

Somebody to Lean on

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Somebody to Lean on

by [Pikaknight](#)

Summary

It's White Day, and Ace and Lance want to spend the day together. Unfortunately, the Guild assigned Ace another mission. While waiting for Ace, Lance has a nightmare that involves his greatest fears. When Ace finally arrives, Ace attempts to comfort Lance, but the moment is ruined because of his injuries. Lance confronts him about his missions and injuries, and he isn't pleased with what he hears.

Set after episode 81. One shot.

Notes

Belated Happy White Day, everyone! I'm sorry this is late. I promised everyone a White Day sequel to my Lean on Me story, and even though it's three weeks late, I hope this makes everyone happy.

Speaking of which, if you haven't read my Lean on Me story, I would highly suggest that you read that first. This story will have details from that story in this one, but if you don't care about some of the small details or the important details (like how Ace and Lance got together or about Ace accepting S-ranked missions), feel free to continue reading.

There are some mentions of Ace's Ra Soul Armor and Lance attacking Crocus in his Reversion state, but other than that, there aren't any spoilers.

I hope you all enjoy it!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“Why did you let him spot you?” Ace said, looking over at Tamazo as he ran. His cheeks flushed pink from the early afternoon sun’s rays.

Tamazo flew past him, moving his legs rapidly as if he was trying to run in the air. “You can’t hide my star-like quality, tama!”

Hearing a loud and *angry* roar behind him, Ace looked behind him, wondering why this situation seemed familiar.

Infernodragon Muspelheim chased after them in the air. He breathed a plume of flames toward them, making Ace and Tamazo jump and hastily move out of the way.

The dragon growled, unpleased his prey managed to dodge his flames. His normal blue eyes were a dark red, expressing his fury and a tiny hint of sorrow.

Upon spotting the dragon closing in with his powerful wings, Ace’s eyes widened. He looked back at Tamazo, noticing that his partner wasn’t paying attention. “Tamazo, duck!”

Tamazo’s eyes lit up. He drooled as he looked around. “Duck, tama? Where, tama?”

Wondering how Tamazo could think about food at a time like this, Ace grabbed Tamazo by his arm and quickly dove to the ground with him in his arms, turning around midair to protect his partner from hitting the hard ground.

He yelped as his back hit the ground, Tamazo calling his name worriedly. He sat up, groaning and resisting the urge to let go of Tamazo to rub the sore spot on his back.

Just as he was about to reassure Tamazo, though, his eyes spotted the dragon approaching them.

He hastily bent over on his stomach, shielding Tamazo with his body. Not even a moment later, Ace felt the heat from the dragon’s burning wings and burning forelegs as the dragon flew over them, thankfully not hitting them.

Ace sat up, sighing.

That was close.

Tamazo wiggled in his hold, causing Ace to let go. Tamazo floated closer to him, looking concerned. “Are you alright, Ace? Ace protected Tama, tama.”

Not only that, but Ace had protected him twice.

Ace smiled, feeling his heart racing. “I’m alright, Tamazo. Don’t worry.”

Considering what day it was, he wanted to finish this mission as soon as possible.

It was White Day.

But Ace was on another S-ranked mission.

The Guild had asked him to take care of this mission, promising to give him the rest of the day off when he finished.

The Guild had also said something else, but Ace couldn't remember what they said, distracted at the thought of spending the rest of the day with his *boyfriend*.

After Valentine's Day, Ace and Lance had talked about their relationship, both agreeing to the title of boyfriends.

Lance preferred to call Ace his *mate* (which would always fluster Ace), but he agreed to call him his boyfriend in public.

Or partner.

Lance seemed to like calling Ace his partner too.

When Ace had pointed out that Devi was his partner, Lance had smoothly replied that Ace was his *romantic partner*, making Ace's cheeks flush pink.

Ace had already sent a message to Lance earlier that morning, telling him that he had a mission but had the rest of the day off.

And with his luck, today's mission had seemed straightforward.

At least at first.

The Guild had assigned him a mission in the mountains.

It was to stop a rampaging Infernodragon Muspelheim.

The Guild didn't know why the monster was rampaging. The dragon had already attacked many travelers and merchants making their way up the mountain, inconveniencing everyone.

And maybe it was because he felt the situation was familiar, but Ace was beginning to think that this dragon needed their help.

Tamazo was about to say something, but the dragon flew back toward them, letting out another roar.

Instead of trying to hit them with his wings again, though, his wings flapped as he flew in place for a moment before slowly lowering his body to the ground. The quadruped landed thirty feet away, and once his feet touched the rough rocky terrain, he looked at his prey and growled.

Tamazo narrowed his eyes, moving in front of Ace. "This time, Tama will protect Ace, tama!"

Ace blinked, surprised. He smiled a soft smile before standing up. “Thank you, Tamazo.” His eyes narrowed, one of his hands pulling out his red D-Gear. “But if we have to fight, we’re fighting together. Right?”

Tamazo looked back at him, surprised. A moment later, he nodded, his eyes expressing his determination. “Right, tama! Let’s do this, tama!”

Ace gave him a confident grin before looking at the dragon, determination in his eyes. “I don’t want to fight you. I’m here to help you. Please believe me.”

Muspelheim breathed a plume of flames at them, causing them to hastily jump out of the way.

“Ace! This guy won’t listen, tama! We have to fight, tama!”

Ace ignored Tamazo, looking up at the dragon with pleading eyes. “Did someone hurt you? Or capture your friends? Please let me help you.”

Muspelheim took one step forward, glaring at the human.

The human wanted to help him?

Impossible.

The humans were the reason he was in this mess in the first place.

Yet something about this human was... *off*.

His instincts told him that this was no ordinary human, making him pause.

It wasn’t that this human was a Dragon Caller.

He couldn’t put his claw on it, but this human felt (and smelled) differently than the other humans he had encountered before.

This human... almost smelled like a Dragonoid.

He shook his head, slamming his long, dark red tail against the ground irritably.

What was he thinking?

This was a human.

Not a Dragonoid.

Regardless, he trusted his instincts.

He would have to be careful not to let his guard down.

Watching the human and the small, strangely shaped monster that was with him, he breathed another plume of flame, hoping they understood the underlying message.

Ace and Tamazo dodged the flames once more, eyeing the dragon warily.

Tamazo flew over to Ace's shoulder, determination in his eyes. He brought his arms up and held them near his chest. "We need to fight, tama, Ace!"

Ace reluctantly nodded, holding up his D-Gear. "Right. Let's do this." He raised his arms above his head and crossed them at the wrists, forming a X pattern. "Cross On!"

Golden light shined from his D-Gear, signifying the start. Once the golden light covered his body, he brought his arms down, the motion resembling a martial arts motion.

The sleeves resembling bandages formed on his arms first. The golden gauntlets formed next. Armor appeared on his shoulders, and the armor that formed on his legs almost reached his waist.

Ra's golden armor appeared on his waist, the purple and gold skirt and beige tunic appearing a moment later. Golden armor formed on his collarbone, Ra's jewel hanging from the armor. His golden headdress formed last, feeling Ra's strength as the green wings formed on his back.

Ace stood in front of the dragon, wearing his Soul Armor. Since he didn't need to hide his identity and hoping he could still convey his emotions to the angry dragon, the black visor that normally formed over his eyes didn't appear.

"Cross On, tama!" Tamazo quickly transformed into his wood element form. "Awesome!"

No one moved for several moments, a tense atmosphere surrounding the area.

Sensing an opportunity, the dragon quickly stepped forward, breathing flames toward them.

Surprised at how quick Muspelheim was, Ace barely avoided the brunt of the attack by flying to his left, gritting his teeth as flames licked at the bare skin on top of his right shoulder unprotected by his armor as well as his right wing.

He hissed at the burning sensation on his skin and looked back at his right wing, quickly flapping his wings to put out the flames.

"Ace! Watch out!"

Ace belatedly remembered that the dragon was still near him and quickly looked back.

Only for the dragon to swing his tail toward him.

Unable to dodge the attack in time, Ace cried out as the tail struck him in his chest, almost not hearing Tamazo's shout of his name as the force of the attack caused him to slam against the rock wall of the nearest mountain.

He cried out once more as his back slammed against the rock wall, eyes closed at the pain.

The force of the impact left a large crater in the wall, Ace gritting his teeth and struggling to get up in the middle of it.

Pain.

It felt as if pain was everywhere.

He could vaguely hear Tamazo shouting his name as well as the sound of large footsteps approaching him, and while he knew he should recognize *why* Tamazo was shouting his name and *why* large footsteps approached him, he couldn't remember.

The pain was making him lose his focus, his body screaming at him to rest.

One part of his brain not focused on the pain repeatedly called him an idiot.

And Ace felt inclined to agree.

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to accept missions when his injuries hadn't healed yet.

Every time he moved, he felt throbbing pain in his ribs and back. His chest injury was smarting. And he could feel some liquid trickling down his face.

Judging by the throbbing pain in his head, he guessed that his head injury had opened again.

Which meant the liquid was blood.

He felt burning pain in his right shoulder.

It felt like the skin was ripping apart.

Wait...

Burning pain... Large footsteps... Tamazo shouting his name...

His eyes shot open, spotting the large dark red dragon approaching him.

When he finally pushed himself away from the wall and stood up, his body swayed, threatening to collapse.

He groaned, shaking his head to clear the black spots that formed on the edges of his vision as well as the dizziness.

He couldn't pass out now.

He still had a job to do.

Once he was close enough, Infernodragon Muspelheim swung his tail once more, aiming for his chest.

Ace dodged the attack by flying up. He hovered in the air at the dragon's eyelevel, narrowing his eyes.

He raised his right arm, gritting his teeth at the pain from his shoulder and wiped away the blood from his face.

Tamazo flew up to greet him, his eyes expressing his concern. “Ace! I’m glad! Are you alright?”

Even now, it was taking all of Ace’s willpower and stubbornness not to pass out, determined not to worry Tamazo more than he already had.

He couldn’t stop his pained face, though, as he looked at his partner. “I’m alright, Tamazo.” After giving him the most confident grin that he could muster at the moment, he looked back at Muspelheim.

Tamazo felt worried. His partner’s injuries hadn’t healed yet, and he knew the count would only increase after they finished this mission.

They needed to finish this mission as soon as possible, so Ace could receive treatment and rest.

A white haired Dragonoid came to mind, making him pale.

He was *not* looking forward to *his* reaction to Ace’s injuries.

If the white haired Dragonoid allowed Ace to return to his missions, Tamazo would eat his hat.

“Let’s go, Tamazo!”

Tamazo looked at him, feeling worried at seeing Ace’s brief pained look before a determined look took its place.

