lance messing around with him? Of course he liked someone, he'd been dating Lance for several weeks now. It was pretty obvious who Keith liked. Unless Lance WAS messing around. Was he flirting? Two could play at that game.

"Oh, yeah, I like someone." He said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"Oh yeah?" Lance raised an eyebrow jauntily. Oh, he was definitely flirting with him.

"You know him, actually."

"Oh really?" Lance took a step closer.

"Yeah," Keith took a step forward himself and licked his lips. "In fact, he works here."

"Mhmm?" Lance leaned in even closer, smirking.

"Yeah. I've liked him for a while really. He always listens to my conspiracy theories even when everyone else says I'm crazy. He always manages to cheer me up, and he's so smart, and funny, and selfless-" Keith stopped abruptly, realising that he was gushing. He was trying to be smooth. Gushing was not smooth. He leaned in even closer and stared Lance straight in the eye. "And pretty fucking hot."

Lance visibly gulped at the comment.

"I'm really glad that he gets on well with Shiro and Pidge too. And I mean, yeah, we've had some disagreements in the past, but everything's good now. And I don't think he'll bring up my mullet again anytime soon, since technically he has one too." Keith grinned slyly.

Oh my God, he thought, Keith is in love with Matt.

He wanted to cry.

Keith looked him straight in the eyes and took a step forward. A new sense of determination settled on his features- a look that he wore often and one that Lance had come to love.

"I'm pretty sure he likes me too," Keith winked at him. "I was actually thinking of asking him out. Like, all of us making the conspiracy video last time was fun and all, but now I kinda wanna do something with just the two of us. Say, next Saturday maybe?"

"Why don't you ask him." Lance gulped. Keith got even closer.

"Maybe I will."

Keith was so close now. Lance held his breath and took a moment to just admire Keith, his expression blank in contrast to Keith's simultaneously determined yet strangely tender one.

He wanted to kiss him.

"Well?" Keith half whispered.

"Well, what?" Lance replied, recovering from his rumination.

"Do you..." Keith blushed, avoiding eye contact with Lance. He wasn't expecting Lance to respond this way, and it threw him off, causing him to drop his suave act. "Do you think he'd be free on Saturday?"

"Oh, uh..." Lance started, crestfallen. Keith was really serious about telling Matt. Lance could feel his grip on his composure slipping more and more. At least Keith was starting to look as jittery as he felt.

"You're really nervous about this, aren't you?"

"Yeah". It was such a soft reply that it melted Lance's heart.

And broke it.

Lance knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to tell Keith everything. He wanted to tell Keith that he loved to listen to his conspiracies. He wanted to wanted to cheer him up when he was down and bring a smile to his face. He wanted Keith to feel comfortable around him, and feel comfortable with him interacting with his brother and best friend. And despite his own heartbreak, he wanted to be there for Keith, even if only as a friend. Keith deserved someone who could make him feel loved, and even if Lance himself wasn't that person, he was going to make sure that Keith could be with the one he really cared about

"Geez, well, I guess I could help you ask him out if you want."

"What?"

Lance opened the break room door and called out.
"Hey Matt, come here for a sec." Lance kept facing the door, but tried to gauge Keith's expression from the corner of his eye. He looked...surprised? Shocked, maybe? Perhaps the thought of finally going on a date with the love of his life, Matt, was overwhelming. He'd thank Lance later for this, though. He gave Keith a small smile.

"What?" Was all Keith could say. The colour drained from his face.

Within a moment Matt appeared, Robot Cats From Outer Space™ book in hand.

"What's up Lance?"

"Me and Keith were gonna marathon ancient aliens this weekend, but something came up and I can't go."

"Mm hmm" Matt replied, still engrossed in his story.

"Keith here was wondering if you wanna hang out with him instead."

"Oh, sure."

"Yeah, Keith was gonna tell me about some new sightings of slenderman or something." That got Matt's attention.

"Slenderman, you say?" He said, closing the book, curiosity piqued.

"Yeah, Keith got some major leads on slendermen around the world, isn't that right Keith?" Lance gestured to the man in question.

"What?"

"Yeah, like there's this one video from Russia where a huge, spider-y slender dude is scaling a building, and 4 cases in the UK in 2015, three of which slenderman was actually reported to be inside people's houses!"