The pained look had been brief, but Tamazo knew he didn’t imagine it.

He nodded, determination in his eyes. He looked at the dragon, raising his staff. “You can count on me!”

Muspelheim growled, displeased the human dodged his attack.

But he could tell that the human still felt pain from his earlier attacks, and upon noticing the crater he created, he couldn’t help but feel smug at his strength.

He was about to take advantage of the human’s conversation with his strangely shaped monster, already planning to grab the human with his tail and squeeze that small body until it broke.

But something made him pause.

His instincts were warning him again.

Why it was happening *now* when he had the advantage, he didn’t know.

He would've normally never thought it before this moment, but...

Maybe his instincts were wrong?

Unfortunately, his instincts proved him wrong as Ace flew forward, his right hand forming a fist and pulling his arm back.

Muspelheim froze, surprised at how quick the human was and at how his body had refused to move.

But before his fist could touch the dragon, Ace stopped close to the dragon's face, his fist uncurling as he reached out and touched the dragon's snout with his palm. His hand rested on a spot below the dragon's long red horn.

Muspelheim could've sworn that one of the human's blue eyes had turned red.

And the human wasn't this fast before.

Wasn't the human injured? How did he move quickly with his injuries?

Noticing that the dragon wasn't attacking, Ace smiled. "It's alright. I'm not here to hurt you. Please let me help you."

The dragon unfroze, feeling his fury from earlier return. It burned like the fire in his belly. He answered Ace by shaking his head away from the (surprisingly gentle) touch and breathing fire toward him.

Ace easily dodged the attack by flying to his left, looking at him with pleading blue eyes. "Please! I'm here to help. I don't want to hurt you." When the dragon only swung his tail at him, he raised one hand and blocked the blow by grabbing onto it.

Muspelheim narrowed his eyes, struggling to move his tail and hit the human.

But the human was holding onto his tail with a firm grip, not allowing him to move his tail away.

Had he underestimated this human?

He roared, breathing fire once more. When Ace, still holding onto his tail, dodged it by moving away, he growled, leaning in to bite the human.

Ace let go of his tail, quickly moving away to avoid the approaching tail and mouth. He hovered in place a few feet away, watching the dragon roar at his failed attacks.

Since he had moved in close to look in the dragon's eyes, Ace had seen the hidden sorrow in the dragon's eyes.

He knew that Muspelheim wouldn't start attacking without good reason, but what was his sorrow about?

He wanted to help the dragon.

But the dragon wouldn't let him.

How was he supposed to help?

"Ace!"

Ace blinked, surprised Tamazo's voice came from right beside him. He looked over, seeing that Tamazo was pointing at something. "What is it, Tamazo?"

"This guy is injured!"

Ace blinked, confused. "We're in the middle of a fight, Tamazo. I think both of us have injuries."

"But my attacks didn't cause any damage, and I know you didn't hurt him, Ace."

Ace furrowed his brow.

Tamazo had attacked the dragon? When was that?

Maybe when his mind had succumbed to the pain after slamming into the wall?

He followed Tamazo's arm with his eyes, not noticing the injury at first due to the dragon's colors.

But then he saw dark red liquid trickling out of an open wound on one of the dragon's forelegs.

"That's it! He's injured! When did you spot that, Tamazo?"

Tamazo smiled cheerfully. "Just now when he attacked you with his tail." Ace sweat dropped. "I didn't think to look at his legs before, but it makes sense. No wonder this guy roars a lot. I thought it was because of his anger," Tamazo said, nodding his head.

Ace sweat dropped once more, smiling. "Is that so? Good job finding it, Tamazo." He looked around his surroundings, hoping to find some heart drops.

But there weren't any heart drops in their local area.

He closed his eyes, hearing Tamazo ask what they're supposed to do now.

He breathed in deeply, his face contorting in pain at the action. He let it out, reaching his hands out and concentrating on the flow of drops around them as well as the unseen drops.

He could sense which drops were around them, and he could tell that they would come to him if he reached out for them.

Some fire drops hovered near him, and he could sense water drops behind him as well as in the clouds.

Behind him at a distance, he could sense wood drops, light drops, and a few dark drops.

But that wasn't what he was searching for.

He didn't need any of the elemental drops.

Most mountains had a water source where monsters would quench their thirst at.

It was there at the water source that he would find what he was searching for.

“Ace! Watch out!”

But Ace was too focused on what he was doing that he didn't hear Tamazo or notice that the dragon had once again swung his tail at them.

It had taken almost all his remaining strength, but he had found the water source.

Well, if he were honest, he sensed two large water sources.

He could sense one deep in the caverns of the mountain, flowing underneath the ground. The other water source was a lake in one of the forests behind him.

The water source underneath him was closer, so he called for the drops, asking them to answer.

A few moments later, countless water and dark drops as well as some heart drops appeared from the ground, floating up and around them.

Noticing the drops around them, Muspelheim stopped his attack, his tail stopping a few inches from Ace's head.

Tamazo sighed, relieved. “That was close!” He furrowed his brow. “Why did he stop?”

Muspelheim hated to admit it, but the way this human could sense the drops and ask them to come...

It was impressive.

He had never seen a Dragon Caller in action before.

He had heard of them, and a small part of him had hoped that he would have the chance to help a worthy Dragon Caller one day, but this display of strength...

No wonder this human was a Dragon Caller.

His tail slowly lowered as he watched the human warily.

Did the human call for the drops to attack him with them?

But if he wanted to, the human could've done that before... right?

Ace knew Muspelheim was still feeling cautious (especially at the appearance of the water drops), so he opened his eyes and looked at the dragon, holding his hands up with his palms facing the dragon.

After giving Muspelheim a reassuring smile, he slowly flew closer to the large creature.

The dragon thought the human would touch his snout again, but to his surprise, the human flew lower, causing him to snort, confused.

It didn't take long for Ace to arrive at the dragon's injury. He gestured to the injury, looking concerned. "You're injured. Please let me help."

Muspelheim blinked, surprised. His rage had made him forget about the injury. He looked at the human warily.

Maybe this human wasn't like the ones he had encountered before.

This human was a Dragon Caller for a reason, right?

It was clear the small monster that was with this human cared about him a lot.

And it didn't seem as if the human was hurting or somehow tricking the monster.

His instincts told him that he could trust this human and that this human was different than the others.

This human was... *kind*.

Ace waited patiently, not wanting to heal Muspelheim without his consent. For several moments, he thought the dragon would refuse and try to attack him, but his worries disappeared at the dragon's reluctant nod and snort.

He smiled a bright smile. "Thank you!"

Reaching his right hand out to his side, he grit his teeth at the pain from his arm and shoulder.

Heart drops lined themselves up into rows of three, and Ace hissed as he moved his arm back toward the dragon and transferred the healing energy of the drop into the injury.

Almost immediately, the blood stopped flowing.

As Ace kept feeding the drop power into the injury, it slowly started closing, and in a few moments, the injury had healed.

The blood on the dragon's foreleg as well as the small puddle of blood on the ground was the only proof that the dragon had suffered from an injury at all.

Ace smiled, flying up to look the dragon in his eyes. "Do you feel better?"

Muspelheim moved the foreleg tentatively, surprised when he didn't feel any pain.

The human had healed him.

He looked at the human, grunting his reply.

Taking the grunt as a positive answer, Ace felt glad that he could help. "One more thing." Reaching out once more and gritting his teeth at the pain, he grabbed one of the nearby fire drops.

Holding it in one hand, he showed it to the dragon. "This will help with the energy that you lost."

The dragon nodded, reluctantly opening his mouth.

Ace let go of the fire drop, sending a fire drop combo to the dragon's mouth with one clean sideways sweep of his arm.

Almost immediately, he hissed at the pain from the action.

Maybe he should stick with using his left arm for now.

Ace fed the dragon a few fire drop combos, only stopping when the dragon closed his mouth.

The dragon roared, causing Ace and Tamazo to wince.

Muspelheim slammed his tail on the ground, feeling pleased that he recovered his energy.

He growled something, his red eyes returning to their normal blue.

"Eh? What is it?" Ace said, confused.

Tamazo blinked, surprised. "He said thank you."

Ace looked at Tamazo, surprised before looking at Muspelheim. He smiled a bright smile. "I'm glad you feel better." He furrowed his brow, concern in his eyes. "Who injured you?"

Muspelheim slammed his tail on the ground once more, looking away from those concerned eyes and growling something reluctantly.

Tamazo's eyes widened at the answer. "What? That's terrible!"

Ace looked over at Tamazo, confused. "What is it?"

Tamazo looked at him, narrowing his eyes. "He said that some poachers tried to capture him."

Ace's eyes widened before quickly narrowing, his hands forming fists. "I won't forgive them!"

Tamazo nodded, raising his staff threateningly. "I won't forgive them either!"

Muspelheim growled something else, causing Tamazo to look over, surprised.

It didn't take long for Tamazo to growl.

Ace blinked, gaping at Tamazo.

Tamazo actually... *growled*?

Looking over and noticing Ace's baffled look, Tamazo tightened his grip on his staff. "He said that the poachers hurt his friends and captured them."

Ace's mouth opened, belatedly understanding why Tamazo growled and why Muspelheim had attacked them.

The poachers had captured Muspelheim's friends and had tried to capture him. After Muspelheim had broken free of the trap, injuring himself in the process, he had probably tried to chase after them, but he didn't succeed.

When Ace and Tamazo had appeared, Muspelheim must've gave in to his rage and started attacking them, unable to stop himself at the sight of the human.

The rage and pain must've blinded him and overtook most of his senses.

It all made sense now.

Ace's eyes narrowed, his jaw clenching.

The poacher's actions were unforgivable.

He wouldn't let them off easy.

After several moments, he let go of his anger, taking a deep breath to calm down. He looked back at Muspelheim and gave him a reassuring smile. "Leave it to me. I promise I'll save all of your friends."

Muspelheim looked into the human's eyes curiously, wondering if the human was going to fight the poachers.

Something about the human's words sounded wrong to him, though.

He shook his head, slamming his tail into the ground and growling something.

Before Tamazo could translate, Ace nodded his head, somehow understanding what he meant. "I'm going to get them back, so let's fight together."

He knew Muspelheim wanted to fight the poachers himself and hurt them for hurting and capturing his friends, and while he felt concerned the poachers would hurt Muspelheim again, he wouldn't ignore the dragon's feelings.

Muspelheim looked at him, surprised.

The human wanted to... fight together with him?

What a strange human.

No.

This... *Dragon Caller* wanted to fight together with him.

Almost immediately, a corner of his mouth quirked up, forming a smirk.

Those *humans* wouldn't know what hit them.

He nodded, roaring his approval and turning his head to breathe a small plume of flames.

Ace and Tamazo winced at the volume of the roar.

Once the roar ended, Ace smiled, eyes sparkling. "Thank you!"

He turned away from the dragon, his eyes darkening, a scowl on his face as he thought about the poachers. His hands formed fists at his sides.

He closed his eyes, and when he opened them a moment later, one of them was a dark blue while the other was a darkened red, his Dragonoid power making his red eye flash threateningly.

Unforgivable!

ZZZ

Darkness.

Darkness was everywhere.

Lance looked down at his hands, feeling surprised he could see himself in this persistent darkness. His body glowed for some reason, allowing him to see himself.

He looked up, raising his eyebrow.

Where was he?

Nothing was around him.

Only darkness.

Looking around, he automatically noticed two things that was strange.

One was that Devi wasn't with him.

The other was that there was no noise.

He walked forward, hearing his footsteps and stopped after a few steps.

"Where are you, Devi?"

He expected Devi to appear, calling his name like he always did.

But Devi didn't appear.

It was crazy, but the darkness looked like it was laughing at him. Parts of the darkness moved back and forth as if the darkness had a body shaking from laughter.

“Devi!”

When Devi still didn't appear (even after he forced himself to wait for him to appear), his eyes darkened, a scowl on his face as he looked at the darkness around him.

The darkness taunted him, daring him to walk further into the darkness.

If he walked further into the darkness, would he find Devi?

He grit his teeth, shaking his head at his thoughts.

That was what the darkness wanted him to do.

Ignoring that he thought of the darkness as if it was a person, he glared. “Where is he?”

Idiot.

It wasn't like the darkness could or would respond to him.

To his shock, cruel laughter echoed around him. “*He's not here, Dragonoid,*” the darkness snarled, putting emphasis on the word Dragonoid.

Lance growled, tempted to pull out his blue D-Gear and fight. It was crazy to think about since he couldn't fight darkness, but if it would help him find Devi, he would. “Give him back.”

“*The Dragonoid is high and mighty even after what he did? Pathetic.*”

Lance froze, eyes widening at the words that echoed around him.

The darkness could only be talking about when he was in his Reversion state.

“That's none of your business. Give Devi back.”

The darkness laughed. It was a cruel and mocking laugh. “*None of my business? And you have the nerve to call that Ace an idiot.*”

Lance growled, stepping closer. “Be quiet! He has *nothing* to do with this!”

“*I beg to differ. Isn't he the one who saved you? He has everything to do with this.*”

Feeling curious despite himself, Lance looked around at the darkness, unsure where to glare at. “What do you mean?”

“You thought it a few months ago, didn’t you? You’re darkness.”

Lance blinked, surprised.

How did the darkness know that?

“There can’t be both light and darkness. Only one. Light would only hurt you.”

Lance glared an icy glare.

It was almost scary how this darkness knew his deepest thoughts and feelings.

But the thing that unsettled him was how the darkness kept talking about Ace.

If it was thinking about hurting Ace, he wouldn’t let it.

“What a scary look.”

Lance hated how he could tell that the darkness’ voice sounded amused.

“Weren’t you the one who thought that you didn’t deserve to live alongside him?”

It was true Lance had thought that, but Ace had told him that he...

“I don’t care what you or anyone else thinks. Ace wants me,” Lance said, one of his hands reaching into a pocket and taking out his D-Gear. He held it out in front of him. “And if you or anyone else tries to hurt him or get in my way, I won’t hold back.”

“How sweet.”

Lance’s grip on his D-Gear tightened, not wanting to give in to the temptation and try to fight the darkness. All it was doing was taunting him and insulting him.

Why was he falling for it?

This was stupid.

Cursing, he turned around, intending to walk away.

He didn’t have to put up with this.

He felt like an idiot.

But as he started walking, his ears picked up the darkness’ cruel laughter, causing him to stop.

“You’ll soon see that you can’t protect your precious Ace from everything.”

Lance turned back around, snarling. *“I won’t let you hurt him!”*

The darkness laughed, sounding amused. *“You’re so protective. But don’t worry. I wasn’t talking about me hurting him.”*

Lance’s glare didn’t relent, not believing the darkness’ words.

The darkness probably would’ve reassured him that he meant no harm again, but for the first time since Lance arrived at this... area, light shined in front of him, causing him to blink, surprised.

And it wasn’t just any light.

It was a familiar *golden* light.

The light itself was small.

It looked as small as a drop, but the golden light shined brightly.

It only seemed to shine brighter at noticing him, making him feel amused and happy.

“How sweet. Your boyfriend came to rescue you. You better look out for him. Or you could lose his love before your relationship even began.”

Ignoring the boyfriend comment, he glared, stepping closer to the light and cupping it gently with his free hand. He held it close to his chest, feeling Ace’s heartbeat through the light. “I won’t let anyone hurt him.”

“Too bad. Someone already hurt your Ace, and you couldn’t do anything to stop it. All you can do is watch him suffer.”

Lance growled, about to demand that the darkness tell him what it meant by that.

But the light close to his chest started shining brighter.

It got bright enough that he had to shield his eyes with the hand that was holding his D-Gear, not wanting to let go of the light.

A few moments later, he opened his eyes, blinking at the brightness of the new area.

When his eyes finally adjusted, he felt surprised to see that he was in a large meadow.

Countless flowers of all sorts of colors bloomed around him. Everywhere he looked, he could see fairy monsters as well as some baby monsters playing together in the grass.

The sun shone brilliantly. White, puffy clouds occasionally covered the sun.

Many of the monsters sunbathed while others preferred to lay down in the shade of a nearby tree. The fairy monsters giggled as they chatted to each other in their language. He could see the baby monsters’ parents watching over their kids from a safe distance.

“Lance-sama!”

Lance put away his D-Gear and blinked, surprised at the sound of his name. Recognizing the voice, he quickly turned around, noticing his partner approaching him. "Devi."

A couple of moments later, Devi flew into his chest, Lance automatically hugging Devi with his free arm.

Devi sniffed, eyes welling up with tears. "I'm sorry, Lance-sama! Devi couldn't help you, devi!"

Lance furrowed his brow before shaking his head, eyes softening. "I'm glad you're alright. Don't make me worry about you."

To his surprise, Devi tensed at his comment before pulling away from him and rubbing at his eyes with one arm.

Lance blinked, confused and concerned. "Devi?"

"I'm sorry I worried you, Lance-sama. But I'm alright," Devi said, looking around nervously.

Lance raised an eyebrow at Devi's behavior.

This kind of behavior from Devi was abnormal.

Was something wrong?

Devi looked into his eyes, hesitant. "Devi is alright thanks to Ace, devi."

Lance's eyes widened.

He had forgotten about Ace.

He looked at the hand that was holding Ace's light.

Only to see that it had disappeared.

He stared at his empty hand for a few moments before looking up and around the area. Not spotting him, he looked back at Devi, noticing how he kept looking around. "Where is he?"

Lance felt his heart drop as Devi shook his head, looking sad.

Assuming that meant that Devi couldn't find Ace (and not wanting to even think about the other possibility), he looked around the area.

But Ace still didn't appear.

Remembering what the darkness told him, he looked around the area once more. He would deny it if anyone asked, but this time, he looked around, worried.

Where was that idiot?

Why wasn't he appearing?

If this was Ace's idea of a joke...

He shook his head, mentally scolding himself.

Ace wouldn't joke about something like this.

But if this wasn't some sort of joke or prank...

What did it mean?

Refusing to dwell on those uncertain and confusing thoughts, he pulled out his D-Gear. He was about to call Ace, but a light out of the corner of his eyes caught his attention.

Quickly turning to face the light, his breath caught in his throat at the familiar golden light and the familiar figure.

Ace, who was wearing his Soul Armor, shined brilliantly in the air. He smiled brightly as he flew over to Lance, Lance walking closer to meet him halfway.

If Lance had looked back at Devi, he would've felt surprised to see that Devi's sad look didn't disappear.

A few moments later, Lance stopped and put away his D-Gear as Ace landed a few feet in front of him. Ace's Soul Armor disappeared, leaving Ace in his normal outfit.

But before either of them could speak or move closer, Ace hissed, his face contorting in pain as he grabbed his right shoulder with his left hand. His eyes caught Lance's concerned eyes as his body swayed before closing his eyes.

When Ace's body started falling, Lance immediately closed the gap and pulled Ace close to his chest, grunting as he felt him leaning his full body weight on him.

Ace opened his eyes, surprised he didn't hit the ground. And he would've thanked Lance if it weren't for the pain he felt from his injuries, causing him to close his eyes and groan.

"Are you alright?" Lance said, concerned. His eyes glanced at Ace's right shoulder and the hand that was grabbing it, tempted to reach out and cover it with his own but finally decided not to since he didn't want to hurt Ace.

Ace would've normally felt flustered at being this close to Lance, but he was in too much pain to feel flustered. His eyes opened, revealing pained eyes as he pulled away to look into Lance's eyes.

His mouth opened to reassure him, but the only thing that escaped his mouth was a whimper as he felt his ribs and head throbbing with pain.

Lance's eyes widened at the whimper. Before he could say anything, though, Ace closed his eyes, leaning his head on his shoulder.

Lance shook Ace gently by his arms, not wanting to touch his hurt shoulder. “What happened?”

He had a strange sense of foreboding that if he allowed Ace to close his eyes for any longer, he might lose him.

Ace hummed, his head not moving. When Lance only shook him once more, he groaned, letting go of his shoulder to wrap his arm around Lance’s back. “’M fine,” he muttered.

He knew Lance would protect him, and while part of him wanted to insist that he could protect himself, a larger part of him didn’t mind Lance’s protection (especially while he was in this vulnerable state) and welcomed it gladly.

Lance’s sharp ears easily picked up what he muttered, making him shake his head at Ace’s stubbornness. “You’re not fine!”

When Ace didn’t respond with words or some type of noise, Lance cursed. His eyes narrowed, pulling Ace away from him enough to see his face.

His heart jumped in his throat at seeing Ace’s closed eyes, feeling the worry from earlier.

He quickly knelt and lay Ace on the grass, starting to feel fear and dread.

No.

Ace couldn’t be...

His eyes darkened, pushing away the fear and dread as much as he could. “Damn it! Open your eyes!”

The sun was out, and he knew what Ace’s warmth felt like.

So why did Ace feel *cold*?

His mind not so helpfully reminded him of what the darkness said about someone already hurting Ace, causing him to curse, his hands forming fists.