Matt's eyes widened.

"Ok, I've gotta see this now. To be honest, I'm surprised you know all of this. I didn't think you were into conspiracies all that much, besides what we've told you."

"Hey!" Lance gasped with an exaggerated offended face, "I do pay attention to Keith when he's telling me all these conspiracy theories, y'know! I got all that info from him! He found it all out himself, he's so dedicated to his work. He's so cool like that, so passionate." Lance added an eyebrow wiggle for good measure.

"Oh, yeah, Keith definitely takes his work seriously! Keith, you've gotta show me that video of slenderman climbing a building."

"And he could even be mothman too! So strong and cool! He could be, like, a superhero now? I mean, he's got powers and shit and he's got a good heart and he's not bad to look at, don't you agree Matt?" Lance boasted as he threw an arm around Keith's shoulder. Keith looked like he was astral projecting into another plane of existence.
"Keith chugs milk straight from the carton and spends the rest of the day dying because he is severely lactose intolerant. He sleeps fully dressed with gogo boots, fingerless gloves and a knife under his pillow, and his favourite meme is doge. If he was a superhero, he's the one that would need saving, like, 87% of the time." Pidge interjected. Lance nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Holy shit Pidge! Where the fuck did you come from?!

"The depths of Hell. AKA the store front, where you guys should be."

"Oh my God, you can't just keep sneaking up on people like that! I nearly had a fucking heart attack. Don't you cackle at me, you little coffee gremlin." He pointed an accusing finger at the smirking Pidge.

"What are you even doing back here, its employees only."

"I came to get Matt. Shiro needs book 15 of that shitty alien cat series you like so much for Allura."

"Robot Cats From Outer Space™ vs the Galactic Octopus Overlord? I'm on it." Matt turned to leave. "Tell me all about these slenderman leads later Keith."

"I guess you'll be seeing him this weekend then." Lance answered on Keith's behalf.

"Cool beans. Later 'gators." and with that Matt threw up some finger guns pointed in Keith's general direction and left.

"It's a date." Lance said quietly. He took a moment to regain his composure before turning back to Keith.

"You're welcome, Keithy boy." He said with a Lance patented™ smile, before rushing out of the room himself. Pidge, unsurprisingly, had vanished at some point as mysteriously as she'd appeared, leaving Keith alone, still frozen.

"...What?"

Chapter End Notes

Some of you are probably screaming right now ;) Lance made the wrong realisations.

Fun fact: I've had this final scene written out for months. It was the very first thing written for this fic, even before we had started writing chapter 1. This scene is my baby. My honey. My ragtime gal.

Go visit Dean at mothdads.tumblr.com

You can visit me at raumikins.tumblr.com
Langsting

Chapter Summary

Lance does some soul searching. Everyone else just wants him to ask Keith out. We enjoy the glorious tunes of Cascada's Everytime we Touch.

Chapter Notes

Salutations! Apologies for the long hiatus everyone, Dean here having recently experienced the goddamn sharing a bed fanfic trope irl and I tell yall now that shit is by no means an exaggeration, because it was fricken WILD.

HOpe this chapter lives up to expectations. I've been writing from 11 in the morning til now and its 2:31am now :'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Lance, come on. You're gonna be late for work."

"Mmmmmm."

Hunk stood in the doorway of Lance's room, watching with his hands on his hips as Lance buried himself under a pile of blankets and pillows.

"Lance, no. That is the opposite of getting up."

His best friend had arrived home from work several days before looking completely dejected, and making a beeline for his room. He then proceeded to spend the next two days curled up in a ball in his bed, even skipping class. The only time he had moved from his fetal position was when Hunk brought him food.

"But Huuuuuunk."

"What, Lance?"

"It's Saturday today."

"Yeah, which means you have to go into work, man. You can't lie in today."

"Ughhhhhhh."

"Well, if you wanted to have a lie in you shouldn't have agreed to work weekends."

"It's not that."

"Then what is it?"
"It's just...today's the day." Lance mumbled after a short pause.

"What?"

Silence.

"Lance, I can't help you if you don't tell me what's wrong."

Lance shifted in his bed and turned to face Hunk, expression solemn.