The darkness was probably having a good laugh at his situation.

“Damn it, Ace! I won’t allow you to leave me!” This time, his tone sounded almost... *pleading*.

And normally, he would never speak with that tone, and he knew that if Ace opened his eyes and teased him about it, he would feel embarrassed.

But he would rather feel embarrassed and have an alive Ace compared to... whatever was happening with him now.

Once again, his mind not so helpfully reminded of something, but this time, he remembered his parents.

No.

Ace couldn't... Ace wouldn't...

He was about to bend over Ace and kiss him, thinking that would make Ace wake up.

But Ace *finally* groaned and opened his eyes.

The brunet opened his eyes slowly, squinting at the bright sunlight and tempted to groan as the light made the pain in his head worse. His eyes noticed a familiar Dragonoid beside him, making him smile.

Turning his head to look at Lance, his smile disappeared as he got a closer look at Lance's expression and body posture.

Lance's body posture was tense, his hands formed into fists. His eyes were narrowed, but it was those beautiful golden eyes that caught his attention.

Ace's breath caught in his throat at seeing the fear, dread, frustration, and panic in that beautiful golden eye not hidden by his hair.

"Lance..."

Ace spoke in a soft voice, but Lance easily heard him.

If Ace wasn't already injured, Lance would hit him for making him worry like that.

He had thought Ace was...

Shaking his head, he uncurled his hands, letting out a small relieved breath. He reached out with one hand, gently touching Ace's cold cheek. "Idiot. Don't make me worry about you."

Ace laughed a weak sheepish laugh, leaning into his touch. "I'm sorry. I was being reckless, but it was worth it." He smiled a soft smile, his eyes expressing his love and happiness. "I saved you."

Feeling his heart race at Ace's soft smile and look, Lance looked away. He was about to scold Ace for being reckless when he was still injured, but he was distracted by Devi flying over to join them.

But instead of joining Lance and hovering beside him, Devi hovered on Ace's other side.

Lance frowned, noticing that Devi still had a sad look on his face.

He was about to demand answers, but Ace turning his head to look at what Lance was looking at caught his attention.

Ace blinked, surprised to see Devi beside him. He smiled a soft smile, and if he had the strength, he would've tried to pet Devi on the head. "I'm glad you're alright, Devi. I'm sorry for doing everything myself. I know you wanted to help."

Lance blinked, confused.

What was Ace talking about?

He looked back at Devi, eyebrow raising at the expression on his partner's face.

Why did Devi look... *miserable*?

Devi reluctantly shook his head, knowing that it wasn't Ace's fault. "It's not your fault, devi. Thank you for saving Lance-sama, devi."

Lance nodded, understanding that they were talking about what happened with the darkness.

Devi's ears and wings drooped. "Maybe if Devi went back and helped, Devi could've helped you."

Ace's eyes softened, shaking his head. "Don't blame yourself, Devi. I had it coming with my recklessness. Take care of Lance and Tamazo for me, okay?"

Devi looked hesitant for a few moments before hitting his chest with one arm, determined. "Don't worry. Leave it to me, devi."

Lance narrowed his eyes at the strange conversation. Were they still talking about the darkness?

Why, then, did he get the feeling that he was missing something?

Something important?

Why did Ace ask Devi to look after him and his Tamadora partner? Did Ace have to leave them for some reason?

And *why* did Ace still feel cold?

Irritated, Lance took off his cloak, laying it on top of Ace.

Ace and Devi blinked and looked at Lance, surprised.

Belatedly, they realized Lance wouldn't know what they were talking about.

After exchanging a worried look with Devi, Ace looked up at Lance, smiling softly. "Thank you, Lance."

Lance looked down at him, giving him a curt nod.

Ace frowned at his behavior, but he didn't hold it against him.

It wasn't Lance's fault.

He blinked a few times, eyes threatening to close once more.

He felt his heart drop, instinctively knowing what was about to happen.

He thought he had enough time to tell Lance about what happened, but it seemed fate had other plans for him.

Ignoring Lance's concerned eyes, he looked back at Devi. "Sorry, Devi. I wanted to tell Lance, but it seems like you'll have to."

Devi's eyes widened before nodding, his sad look from earlier returning much to Lance's irritation. "Isn't there another way, devi?"

Ace sighed sadly, eyes expressing his regret. "You know there isn't. If there was, I wouldn't make you go through that conversation alone."

Devi's eyes narrowed. "Don't worry. Leave it to me, devi." He hit his chest with one arm, determined.

He was unable to completely hide the sadness in his eyes, though.

Lance had enough.

"What's going on?"

Ace and Devi jumped at hearing the anger in Lance's voice, looking over at him nervously.

Something was going on, and Lance was the only one who didn't know what it was.

And it angered him.

He was going to get his answers even if he had to force them to tell him.

Why did they think they could talk about him as if he wasn't there?

After exchanging a nervous look with Devi, Ace looked up at Lance, guilt in his eyes. "Sorry, Lance. I didn't mean to ignore you."

Lance shook his head, resisting the urge to form fists. "I don't care about that. Tell me what's going on." When Ace hesitated and shared an undecipherable look with Devi, he glared, feeling tempted to reach out and force Ace to look at him. "*Now, Ace.*"

Ace looked up at him, frowning. He blinked a few times, the exhaustion and pain from earlier returning at full force. He closed his eyes, groaning.

Why did this have to happen now?

Lance's anger melted at the groan, his concerned look from earlier returning. "Are you alright?"

Ace groaned once more, struggling to think past the pain. He could hear Lance and Devi's muffled voices above him, but he couldn't make out any words.

Opening his eyes, he immediately sat up, surprising Lance and Devi.

His body swayed, threatening to collapse. He groaned, shaking his head to clear the black spots that formed on the edges of his vision as well as the dizziness.

It didn't make any difference as his body fell backward.

His eyes closed, expecting to hit the grass.

But Lance easily reached out and caught him by carefully wrapping his arms around his shoulders and pulling Ace's body close to his chest.

Ace could feel the warm presence behind him, making him sigh contently.

Maybe it wouldn't be as bad as he thought.

Lance was with him.

Hearing Lance's voice near his ear say something, he struggled to open his eyes, wanting his boyfriend to be the last thing he saw.

He could hear Lance muttering something, but he couldn't tell if Lance directed those words toward him or Devi.

After several moments, Ace's eyes opened.

Squinting at the bright sunlight and tempted to groan as the light made the pain in his head worse, he blinked, surprised at noticing that Lance had lay him on the grass.

When did that happen?

He gasped at feeling something squeeze one of his hands.

He looked over at his hand, noticing a larger, paler hand holding onto it.

That was Lance's hand.

He squeezed back weakly before looking over at Lance, eyes expressing his sadness and guilt.

"Quit pushing yourself. Idiot," Lance said, reaching out with his free hand and touching Ace's closest cheek. His eyes widened, almost gasping at the temperature.

It felt *cold*.

Lance opened his mouth, but nothing escaped as Ace leaned into his touch, smiling softly. Lance looked away to compose himself before looking back at Ace. "Tell me what's going on."

Compared to earlier, though, no anger was present in his voice. Instead, he spoke in a soft voice.

Ace blinked a few times, eyes threatening to close once more.

Only this time, it would be for good.

He didn't have much time left.

While he felt guilty he was leaving Lance, he didn't regret his decision to save him. He felt happy that he could save Lance from the darkness.

If things were different, he would've fought with Lance by his side.

The thought brought a goofy smile to his face.

Noticing Lance's confused look, he reached out with his free hand to touch him.

He hissed as the movement aggravated his injuries, closing his eyes and pausing in the middle of his action.

Lance narrowed his eyes, but instead of speaking, he let go of Ace's cheek and touched his free hand, forcing it to slowly lower until it was next to Ace's side once more.

"It's alright. I'm here."

Hearing Lance's words, Ace breathed in as deep as his throbbing ribs would let him before letting it out, opening his eyes.

Spots swam before his eyes, making him shake his head stubbornly.

Resisting the urge to groan as that only made his head and dizziness worse, he looked away, gritting his teeth. Feeling Lance squeeze his hand once more, he looked back at him, more spots swimming before his eyes.

If Ace had more time and didn't feel weak, he would tell Lance everything he wanted to know.

He would kiss him over and over.

He would tell him that he would never leave him.

If he didn't feel weak, he might've laughed humorlessly at the irony.

If he had more time, he would've kissed Lance until he made his knees go weak.

That was something he had looked forward to doing.

And because of his recklessness, he wouldn't get to do that or see Lance again.

He didn't have enough time to tell Lance everything.

But he did have enough time to say something important.

He smiled softly. "I love you, Lance..."

He spoke in a soft voice, but he knew Lance could hear him.

Lance frowned. "I love you too. Ace, what...?"

Under different circumstances, Ace might've laughed at how confused Lance looked and sounded.

Feeling his strength leave him, he gave in to the temptation to close his eyes, missing the way Lance's eyes widened.

The dread and fear from earlier returned at seeing Ace close his eyes.

And while he wanted to say that Ace was exhausted and was only going to sleep, something told him that that wasn't the case.

"Open your eyes. Tell me what's going on."

But Ace's eyes remained closed.

"Ace! Open your eyes."

When Ace still didn't open his eyes, Lance was about to lean over and kiss him.

But Ace opened his eyes, struggling to keep his eyes open.

"It's alright, Lance."

Lance's eyes widened, watching as the light faded out of his eyes. Ace's hand grew cold and stony in his grasp.

Ace couldn't... Ace wouldn't...

Lance's eyes narrowed, letting go of Ace's hand. He reached out and held onto Ace's shoulders with both his hands, shaking him none too gently. "Don't go."

"Lance-sama..."

Lance's eyes looked up, glaring in Devi's direction. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Devi knew Lance would normally never look at him or talk to him that way, but he still felt nervous at seeing the anger. "I'm sorry, Lance-sama."

"Sorry? About what?"

Devi moved his arms and repeatedly made them touch.

It was such an Ace gesture that Lance barely stopped himself from growling at the thought that he would never see Ace do it again.

Lance shook his head, pushing away the thought as much as he could.

This was stupid.

He was overreacting.

Ace had... fallen unconscious.

They had to help him.

“Forget it, Devi. We need to help Ace.”

But to his surprise, Devi didn’t say anything. His partner didn’t even move.

“Devi?”

Devi shook his head, eyes looking sad. His arms had fallen to his sides. “He’s gone, Lance-sama.”

Lance frowned. “What are you talking about?”

“He’s gone, Lance-sama...”

Lance’s eyes narrowed, picking Ace up and leaning his head against his chest. He couldn’t help but grunt as he felt Ace’s full body weight leaning on him. “Stop speaking nonsense. Let’s go.”

What was Devi talking about?

How dare he make a joke at a time like this?

And not just any joke, but... *that* kind of joke.

A small part of him that he felt determined to ignore and push away said that Devi wasn’t joking.

Devi sighed.

He and Ace had both known that this conversation wouldn’t turn out well.

And he wasn’t surprised considering the subject of the conversation.

He flew over to Lance, stopping once he was close enough. He reached out with one arm, patting Ace on top of his head gently. “Thank you, devi. I’m sorry I couldn’t help, devi.”

Lance raised an eyebrow. He didn’t understand what Devi was doing or saying.

Couldn’t Devi say that when Ace woke up?

And since when was Devi *kind* to Ace?

Devi let his arm rest on top of Ace's head for a few more moments before letting it drop to his side. Noticing that Lance looked confused, he resisted the urge to touch him, knowing that he had to be strong.

Ace was counting on him.

"He's gone, Lance-sama..."

Lance glared at him, tightening his grip on Ace's body. "*Devi...*"

Ignoring the warning tone and the glare, Devi looked at Lance, determined. "He's gone, devi."

Lance scowled, tempted to walk away with Ace in his arms. "That isn't funny," he hissed.

"I'm not joking, Lance-sama."

"He's not—" Lance cut himself off, not even wanting to voice the word. His eyes expressed his fear and dread. He shook his head, bowing his head and letting go of Ace with one hand to tug his hat over his face.

"But he is, devi."

Lance tugged his hat away from his face as he looked up, glaring. He looked away and thrust his free hand out to the side, quickly forming a combo with three water drops.

With one downward motion of his arm, he slammed the drop power into the ground nearby.

The impact created a loud noise, startling the baby monsters that were playing nearby. A moment later, ice formed in the spot, causing some of the baby monsters to run away in fright.

And while Lance would normally never use his Dragon Caller powers like that or scare monsters away, he didn't care.

He felt like yelling.

He felt like destroying something.

An image of when he was in his Reversion state and when he attacked Crocus came to mind, making his eyes widen.

No.

He didn't want to lose himself in his anger again.

His free hand formed a fist, clenching it to keep repressed emotions from rising to the surface.

"I'm sorry, Lance-sama."

Lance looked back at Devi, eyes hardening.

“Devi wanted to help Lance-sama, but Devi couldn’t attack with the light drops. If I could go back, I would’ve tried to help him, devi. Devi would’ve stopped that idiot from being reckless, devi.”

Lance opened his mouth, about to give a curt reply.

But Devi continued speaking.

Lance frowned, closing his mouth.

It was clear that Devi was speaking, but...

If that was the case, why couldn’t he hear him?

It wasn’t just that, though.

He couldn’t hear anything.

He couldn’t hear the monsters’ voices in the background.

And, he realized, he couldn’t feel Ace’s skin anymore.

Before, Ace’s skin was cold.

But now, he couldn’t feel anything.

He couldn’t feel the temperature or even how soft it was.

If he wasn’t touching Ace, he would’ve thought that it was because he wasn’t touching him.

He raised an eyebrow as Devi cut himself off, his partner’s eyes widening. He was about to ask if something was wrong when he remembered that he wouldn’t hear Devi’s answer.

But Devi wasn’t looking at him.

He was looking behind him.

Lance carefully lay Ace on the grass, cupping the cheek closest to him and leaning in to give Ace a quick kiss on the forehead.

Pulling away, he turned around, unsure what to expect.

His eyes widened as darkness grew larger around them.

It wasn’t normal darkness, though.

He recognized this darkness.

Didn’t Ace defeat the darkness? Why was it returning?

His head turned, about to order Devi to take care of Ace.

But in the next moment, the darkness quickly expanded, covering the area and everything around them in darkness.

“Lance-sama!”

Lance blinked, surprised as his ears registered Devi’s voice. He turned around, facing Devi and Ace.

Devi’s eyes expressed his worry. “The darkness has—” He cut himself off, eyes widening at the darkness approaching him.

Lance’s eyes widened as the darkness covered Devi, starting to swallow him.

He ran over, reaching out for Devi’s arm. “Devi!”

“Lance-sama!” Devi reached out with one arm, hoping to reach Lance’s hand.

Lance’s hand was a few inches away from Devi’s arm when the darkness engulfed Devi, leaving Lance alone with Ace.

Lance stopped, hand still outstretched. His free hand formed a fist, clenching it. “Devi!”

He let his hand drop, turning around to face Ace and cursing.

I failed.

He couldn’t save Devi.

What kind of partner and friend was he? He couldn’t even protect Devi from this stupid darkness.

Cruel and mocking laughter echoed around him, causing him to narrow his eyes.

That laughter sounded familiar.

“Too bad, Dragonoid. You couldn’t save your Tamadora partner. Or your boyfriend.”

Lance, who had opened his mouth to snarl something, blinked at the boyfriend comment before looking down at Ace.

He felt horrified to see the same darkness that engulfed Devi starting to swallow Ace’s motionless body.

His hand reached out, moving closer to protect Ace.

But to his surprise and horror, his legs didn’t move.

He grit his teeth, trying to move his legs forward.

He had to protect Ace.

Unlike with Devi, the darkness that was swallowing Ace's body moved slowly.

It taunted Lance, telling him to come and defeat it before it engulfed Ace.

But as much as Lance struggled and cursed, his legs didn't move.

He could feel the fear and dread from earlier returning, but this time, he couldn't push it away.

He was... afraid.

He had already lost Devi to the darkness.

And it seemed he would lose Ace next.

Lance growled, pulling out his D-Gear.

He would not let that happen.

He was about to release one of his monsters or even pull out his Armor Drop, determined to fight and protect Ace.

But before he could, his eyes widened, mouth opening as he noticed that his Egg Drops had disappeared.

His free hand dug through each of his pockets, frantically trying to find them, but he couldn't find any of them.

And, he realized with horror, he couldn't find his Armor Drop either.

He swallowed nervously, looking back at Ace.

As if sensing his fear and despair, the darkness that was swallowing Ace moved quicker.

The darkness was now up to Ace's waist.

Lance desperately struggled, trying to move over to Ace.

But the invisible force that glued him to his spot wouldn't let go.

The darkness was now up to Ace's neck.

His hand reached out instinctively, trying to reach out and touch Ace even though he knew he wouldn't reach.

"Ace!"

A moment later, the darkness engulfed Ace, leaving Lance alone.

The invisible force gluing him to his spot released its hold on him, allowing him to run over to where Ace had disappeared.

He collapsed to his knees, eyes closing and feeling guilt and shame.

His hands formed fists, clenching them to keep repressed emotions from rising to the surface.

“Ace!”

ZZZ

Lance sprung forward, letting out an exclamation of surprise. His body sweated profusely, his heart racing.

His eyes opened, gasping at the darkness and not recognizing where he was.

Maybe he was still in the darkness?

His hands reached out and grabbed the closest object, tugging it up to cover his waist and part of his chest, trying to shield himself.

But his stupid thought quickly disappeared thanks to the bright moonlight permeating through the window next to him, lighting up the area.

He took deep breaths, finally recognizing the familiar room.

It was the room Angine-san let him rest in.

He was in bed, and the object he was holding onto were his sheets.

“What was that just now?”

“Lance-sama?”

Lance’s eyes widened at the familiar voice, looking over to his right. He felt relieved and embarrassed to see his partner sitting on the bed. *“Devi.”*

Devi’s eyes expressed his concern, noticing Lance’s flushed cheeks. His concern grew as he noticed Lance’s golden eyes expressed his fear and surprise. *“Are you alright, devi? Did you have a bad dream, devi?”*

Lance blinked, belatedly realizing it was a nightmare. But instead of answering, he let go of the sheets and grabbed Devi, pulling him into his chest.

Smaller arms wrapped around him as much as they could, his partner nuzzling into his chest.

His eyes softened, hearing muffled sobs. He let go of Devi with one arm, petting the top of his head. *“It’s alright now.”*

As much as he tried not to, Devi couldn’t help but cry.

He was unable to banish the image of Lance gritting his teeth and shaking in bed.

He had tried desperately to wake Lance up, but it was if Lance couldn't hear him.

He knew he was overreacting, but it brought back memories of being at the Coliseum and at Crocus with Lance in his Reversion state, not listening to him.

Neither knew how much time passed before Devi pulled away, sniffing. His tears dried up, and a few moments later, his tears stopped. "I'm sorry, Lance-sama. I was worried when you wouldn't wake up, devi."

Lance shook his head, reluctantly letting his partner leave his embrace. "It's alright. I... needed that." He paused for a few moments, turning his head away. His cheeks flushed a light pink. "... I'm glad. That you're alright. Don't tell anyone about this."

Devi beamed upon noticing the light flush, the action reminding him of a younger Lance. Lance's actions made him feel pride and relief. "Yes, devi!"

He could still see some fear lingering in Lance's eyes, and he knew Lance wouldn't be able to fall asleep until a certain idiot arrived.

He almost huffed, knowing that the idiot would help comfort Lance more than he could.

Yet, he grudgingly admitted to himself, he felt happy and grateful the idiot continued to stick around and love his master and friend.

Lance felt silly for reacting like he did.

What was he thinking?

Of course it was a nightmare.

Nothing like that would happen outside of his dreams.

And yet, as he thought about lying in bed and trying to sleep once more, he couldn't help but think that the nightmare would come back.

He couldn't stop himself from shivering as he remembered the contents of the nightmare, not wanting to see it again.

Maybe it was stupid and childish, but he found himself wishing more than he ever had before for a certain idiot to show up.

One look at that idiot's smiling face would dispel any remaining worries and fears.

"Lance-sama?" Devi asked, concerned. He had seen Lance shiver, wondering if he was remembering the nightmare.

He cursed inside his mind.

Where was that idiot? What was taking him so long?

Lance was about to automatically reply that he was alright, but he didn't get a chance as his ears picked up some nearby noises.

It sounded like footsteps and... *voices*.

As much as his idiot liked to complain about his excellent hearing, he couldn't hear any words or who was speaking.

Footsteps walked closer to his room, the voices continuing their conversation.

A hopeful feeling grew in his chest.

Maybe one of the voices was... *him*?

"Tama told you to be careful, tama."

Lance's eyes widened at the familiar voice, almost missing the other voice's response.

"How was I supposed to know that would happen? It was an accident, Tamazo."

That voice...

It was *Ace*.

Ace was finally here.

He closed his eyes, feeling his heart race at the thought of seeing Ace again.