"Matt and Keith are going on a date tonight." Lance mumbled as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes.  
"Matt and Keith? You mean on a DATE date?" Hunk's eyes were wide open.

"Mhmm."

"Oh...wow. I had no idea that they liked each other. I was pretty sure Keith liked you?"

Lance groaned and hid his face in his pillow. Hunk could practically feel the regret oozing off of him. He slowly walked over to his friend and sat down on the edge of the bed, placing a gentle hand on Lance's back.

"Lance," His voice was softer now. "Are you alright? Did something happen with Keith?"

He felt Lance inhale deeply before peeking up at him again, the majority of his face still in the pillow. He had such a despondent, heartbroken look in his eyes that Hunk couldn't help but pout himself.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Lance sighed briefly and finally sat up. He sniffed a bit and looked at Hunk again, more serious than before, but with the same vulnerability.

"Yeah. Yeah I'll talk. What time is it?"

"8:40am exactly."

"Fuck, I'm gonna be late!" Lance fumbled around in his bed, attempting to untangle himself from his nest of blankets and pillows. "Ugh. Can we talk about this later? Like, at lunch or something?"

"Alright, but I'm gonna hold you to that." Hunk nodded and stood up, giving Lance space to get out of bed.

Lance had dodged the bullet again, after several days of avoiding talking about what happened, in a very uncharacteristic fashion. Lance was usually quick to open up to others. Hunk speculated that his pride must have been hurt; a fatal blow to his self esteem that would perhaps have caused him to keep to himself for so long. Whatever had transpired between him and Keith must have been bad. Hunk was worried about his friend, and was determined that he would get to the bottom of his predicament. Come lunchtime, he'd accept no more excuses. He suspected- and rightly so- that Lance and Keith's relationship could potentially be hanging in the balance- or even worse, totally ruined.

And he couldn't let that happen.

Not when he'd already started planning his best man speech for their (inevitable) wedding.
Lance arrived at work with a few minutes to spare. He was lucky his apartment was only a few minutes away from the bookstore, or else he'd have been late for sure. He chucked his stuff into the backroom, pinned his nametag to the front of his shirt where it hung slightly lop sided, and hurried back to the store front, ignoring both Matt, who was playing his 3DS in the borrowing library, and Keith, who waved at him slightly awkwardly.

Lance did not want to think about Keith fucking Kogane, not today, no sir! He had no time to let himself be sad and bitter about some weird guy who would never have liked him back anyway!

Oh, and just thinking like that made him wince. Keith wasn’t like that-

No, shut up, brain! No thinking! Crush on Keith? No, nuh-huh, no way. Didn’t happen.
Not today.

“Uhm, excuse me!?”

Lance looked up to find a fuming, forty-something with bleach blonde hair staring at him.

“Can I help you?”

The woman stood over him in her cheap heels like a Mesozoic Era Raptor making a display of dominance.

“I would like to file a complaint.” She spat venomously.

Lance sighed. Fine day this was turning out to be.

“I’m sorry to hear that ma’am, what’s your issue?”

Her eyes sparked with the rage of a thousand suns. With a singular, leering smile drawn across her face like a wound in lipstick she drew out from inside her tacky handbag a book, and handed it to Lance.

“What do you think about that?!” She grinned, her trump card laid out before her.

Lance looked at the book, which appeared to be a well thumbed copy of The Trial by Franz Kafka.

Huh.


“I got this for my daughter from the book exchange for Christmas and she hated it!” The woman spat. “I demand a refund!”

Lance kept smiling. It felt like his face was melting from the inside out.

“I’m sorry to hear that she didn’t like it ma’am, but seeing as it’s from the book exchange you didn’t actually pay any money for it, so I can’t actually refund you anything.”

“Wh-”

“Would you like me to return it to the book exchange?”
“But- but-” She spluttered. “It was in the younger teen section! I have to be reimbursed! That book caused my family emotional damage! Just looking at it makes me feel sick!”

“It must have been misplaced.” He offered her a sympathetic look. "Is there anything we can do to apologise?"

"Apologise? You can pay for my daughter to get therapy after reading this terrible novel!"

“Uhhh, I could give you a voucher for 20% off your next purchase?”

“As if I’d buy anything from here again!” She thundered. “This is unacceptable! I want to speak with your manager!”

Lance pointed to the front desk. “Shiro!” He called. “This lady would like to talk to you.”

Shiro hurried over, trying to look as amicable as possible. He looked Very Tired. As the woman re-started her enraged narrative, he motioned for Lance to leave, and Lance, who really wasn’t bothered for any of this shit took the opportunity gladly. He darted from the room, book in hand, into the book exchange.

“Hey Matt!” He called out. “Shiro needs you to take care of the front desk for a while.”

While Shiro had never asked for Lance to fetch him, per se, someone needed to take charge of the front desk, and quite frankly, Lance didn’t even want to look at Matthew Holt. It wasn’t about how much smarter than Lance he was, or how much more he knew about conspiracy theories, or how much more he must appeal to Keith than Lance did for some goddamn reason, but Lance wasn’t bitter. No, Lance just happened to have a headache that only manifested when he was looking at Matt. Nothing more.

“Aughhhhh.” Matt closed his 3DS, removing his feet from where they were propped up on the table and stomped off.

“Oh hey Lance.” Keith was staring at the shelves on the left side of the room with a look of intense concentration.

“Keith.” Lance replied. “Hey, I got a Kafka novel here, do you know where it goes or should I just put it in the back room?”

“Oh, Kafka?” Keith said. “Give it here.”

Lance walked over, and handed him the book, watching Keith slide it back into the children’s literature section.

“Are you sure it goes there?”

Keith nodded.

“You know, a woman came in to complain about that one being with the kids stuff. Apparently it upset her daughter.”
“And? Books are meant to make you feel uncomfortable emotions when you read them. It expands your parameters and stuff.”

Lance frowned. “These are kids, Keith. You might just upset them. Not every ten year old is capable of dealing with adult themes.”

“We can’t coddle them, Lance! They deserve to know about the world! Never underestimate a child. They understand what’s going on better than adults give them credit for.” Keith turned around, and grimaced. “Lance, can I talk to you?”

“About what?”

“Tonight. With Matt.”

Lance could feel his heart being torn apart by feral badgers.

“You excited or what? Big day for you and all.”

“I mean, I guess.” Keith fidgeted awkwardly, somehow unable to stop moving his fingers.

“Cmon, you gotta sound more enthusiastic than that! You wanted all this. I’m just trying to help you out, buddy.”

“But Lance-”

“I’m busy.” Lance said quickly. “Gotta dash. Work… stuff to do. Oh, and put that book wherever you want to.” He said and rushed off into the staff room before Keith could get a word in edgeways.

He shut the door behind him and sighed, air escaping from his body and leaving him deflated.

He grabbed his phone out of his pocket and called the first person on his contact list.

The phone rang three times before Hunk picked up.

“What’s up, Lancey Lance? Thought you weren’t meant to be on your phone during work hours.”

“Yeah, I don’t give a shit right now.” Lance replied tersely. “What are you up to? I missed your voice.”

“What? Oh, I’m playing Yakuza 0.”

"Wait, aren't you in work?" Lance raised an eyebrow. "How are you even doing that?"

"I was explaining video games to Coran a few days ago, and he didn't really get it, soooooo, I brought the PS4 into work to show him."

"Damn, really? Is he enjoying the game?"

"Oh man, he super is! You should see it! He's been very intensely concentrated on it for like, hours. He gave me this really intense face earlier and told me he was starting to think Kiryu and Majima are gay for each other."

"Damn, the Coran man is sharp. They are gay in a big way.” Lance replied. “Hey, you think you could meet me for Lunch at the Coffee Corner? I don’t want to have to look at any of my co-workers for longer than I possibly can, and I’m getting kinda lonely. I’d ask Shiro to let me have the day off sick, but he looks worse off than I do.”
“Is Keith there?”

“Yeah, and he keeps putting mature dystopic fiction in the kids section. It’s- kinda sweet, but like, also very disturbing. He thinks they ‘deserve to know the truth’, and while I agree on some levels, I don’t think that translates to the reality of disguising Kafka novels as family friendly material.”

“Yeah, that’s… kinda weird. Does he do that often?”