"Tama told you that it was a bad idea, tama. Ace is an idiot for walking into a trap, tama."

"B-Be quiet, Tamazo. It all worked out, didn't it?"

Lance could hear Ace's flustered tone, easily imagining Ace with flushed cheeks.

"We got lucky, tama. We're here, tama!"

"Shh, Tamazo! What if Lance, Devi, and Grandma is sleeping?"

Lance opened his eyes and shook his head at the volume of their conversation, unable to stop the small smile from forming.

"That white dumpling... He's too noisy, devi," Devi grumbled, crossing his small arms in front of his chest.

Lance nodded, turning his head to look at the door and resisting the urge to chuckle at his partner's irritated tone.

A few moments later, someone knocked on the door.

“Hurry up and come in, devi! You two are too noisy, devi!”

The door creaked as it opened, and a few moments later, Ace and Tamazo entered the room.

It didn't take long for Ace to close the door behind him and turn around, eyes sparkling at the sight of Lance and walking further into the room.

Lance's small smile that had formed at Ace's appearance instantly disappeared as he got a closer look at Ace.

Was it just his imagination, or did it seem like Ace had *more* bandages than before?

The white bandages around Ace's head looked new, and he felt certain that the white bandages wrapped around Ace's right hand hadn't been there before.

Resisting the urge to growl, Lance's eyes lingered on the new bandages for several moments before looking into Ace's eyes.

Once he got close enough, Ace's bright smile instantly disappeared at the fear in Lance's visible eye. He stopped next to the bed, unsure whether to try and risk touching him or saying something.

What happened?

This was his first time seeing Lance with... *fear* in his eyes.

The worst thing was that Lance either wasn't trying to hide the fear in his eyes, or he didn't even realize that the fear was there.

Noticing the concern in Ace's eyes and feeling guilty his smile disappeared, Lance gave him a small smile.

But it didn't seem to do anything as Ace still looked concerned.

Ignoring Ace for the moment, he looked at Devi and gave him a look.

Devi understood the look and nodded, getting up. As much as he hated to admit it, he knew Ace would look after his master and friend.

He was unable to stop the huff from escaping, though, feeling embarrassed but pleased when Lance petted him on his head.

Acting like that didn't happen, he flew over to Tamazo. “Let's go, white dumpling.”

Tamazo tilted his head, confused. “Tama?”

Devi rolled his eyes, pointing to the full moon in the black sky. “You told me that the next time we meet, you would tell me how this cheese from the moon thing works, devi.”

Tamazo blinked, looking baffled. “Tama told you that? I don't remember, tama.”

Despite his concern for Lance, Ace couldn't help but sweat drop, a small smile forming at Tamazo's reaction.

Lance felt relieved to see the small smile on Ace's face, tempted to pull him closer.

Devi narrowed his eyes, pointing at Tamazo with one arm. "*You're* the one who messaged me and forced me to accept, devi!"

Tamazo's eyes widened at the mention of a message. He smiled sheepishly, raising an arm to touch the pink oval on his cheek. "That's right, tama. I remember now, tama."

Devi grumbled something under his breath before turning and flying over to the door. "Speaking of remembering things... Stop texting pictures of food to Lance-sama's phone, devi!"

Tamazo quickly joined him, pouting. "Tama was texting Devi, tama. Devi doesn't like the pictures of food, tama?"

Devi opened the door, tempted to roll his eyes. "It's Lance-sama's phone, devi. I don't even know how you keep taking all those pictures, devi." He flew out of the room, gesturing for Tamazo to follow him.

"Tama uses Ace's phone, tama." Tamazo smiled and followed him out of the room. "I know Devi likes food, so I always text you a picture whenever I find some that looks good, tama. We're food friends for life, tama!"

Devi closed the door after he joined him and blinked, surprised.

Food friends for life?

He did have to admit that the food pictures that the white dumpling sent always looked delicious and made him drool.

Almost gasping at his thoughts, he narrowed his eyes, scowling. "We are not friends, devi! Stop texting Lance-sama's phone, devi. The only reason why I don't report it as spam is because it comes from Ace's phone, devi."

The two Tamadora continued speaking in loud voices as they made their way down the hallway, making Lance shake his head.

Devi always got like this when Ace's Tamadora partner was around.

He had scolded him last time and reminded him that Angine-san lived inside the house and could be sleeping, and Devi's ears and wings had drooped, apologizing in a sad voice.

He thought Devi had learned his lesson.

Apparently not.

He knew Angine-san didn't mind and liked it when Devi and Ace's Tamadora partner got along (although it's debatable if they got along *well*), but Lance still made a mental note to himself to scold Devi in the morning.

He blinked, surprised as he felt someone sitting on the bed. He looked back at Ace, noticing the concerned look had returned.

"Lance?"

Instead of speaking, Lance reached out for Ace's wrist, easily holding onto it and tugging him forward.

Understanding what Lance wanted, Ace's cheeks flushed pink before crawling closer.

Normally, Lance would've felt amused at Ace's flushed cheeks, but the fear from the nightmare had returned.

Once Ace was close enough, Lance pulled him into his lap, wrapping his arms around his waist. He closed his eyes and buried his face in Ace's hair, breathing in his comforting scent.

Ace let out a surprised noise, unable to make the pink from his cheeks disappear as he realized he was sitting in his lap.

His arms reached out, hissing as the movement aggravated the injuries on his right shoulder and arm and pausing in the middle of his action.

He winced, feeling the injuries start throbbing and couldn't help but hold onto the side of his injured shoulder with his other hand.

Ace had made sure to hiss and wince as low as possible, not wanting to ruin the moment.

But his boyfriend with his unfairly sharp hearing immediately pulled away and opened his eyes, concern expressed in his eyes.

Lance's eyes widened at noticing Ace clutching his right arm, face contorted in pain.

Almost immediately, images from his nightmare resurfaced in his mind.

The darkness mentioning that someone had already hurt Ace...

Ace in pain and clutching that same arm...

Ace's motionless body on the ground...

He shook his head, pushing away the images as much as he could.

It was just a coincidence.

It didn't mean anything.

One of his arms let go of his waist, his now free hand hovering around Ace's right arm, hesitant to touch it and not wanting to aggravate the injuries. "Are you alright?"

Ace nodded, gritting his teeth. "I'm alright." It took several more moments, but the pain finally lessened to a dull pain. Noticing the concern and fear in Lance's visible eye, he smiled, letting go of his arm and grabbing Lance's free hand.

Lance hummed, letting his eyes linger on their joined hands. He looked back up at Ace, eyes narrowing. "Idiot. Why do you have more injuries?" Ace was about to speak, but Lance cut across him before he could. "And don't lie."

Muttering about how unfair Lance was, Ace frowned. "I got them on my mission." His brow furrowed at Lance's unconvinced look. "What? I told you the truth!" he complained.

Lance shook his head, resisting the urge to roll his eyes at Ace's stubbornness.

Lance had wanted to go out on a date that night, wanting to express his love for Ace in response to Ace's chocolate on Valentine's Day, but Ace was quick to remind him of their injuries and had told him that they should probably rest instead.

Still wanting to spend time with Ace, Lance had suggested a movie night, Ace instantly agreeing.

Ace had messaged him earlier that day, warning him that he had a mission to complete, and depending on the mission, he might arrive late.

It figured that Ace would arrive with more injuries.

The idiot was going to get himself killed one of these days.

They would have to postpone their movie night much to Lance's disappointment.

"You're not telling me everything."

Ace cursed, looking away. How did Lance know?

It was unfair how his boyfriend knew him so well.

Feeling Lance squeeze his hand, he looked back at him, noticing that Lance had a raised eyebrow.

Understanding that he was asking what happened on the mission, he shrugged, determined to pass it off as no big deal and hoping Lance wouldn't ask for more details. "I had to calm a dragon down. He was bothering some travelers."

Lance scowled, noticing what Ace was trying to do.

Clearly, the idiot was hiding something from him.

Ace's words reminded him of his first and only mission with Ace.

Which was why he knew there was more to it than that.

He had wanted to give Ace a chance to tell him everything, but Ace had ruined that chance.

“What rank was the mission?”

Ace couldn't help but look away and wince at Lance's directness, inwardly cursing at how merciless Lance was.

Why did Lance have to ask that question?

It was impossible to try and lie about the mission's rank.

By the scowl on Lance's face, he *definitely* knew he was hiding something from him.

And he was.

He hadn't told Lance that he could accept S-ranked missions yet, knowing Lance wouldn't be pleased.

Plus, the fact that he had received those injuries while on said S-ranked missions...

He was in deep trouble.

Dreading Lance's reaction, he looked back at him and desperately changed the subject, hoping it would distract him. “W-What about our movie night? It isn't that late. We can watch—” He cut himself off, unable to stop himself from shivering at the icy glare on Lance's face.

Lance raised an eyebrow, silently asking if Ace wanted to continue talking about that subject.

Ace gulped nervously, shaking his head.

Well, that didn't work.

If he was honest with himself, he didn't expect that it would work.

Maybe it would've worked with someone else (like Tamazo), but he knew it would never work with Lance.

Silently groaning at his misfortune, he looked away once more, biting his bottom lip. “You won't like it,” he muttered.

“Stop avoiding the question and answer, *Ace*.”

Ace couldn't help but shiver at the way Lance said his name, although whether it was out of fear or pleasure, he didn't know. One part of him not focused on what was going on wondered why he would take pleasure in hearing his name said with so much anger, but he hastily pushed it away.

Normally, Lance would feel amused and smug at Ace's shiver, but he was tired of waiting. He let go of Ace's hand, grabbing his chin.

Ace gasped at the hand grabbing his chin and forcing him to look into Lance's eyes, any type of response dying in his throat at the anger in Lance's visible eye.

He had no choice now.

He sighed, briefly looking away from that intense gaze to gather his courage and prepare himself for Lance's negative reaction.

"It was a S-ranked mission."

Lance's eyes widened before quickly narrowing.

No wonder Ace hid this from him.

But as far as he knew, Ace couldn't accept S-ranked missions.

Noticing the glare on his boyfriend's face, Ace gulped nervously, thinking that he should tell him everything. "Since you're out of action, the Guild allowed me to accept S-ranked missions."

In an alternate universe, Ace might've felt offended at how Lance was taking this news, believing that he wasn't strong enough.

But since this wasn't an alternate universe, he didn't feel offended. He knew Lance respected his strength, and he knew the anger was because he hid it from Lance and because he loved him.

Whenever he thought of Lance loving him, it would make his heart race, unable to stop himself from smiling a goofy, love-sick smile.

More often than not, Tamazo or one of his other friends would notice the smile and tease him about it.