“You don’t even know dude, it’s unreal. We got a complaint from someone whose ten year old accidentally got hold of a book called The Protesters Handbook and tried to start a revolution in his school. Shiro was furious, but Keith just looked proud. I swear I saw him wipe a tear of joy from his eye after hearing that. He also likes to hide pamphlets about Cryptozoology inside cooking books as a gift to whoever buys them.”

"Oh, big mood."

The phone call muffled and Lance could hear talking on the other end.

"Right bud, I gotta go. They need me to work my cooking magic and bake another tray of Cinnamon Buns."

"Save one of those for me, okay?"

"I'll do my best!” Hunk said and hung up the call.

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12:00pm. Lunch time.

The time of Lance's reckoning.

He currently sat in a deserted spot off to the side, away from other customers, at none other than Coffee Corner, Hunk sitting opposite him. He stared down at his drink, avoiding his friend's gaze. Hunk just looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to talk. He glanced up quickly at his friend then down at his coffee again, before sighing.

"It was going so well. Me and Keith, I mean."

Hunk nodded solemnly in agreement.

"Hunk, I think I fucked up."

"How bad did you fuck up? Like on a scale from 1 to 10?"

"Like...maybe an 8? At least?"

"Lance," Hunk pinched the bridge of his nose. "What exactly did you do?"

"I was pretty sure beforehand that Keith liked me, but I wanted to make sure, y'know? So I asked him if he was into anyone at the moment and he said he was. So then I started flirting..." Lance trailed off, lost in the memory of the way Keith looked at him; the way he talked to him, like there was nobody else on the planet at the time. Just the two of them.
"Did he flirt back?" Hunk interrupted Lance's reverie.

"Oh- yeah. He did."

"Well, that's good right?"

"Yeah. At least, I thought so. So I flirted some more. But then he started talking about his crush. He said he was smart, and funny, and pretty hot."

"So what's the problem? He was obviously talking about you."

Lance shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Hunk grew concerned.

"Lance, you do know he was talking about you, right?"

"I...I don't know."

"Lance-"

"I just...I got scared. People don't usually flirt back with me. None of my relationships have ever been serious, and I've never liked someone as much as I like Keith. So I thought I might try my luck and flirt with him, just to see where it gets me. I didn't expect him to actually flirt back, or for him to want to be with me, especially since he's gonna move to West Virginia soon once his transformation into mothman is complete. Honestly I thought he'd just brush me off. But then, all of a sudden, this incredible, amazing guy is saying that he likes me too? A lot? It was just...too good to be true."

Hunk nodded sympathetically.

Lance sighed heavily. "Like, it seemed like everything was happening so fast? And I didn't know how to deal with it. I mean, maybe I read the mood wrong. But whoever he was describing, that wasn't me. Because I'm not smart, I've never been the smart kid, ever, I can barely hold my damn life together. My jokes don't make people laugh, they make people groan. And I'm selfish, and miserable, and everything around me is just turning to shit. But Matt? He's funny, right? He's known Keith for ages, and he knows so much more than me and he has his shit together! He's happy with his life and he had good friends and his family are all perfect and happy, and- Oh come on, he's just everything I am but better!" Lance broke down. "I know everyone already thinks that, but- Keith- I thought he was- I thought he saw me as more..." Hunk drew him into a hug, and Lance rested his weary head on Hunk's shoulder.

"I don't know if I'm ready for this, Hunk. I don't know if I can even handle this kind of commitment. Responsibility. Maybe it's better that Keith doesn't like me back."

Lance pulled away, and sat down on the bed. Hunk moved next to him, taking his best friend's hand in his own.

"Look, Lance, I understand what you're going through. You got scared because everything was getting serious and you didn't want to get rejected in the end, and have to deal with the moth lifestyle, or whatever's going to happen in the future. But nobody knows what the future's going to be like. This is all your decision, but I just think that both your lives are gonna be a lot better when the both of you just learn to stop worrying and let yourselves be happy. And Keith? He adores you. It's obvious to see. I mean, he kissed you in front of everyone."

"Because he was trying to make a point."

"But he kissed you at Christmas too, remember? I know you were both under the mistletoe but I
don't think he'd really have gone through with it if he didn't want to. And what about that time you went to that weird village in the middle of nowhere? That was definitely a date."

"...Oh," Lance's eyes widened with realisation. "OH."

"I know, right?"

"I didn't think of it as a date since I didn't know if he like me for sure."

"Well, you're sure now, aren't you?" Hunk raised an eyebrow jauntily.

"I just set him up on a date with Matt. Even if he did like me, I've probably just ruined my chances with him now," Lance took a slow sip of his drink. "He probably thinks I'm not interested."

Hunk leaned back in his seat and huffed. He half turned, and craned his head back to glance at the counter. Allura was at the register whilst Coran took orders. Hunk began to stand up.

"Where are you going?" Lance put his drink down and looked up at his friend.

"We're gonna get a second opinion on this. Come on, Lance."

Lance sighed as he got up and followed Hunk to the counter.

"Hey, Allura, do you think Keith has a crush on Lance?"

"HUNK!" Allura stared at him in dismay. "We have to let them figure that out on their own!"

Hunk shrugged. "I agree, but this is getting ridiculous. We're working on a tight schedule here-" He turned to Lance. "How long do you think we have until lover boy flutters off in search of bright lights to bump into?"

Lance considered. "Going by the estimations he made in his last video, I give it a month. Maybe five weeks at most."

"Wait, you still watch those?" Hunk raised a jaunty eyebrow at him.

"Of course I do- I mean, uhh- I guess." Lance blushed and looked away. "I just like to check how he's feeling."


"Aww cmon." Lance whined. "That's not so gay. I'm concerned! It's like, mildly bisexual at best."

Hunk patted him on the shoulder. "Just like you, buddy." He said fondly.

"Well, actually I'm strongly bisexual- Powerfully bisexual, Hunk. I'm a power bi. Like a power bottom, but not in a specifically sexual way. Ain't that right, my sweet princess?" He winked at Allura, pulling out the finger guns move and letting out a celebratory round of gunfire with added sound effects.

Allura rolled her eyes, but she was still smiling.

"Lance, I saw Keith fall over a table while walking because he was too busy staring at you to mind where he was going. I'm positively certain he has developed feelings for you. Personally I'm still surprised that the two of you didn't end up together months ago."
"Yeah, but..." Lance faltered, his face heating up crimson. "A lot of that could just be coincidental. There's no guarantee that anything that's happened between us actually means something. We could all be wrong and then I'd have messed everything up!" Lance insisted quite a lot louder than he had intended. Several customers looked up at him and he shrank down into himself, ears heating up. This was not how he liked to hold the attention of the room.

But not for long, as behind the counter a door flung open, and a tall ginger man strode out, twirling his moustache with concentrated purpose.

"Ah, young Hunkules! The tiny story box with the gangsters in has gone wrong and it needs your masterful eye to fix it."

Hunk went very pale. "Oh shit!"

"Shit indeed, my young Padawan." He nodded as Hunk sprang away toward the back room.

Coran's eyes alighted on Lance. "Just the man I was looking for! Care to take a turn about the street with me, lad?"

Lance cringed internally. Just when he was in the middle of something. But no protest made its way from his head to his mouth.

"I guess." He nodded.

Coran grinned and Lance could have sworn he actually physically saw his eyes twinkling.

"Good, good! It might surprise you to hear I have some questions for you."

-- - --

"And he's quite convinced he's turning into this... mothman?"

Lance nodded. "He's certain. In a few weeks he's going to leave and- be with his people. Go fly around lampshades with all the other moths."

"And do you believe him? That he's actually a huge butterfly?" Coran looked at him appraisingly.

Lance had never actually realised how studious and sane Coran could seem when he wasn't, well, Coraning. It was funny, but right now, walking along with the man felt consoling. Almost like he was family.

"I-" He breathed heavily. "I believe him. Something is changing him, and he just seems like he knows so much more than I do about it. I’ve looked up his symptoms, all of them, so many times, and there’s just nothing out there! Nobody can tell me what’s wrong, and I have to be on his side but-"

“But he doesn’t look anything like a moth." Coran finished.

Lance nodded in stunned silence, his mouth suddenly feeling very dry.