The teasing would always make his cheeks flush pink.

Lance grit his teeth, almost growling.

What the *hell*?

What was the Guild thinking?

Both he and the Guild knew that Ace wasn't ready for S-ranked missions.

No offense to Ace's strength, but there was a reason why only he and the other elite Guild Dragon Callers could accept S-ranked missions.

And the Guild knew how reckless Ace could be at times.

What if the idiot got himself killed while being reckless?

“When they learned about my injuries, the Guild was reluctant to assign me any missions.” Ace couldn’t help but notice that as he continued speaking, Lance’s expression only grew darker and darker, making him want to stop.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t stop himself. “But I told them that I was alright and could handle it, so they gave in.”

This time, Lance couldn’t stop himself from growling. It was a low growl, but the noise startled Ace, making him jump.

Lance felt rage coursing through his blood.

The Guild was *using* Ace for their own gain.

He didn’t care if he was still recovering.

He was going to give the Guild (mostly the Ancients) a piece of his mind, and damn the consequences.

Did they think they could get away with *manipulating* Ace like that?

He knew that if he brought it up to Ace and tried to make him see reason, Ace would refuse and stubbornly insist that he was alright and that the Guild was counting on him.

“You’re not going on anymore missions.”

Ace winced at his boyfriend’s cold tone and icy glare. It wasn’t his first time on the receiving end of Lance’s icy glare, but he couldn’t help but feel nervous. “But the Guild is counting on me. I can’t let them down.”

“... Alright.”

Ace blinked, surprised at the easy acceptance.

No.

That was too easy.

Something worse was coming.

“But I’m coming with you.”

Ace paled, looking horrified.

Lance coming with him on his missions was worse than not going on any missions at all.

His boyfriend was still recovering.

He quickly shook his head, stupidly ignoring Lance's warning look and the arm tightening around his waist. "You're still recovering. I won't let you."

Although he couldn't help but admit that the offer *was* tempting.

He had wanted to go on another mission with Lance for a while now.

But he wouldn't allow it under these circumstances.

"This is not up for discussion!"

Ace yelped as Lance's grip around his waist tightened, hurting him. His eyes widened at Lance's rage, noticing Lance's dark red visible eye and instinctively leaned away from his boyfriend.

Lance's eyes widened at the yelp, belatedly noticing Ace's pained expression and the way the younger boy leaned away from him. He quickly let go and pulled away from Ace, feeling guilt and shame at noticing the fear in those blue eyes.

He felt horrible and hated himself for scaring and hurting Ace like that.

He couldn't believe he had made Ace scared of him.

And he was supposed to be Ace's boyfriend.

He was supposed to *protect* him and make him happy.

Not *scare* him.

Ace paused in his movement, looking at Lance warily. His eyes widened, noticing Lance's eye returning to their normal (and beautiful) golden color as well as the emotions expressed in it.

Feeling his heart hurt at the emotions in Lance's eye and knowing he didn't mean to hurt or scare him, he impulsively leaned in.

Lance opened his mouth, about to protest and starting to lean away, but Ace shaking his head made him stop. He closed his mouth, turning his head and looking away.

He could feel Ace moving closer to him, wanting to reach out and pull him closer.

But he resisted the temptation.

He didn't want to hurt Ace again.

He felt Ace stop, his own hands twitching and reaching out of their own accord.

But he stubbornly pulled his hands back to his sides, glaring at them for disobeying.

"It's alright, Lance."

Lance's eyes widened at the softly spoken words, almost turning his head to look at Ace.

Ace didn't sound angry, scared, or even hurt.

He sounded... *concerned*.

His eyes darkened, remembering what he did and shook his head, refusing to look at or touch his boyfriend.

He didn't deserve Ace's kindness or concern.

His ears picked up a soft sad sigh.

A few moments later, his eyes widened as Ace's hands gently touched his cheeks and applied light pressure, forcing his head to turn and look into his eyes.

Ace's blue eyes expressed his concern and sadness, and he could even see pain in them.

He felt guilt pool in his stomach at noticing the emotions, knowing that Ace was in pain because *he* was in pain.

Belatedly, he remembered that he still needed to apologize.

But before he could, Ace leaned in and kissed him softly on the lips.

He froze at the contact, feeling his heart race.

But much to Ace's disappointment (although he had expected it), Lance didn't respond to the kiss.

Ace pulled away a few moments later and let go of Lance's cheeks.

Only to lean back in and kiss Lance's forehead.

Lance blinked, surprised. He frowned, wondering what Ace was doing.

Not that he hated it.

He was enjoying the attention and Ace's kisses.

It was rare when Ace took the initiative to kiss him.

Ace pecked Lance's nose, making him blink. He couldn't help but find Lance's surprised expression cute. He leaned up, kissing him on the forehead once more before kissing each of his cheeks.

Lance opened his mouth to demand what Ace was doing.

But only a small noise of surprise escaped as Ace leaned back in to kiss him on the lips.

Ace wrapped his arms around Lance's back, and when Lance's arms didn't automatically wrap around his waist, he let go to grab Lance's arms and wrap them around his waist.

He hummed contently, closing his eyes and feeling Lance's arms around his waist briefly tighten their grip. He wrapped his arms around Lance's back, moaning when Lance *still* didn't respond to the kiss.

He grumbled inwardly about Lance's stubbornness before pressing harder, issuing a challenge.

Lance refused to respond to the kiss, feeling that he didn't deserve to enjoy the feeling of Ace's soft lips against his own.

But he couldn't help but lose himself in the feeling of *Ace* kissing *him*, almost giving in when Ace moaned.

When Ace started pressing harder, he couldn't help but feel that Ace was challenging him to a fight.

And when it came to a fight or any type of battle or contest with Ace, he wasn't going to roll over and just *let* Ace win.

If Ace wanted a fight, he would give him a fight.

Ace hummed, smiling into the kiss as Lance *finally* responded. His smile disappeared a moment later, unable to stop the moan from escaping as Lance pressed harder.

Refusing to lose, he kissed him with as much passion as Lance was giving him.

Lance was unable to stop the smirk at Ace's moan, feeling pleased at the reaction. He let go of his waist with one arm and carefully (so that he didn't accidentally brush against any injuries) ran his hand up Ace's back.

Ace couldn't stop the shiver and moaned as he felt himself giving in and losing the fight, and when Lance's hand reached the small of his back, his boyfriend applied a light pressure, forcing him closer.

He knew his next movement would hurt him, but if it meant he was physically closer to his boyfriend, then it was worth it.

His arms let go of Lance's back, and as Lance forced him to come closer, he reached out his arms, wrapping them around Lance's neck and ignoring the stabbing pain that came with the movement.

Noticing that only a small space separated them, Lance hummed, approving Ace's action.

Ace's body trembled as Lance's tongue darted out and licked his lower lip, feeling grateful he was sitting in Lance's lap as he knew his knees would go weak at the motion.

Feeling him tremble (and no doubt reading his mind), Lance smirked into the kiss, making Ace frown.

And Ace would've pulled away and protested, but Lance gently nibbling his lower lip made him have second thoughts.

Ace couldn't stop his disappointed groan as Lance pulled away, causing him to open his eyes and give him an unhappy look.

Lance chuckled at the unhappy look, already leaning in to kiss him on his cheek.

He was trying to be nice and let Ace breathe, but it was clear Ace would rather go back to kissing him.

He leaned back in, kissing his lips and feeling unsurprised at the enthusiastic response.

Ace tilted his head, closing his eyes and burying his right hand into Lance's hair.

Lance hummed, approving the action and darted his tongue out once more. He licked Ace's lower lip, silently asking permission. Ace slowly parted his lips, allowing Lance's tongue inside his mouth.

Ace moaned as Lance's tongue moved inside his mouth, touching different parts of his mouth. It was a little ticklish, but at the same time, it felt like something was burning inside him with every touch. Lance playfully touched his tongue with his own, teasing Ace and coaxing him to respond.

Ace responded hesitantly at first, but it didn't take long for him to try and match Lance's passionate and brisk pace.

Having forgotten about Lance's hand on the small of his back, he moaned as he felt it move carefully under his hoodie and shirt, shivering at the cold touch to his bare skin.

His mind was starting to fog at all of Lance's touches.

If it didn't mean that he had to stop kissing Lance, he would've pulled away and complained about the unfairness of it all.

It was unfair how *good* Lance's touches made him feel, and it was unfair how Lance mercilessly used that to his advantage.

This wasn't the first time his boyfriend played dirty.

And Ace wanted to curse at how both knew that Lance didn't *need* to play dirty to win.

He wouldn't give up on trying to take control, though.

He would beat Lance one day.

Lance's exploration of his mouth was making him breathless. Ace continued to moan and make other pleased noises as Lance's tongue touched different parts of his mouth before touching his tongue once more.

Lance pulled away only to nibble his lower lip, and before he could recover or try to take control, Lance kissed him gently.

But as much as he wanted to continue kissing Lance, his body protested at the lack of air, making him lightheaded and forcing him to pull away reluctantly.

Their breathing was erratic, and both boy's cheeks were pink.

Blue dazed eyes opened, looking at Lance. Ace struggled to catch his breath, still feeling lightheaded and weak in the knees. "*Lance...*"

He knew that if he tried to get off Lance's lap and stand up, his knees would give out.

Rather than respond with words, Lance tightened his grip on Ace's waist and leaned in, kissing him once more.

Ace closed his eyes and moaned into the kiss as he felt the hand that was touching his bare skin moving up and brushing against his shoulder blades.

The hand paused in its action before continuing its exploration, caressing the white bandages wrapped around his right shoulder for a few moments before moving back down to massage the middle of his back.

He was about to pull away, uncaring if he lost without giving his all, desperately needing to breathe in air.

But Lance pulled away, an irritatingly *smug* smirk on his face as he did so.

Ace struggled to catch his breath, glaring at Lance. He was about to speak, but Lance's hand moving down to gently brush against the bandages wrapped around his ribs made the words die in his throat.

Desperately breathing in air and irritated by the smirk on his boyfriend's face, his hand still buried in Lance's hair tugged gently, causing Lance to grunt in surprise.

Lance's eyes narrowed, and he knew Lance was about to retaliate. Before he could, he tugged once more.

This time, it was rougher, and Lance was unable to stop a soft moan from escaping.

Ace's eyes widened at the moan. A moment later, his eyes lit up, a happy and triumphant grin on his face.

He would have to remember that for the future.

Lance wasn't the only one who could play dirty, and he should know better than to underestimate him.

His hand pulled away from Lance's hair and wrapped itself around Lance's neck once more.