They were sitting on a park bench somewhere not far from the cafe. There was a playground a while off that was surprisingly full, for such a cold, bitter day. There was sun, shining full blast down on
them, but it felt weak, thin almost. Or perhaps that was just Lance. Who was Cold.

“Well well.” Coran stroked his chin studiously. “Looks like me and our fuzzy friend are going to need a little chat. Now in the meantime… How are you, Lance? How’s our loverboy holding up?”

Lance blinched. “Excuse me? What?”

“Come on lad, don’t look at me like I’m a Spungling Warbonak! I’ve seen all those soulful looks you and Keith keep giving each other? You don’t just go blind when you turn fifty, you know.” He said pointedly in his twangy New Zealand accent.

Lance found a sudden studious interest in a nearby tree. Carved deep near the base were two sets of initials surrounded by a crudely carved heart. He wondered if the couple who carved it were still together or if they had been flung apart by time and fate and themselves, just like-

No, that wasn’t anything to do with him and Keith. Dammit, he wasn’t going to keep thinking about this. He couldn’t.

Beside him Coran sighed. “Now, I know you don’t want to take advice from an old bugger like me but hear me out. I’ve been in a situation just like this.”

“Have you? Really?” Lance asked bitterly. “You’ve really been right here? In love with a terrifying, inspired boy who you know it’ll never work out with but you can’t stop thinking about it? What, did you have a crush on fucking bigfoot? Because I really don’t think I have anything in common with you at all, Coran, no offence.” He picked a rogue hairpin out of his pocket and twisted it, distorting the thin metal quite out of shape. Destroying it.

“You know, Lance, you have a reputation for being quite the loud young lad. The jokester, the flirt. Now, if I didn’t know you I might say you were just obnoxious.” Coran’s brow furrowed. “Except you care a deal too much for that don’t you, eh? You put a lot of thought into what other people think of you, more than they ever realise. Maybe more than you should. Now, I think you worry about how little everyone else seems to think of you when you’re not talking.”

Lance did a double take. “Wh-”

“Just one of a big family, I’d warrant. Born somewhere near the middle, and with siblings that just seem so much more interesting than you are, so much more accomplished. Am I correct?”

Lance ran out of words. He nodded numbly.

“And now for what feels like the first time you’ve managed to find someone who looks at you even when you aren’t talking.”

Coran stared out into the distance before him wistfully, and the park seemed almost to get bigger, filled with thoughts Lance could never know fully. Now he started to wish he actually knew a thing about Coran. Apart from the fact that he was Allura’s supposed ‘uncle’ or at least legal guardian, almost nothing was known about the man, though he was not cryptic. Lance wondered if maybe it was because he never asked the man questions. Now Lance wished he had tried harder.

“I don’t know… If when I ask him, he’d say yes. Even if he wanted to, he might still- have to leave. I can’t make him stay, you know. Moth or furry, or whatever the fuck he even is, I can’t change that, and I wouldn’t want to, but doesn’t that mean- that it isn’t really meant to be? I- I just don’t know what I should do.”
The older man sighed, and in that moment he looked very, very old. Like there were Eons of history towering above his shoulders, the pillars of responsibility, slowly but surely crushing his body down.

“If you worry about it not working out, then whyever don’t you ask? Maybe your odds aren’t fantastic if you ask, but they’re nothing if you don’t. Chances- much like young, pretty alien boys are things that can slip through your fingers so easily, Lad. More often than not they can just disappear like smoke. But if you just give up on yourself, if you never allow yourself the opportunity for happiness even when it’s within your reach then you’re going to spend your whole life miserable. It’s as simple as that.”

Coran patted him gently on the shoulder.

“You know, Keith has a great deal here. He has friends, and family, of a sort, and he’s found something very, very special with you. Don’t let him abandon all this for a dream he doesn’t really want. It could be the biggest mistake of his life.”

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It was eight in the evening. Not very late but Lance was exhausted through to his soul, and sleep beckoned. He lay, all toasty in bed, wearing his very favourite Mrs Blue Lion pyjamas, a gift from his mother after she’d stumbled upon a gift shop that seemed to feature precious merchandise of every cartoon he had loved as a child (and every protagonist seven year old Lance had had a crush on, which was a category supernumerary). He’d put his phone down in a second, he told himself as he stared blankly at the screen.

The group chat was practically blowing up with messages. Lance would just see what they were screaming about and then he would turn it off, he decided. Alarm be damned. He didn’t have any classes tomorrow morning anyhow, so what the hell. It wasn’t like there was much to sleep through in his miserable fucker of a life.

Mattmatt: Hey any of you wanna make this Ancient Aliens marathon any less awkward? Keith won’t stop eating slices of cheese and i’m like 90% sure he’s lactose intolerant

Hunk・゚☆✧: Thought you two were gunna get high?

Mattmatt: Yea this weed is shit

Mattmatt: Not doing anything for Keeth

Mattmatt: He keeps addressing inanimate objects in his room as ‘yall’ and keeps going to the bathroom but not to pee. I think he’s either avoiding me or he’s going to look at himself in the mirror. Am thinking of climbing from window next time he goes.

Pidgeon: U know u have a housekey now right?

Mattmatt: Y would i use thaat

Mattmatt: U lose,,,
Mattmatt: thrill of the chase
Mattmatt: glory of escape
Mattmatt: compelling feeling of victory against adversity
Mattmatt: U dont get that walking out the front door
Mattmatt: Also @lancelot. U ok? Looked ill today in work
Hunk・☆: He’s ok, just a bit emotionally exhausted
Hunk・☆: U know how it can be
Mattmatt: :C poor lanc
Pidgeon: Is he still angsting over keith?
Hunk・☆: WAt?
Pidgeon: Like before in the coffee shop?
Hunk・☆: Howd you know about that
Pidgeon: I was literally right there with you?? I was in the booth having a scone did you really not see me?
Hunk・☆: ...no
Mattmatt: dont b mean 2 my sister >:l
Hunk・☆: Im not being mean okay? I just didnt see her there
Pidgeon: its literally fine you know
Pidgeon: besides keith was angsting about lance with me afterwards
Mattmatt: Angsting about lance
Mattmatt: LAngsting
Mattmatt: hahaha
Pidgeon: I swear those two need to get it together. I dont know how much more gay sadness i can even deal with
Hunk・☆: They just need some time to come 2 terms with it, yknow?
Pidgeon: They can come to terms with THIS.

Attached to that particular message was a link to a video. Almost instinctively Lance clicked it, only to hear the sound of Cascada’s seminal hit Everytime We Touch blast through the room from his tinny speakers. Cheesy pink lettering appeared up on screen, reading ‘keith and lance moments recorded for posterity’. As lance watched, the loud music was accompanied by video. Video of him and keith in the bookstore, talking. He and keith were sitting together on the same ratty couch, as
Keith passionately described some diagram in the large book he was wielding entitled ‘Nessie- Fact or Fiction?’ Keith made a wide, sweeping gesture and hit Lance in the nose. Keith drew back his hand like he’d been shot, blinking cautiously at Lance, afraid he’d been hurt, and then they were both laughing, giggling together like children, and oh so close to each other.

The scene changed, to several other moments he recognised. Dancing together to the christmas music, Lance falling from that ladder and Keith catching him. Wait, what was this now? Just as the chorus kicked in Lance started to see moments he didn’t remember. That looked like the upstairs of the bookstore, except filled with people, and everyone was counting down. Then Keith was in his arms and they were kissing, unprompted, passionately.

Lance dropped the phone and charged for the door, grabbing his trainers and his jacket. Ignoring everything else possibly he flung himself in a trajectory, towards the door, towards Keith and towards Love.

Coran had been right. Everyone had been right but there was no time to think about that now. Lance had a man- he meant, an opportunity…

No, that was wrong. He had a man to grasp. And Dear God if he wasn’t going to seize that beautiful boy with both hands.

Chapter End Notes

THIS BURN IS NOW SMOULDERING! THESE BOYS ARE GONNA GET JIGGY WITH IT I SWEAR
FIND ME AT MOTHDADS.TUMBLR.COM OR RAUM AT RAUMIKINS.TUMBLR.COM
THANK YOU FOR READING I LOVE YOU

End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Collab between two bros: Dean aka Mothdad and Raum aka Mothmum

Find us on tumblr at mothdads.tumblr.com and raumikins.tumblr.com!

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