Ace couldn't stop the joyful laugh from escaping at Lance's unhappy expression.

Was Lance... *pouting*?

His rival couldn't handle a taste of his own medicine?

He laughed once more, finding his rival's pout cute. Unable to help himself, he leaned in and gave him a peck on the lips.

Lance glared at him, but whether it was for laughing at him or the peck on the lips, Ace didn't know.

Ace was about to tease Lance, but before he could, he hissed, unable to ignore the stabbing pain in his right arm any longer.

He quickly let go of Lance, repeatedly calling himself an idiot as that only made the pain worse.

Lance's glare disappeared, a concerned look taking its place. His hand that was under Ace's clothes carefully pulled away, quickly appearing beside Ace's injured arm and hovering beside it. "Are you alright?"

Once again, images from his nightmare resurfaced in his mind, making him push them away.

He was *not* going to lose Ace.

Ace closed his eyes at the pain, breathing in as deep as his injured ribs would let him. Letting it go, he opened his eyes, about to automatically reassure Lance that he was alright.

But the words died in his throat at noticing that the fear from earlier had returned to Lance's eyes.

Guessing that Lance had a nightmare about him before he arrived, he smiled softly at him. "I'm here, Lance. It's alright. I'm not going anywhere."

Lance's eyes widened at the soft, reassuring words. He buried his face in Ace's hair, closing his eyes and breathing in his comforting scent.

His arms carefully made their way around Ace's waist, not wanting to hurt him.

Compared to the Ace in his nightmare, the Ace in real life was warm.

And it was this warmth, kindness, understanding, and *forgiveness* that made Lance want to hold onto him and never let go.

He knew now that Ace initiating the touch and giving him those kisses was a clear sign of his forgiveness for earlier.

How did he get so lucky to have someone like Ace in his life?

There were still times where he felt he didn't deserve Ace and that someone else deserved Ace's love.

And every time he thought that, he would feel his heart drop, feeling an uncomfortable and *angry* feeling in his stomach.

His jealousy and possessiveness would encourage him to leave a mark on Ace the next time he saw him.

But he would always push that thought away.

Of course, it was difficult to push that thought away at times.

Especially when he knew Ace could freely walk in public and accept missions.

The thought of some faceless and nameless person (or Dragonoid) flirting with *his* Ace made his blood boil.

Every day, he would feel grateful for Ace's continued presence in his life.

And he hoped it would stay that way forever.

Ace and Devi were his two treasures, and he wouldn't let anyone hurt them or take them away from him.

Lance breathed in Ace's relaxing and addicting scent, somehow smelling the sun.

But in a way, it suited Ace.

Ace was his sun.

Ace didn't speak, letting Lance have his moment. It was obvious Lance didn't want or need words right now. He wrapped his uninjured arm around Lance's back, tempted to reach out with his injured arm.

He finally decided not to since he didn't want to ruin the moment by hissing in pain.

Neither knew how much time passed until Lance pulled away, composing himself once more.

But Ace could still see some fear in Lance's eye.

Lance let go of his waist with one arm and grabbed Ace's injured hand, holding it gently. He made sure to lock his eyes onto Ace's as he leaned down and kissed the top of his hand as well as the bandages covering the hand.

Ace's cheeks flushed pink, making Lance feel amused.

While still holding onto Ace's hand, he leaned in closer and kissed Ace softly on the lips. Before Ace could respond to the kiss, though, he pulled away, making Ace pout. Choosing to copy what Ace did earlier, he kissed Ace's forehead.

He pecked Ace's nose, making him laugh. Feeling his heart race and feeling pleased that *he* made Ace laugh, he leaned up and kissed his forehead before kissing each of his cheeks.

He pulled away to get a close look at Ace, unable to stop his amused smirk at Ace's pink face.

But instead of kissing him on the lips like Ace did earlier, he leaned down and kissed Ace's neck.

Ace gasped at the feeling of Lance's lips on his neck, unconsciously tilting his head to one side.

Feeling pleased and smug at the reaction to his touch, Lance left small kisses up and down Ace's neck, intending to milk it for all it's worth.

Ace shivered at feeling Lance's featherlight kisses.

He wasn't sure what had gotten into Lance, but if he was honest with himself, he didn't mind.

He would never admit it out loud since he knew it would only boost his boyfriend's (already huge) ego.

But as Lance pulled away, he almost moaned, unable to stop the pout.

Lance's protective urge and possessiveness had wanted him to bite Ace's skin and leave a mark, but he reluctantly pushed it away, unknowing what Ace's reaction would be.

He felt amused at the sight of the pout and couldn't help but lean in and kiss it, Ace grabbing the front of his shirt and responding eagerly.

When Lance pulled away, he was unable to stop the fond look from appearing in his eyes at the sight of a flustered Ace.

He leaned down, kissing the top of Ace's hand once more and keeping his gaze on Ace. His rare gentle smile formed on his face. "I love you."

Ace's cheeks flushed pink, his heart racing at Lance's words. He was about to respond with his automatic answer, but the words died in his throat at the smile on his boyfriend's face.

He had seen a similar smile before.

Lance would always give that smile toward dragons. It was a smile that conveyed his affection and kindness.

But this smile was different than those.

This smile felt more... *intimate* for some reason.

It was if the smile was just for him.

Noticing he was taking longer than normal to reply, Lance raised an eyebrow, feeling amused at the wide-eyed look.

He let go of Ace's hand, reaching up to cup his cheek instead. Ace leaned into the gentle touch, smiling softly and lovingly at him.

"Ace?"

Ace smiled sheepishly, realizing he forgot to reply. He couldn't stop the goofy, love-sick smile from forming on his face. "I love you too."

Lance gave him a loving and happy smile, making Ace feel warm and tingly at the thought that *he* was the one who made Lance smile that way.

Unfortunately (or maybe it was fortunate because looking at Lance's rare gentle smile was bad for Ace's heart), Lance's smile disappeared a few moments later, leaving a frown in its place.

Ace was about to ask if something was wrong when he noticed the concern in his eyes, his own eyes widening as Lance reached out with his free hand toward his injured arm.

"Lance—"

Lance's hand gently touched his injured arm, and even though Ace was wearing clothes, he couldn't help but cut himself off, shivering at the tender touch.

Lance's frown briefly transformed into an amused smirk at Ace's shiver, but his frown returned as his hand moved to his shoulder. He brushed the injured shoulder with one finger before moving down Ace's arm.

"I'm alright, Lance."

Lance glanced at him, but other than that, he didn't react to his reassurance, silently continuing his action.

Ace rolled his eyes good-naturedly before letting go of Lance and intercepting Lance's hand, causing Lance to stop in the middle of Ace's lower arm.

Lance looked at Ace's hand on top of his own before looking back at him. Instead of saying something, though, he let go of Ace with his free arm and tugged at the bottom of Ace's hoodie.

Understanding the silent action, Ace shook his head, smiling softly. "I'm alright, Lance."

"... Please."

Ace's eyes widened, gaping.

Did Lance just say... *please*?

Cursing at how much power Lance held over him, Ace nodded, unable to deny him.

He unzipped his hoodie, and noticing Lance's expectant look, he let out a nervous breath before taking it off and throwing it onto the ground.

Stupid Lance.

Why did he always act like this when he received new injuries?

Forgetting about Lance's excellent hearing, he looked away from those concerned eyes, grumbling about (once again) being half naked in front of Lance and about the unfairness of it all.

Easily hearing his grumbles, Lance smirked, amused.

He could easily think of a few... *ideas* that would involve both him and Ace shirtless, unable to stop his eyes from darkening with desire.

Unfortunately, as Ace pulled off his white and blue long sleeved striped shirt to reveal his injuries, his *adorable* boyfriend was still injured.

Even something innocent might aggravate those injuries.

And while Lance could be impatient at times, he would wait until Ace's injuries healed.

He didn't want to aggravate any of Ace's injuries if he was accidentally rough with him.

Although Ace didn't seem to mind whenever he pressed harder into their kisses and deepened them.

Maybe Ace liked it when he was rough?

"Lance?"

Noticing Ace's concerned look, he shook his head, wordlessly saying that he was alright.

It was something to think about at another time.

Time to get his mind out of the gutter.

If he was honest with himself, it wasn't the first time he thought of Ace in... *that* way.

Ace shifted in Lance's lap nervously, cheeks flushing and unable to speak at the heated look that came to Lance's eyes.

That look wasn't there last time.

Or maybe it was, and he didn't notice it?

"... Stop it, Lance."

Easily hearing the soft voice, Lance would normally feel amused and smug at Ace's nervous behavior.

But he knew he was making Ace uncomfortable.

He knew how to make it up to him.

"Sorry. Next time, I'll return the favor."

Ace blinked, confused by what Lance meant, but his boyfriend's impish smirk and his glance to his chest immediately cleared up any confusion, unable to stop his face from turning pink.

He looked away for a few moments before looking back at Lance, shyly giving him a nod.

Lance felt amused and pleased at Ace's reaction, tempted to take off his shirt for Ace and not make him wait.

But this wasn't about him.

This was about Ace. And his injuries.

His eyes darkened, although this time, it wasn't out of dirty thoughts. His eyes expressed his concern, sadness, and regret as he looked at Ace's injuries.

The white bandages around Ace's ribs looked new (much to Lance's irritation. Why was his idiot determined to hide his injuries from him?)

Ace also had white bandages wrapped around his right shoulder, upper arm, lower arm, and hand.

His chest wasn't wrapped in bandages, but a dark, ugly bruise the size of a drop marred his skin.

He reached out, tentatively touching the bandages on Ace's arm. He brushed each bandage with one finger before looking up at his boyfriend, letting his hand rest on top of Ace's bandaged one. "What happened?"

Ace's cheeks, which had returned to their normal color, flushed pink, already knowing Lance's reaction. "I uh... walked into a trap." He raised his uninjured arm, rubbing the back of his head. "Tamazo told me not to, but I was impatient." He let his arm drop to his side, scowling. "Those *poachers* had captured and injured Muspelheim's friends. I couldn't let them get away with it."

Lance's eyes narrowed. He knew Ace had his reasons, but... "*Idiot*. That kind of recklessness might help you with your normal missions, but it could easily cost you your *life* on a S-ranked mission."

Ace looked away, unable to stop himself from wincing and closing his eyes shamefully at Lance's blunt words.

He knew he deserved it, but it was still hard to hear.

And since it was coming from *Lance*, it made things ten times worse.

Especially when he knew Lance loved him and was undoubtedly beating himself up for not being there with him.

"... Sorry, Lance."

Some of Lance's anger melted at Ace's small voice, feeling guilty at his reaction.

The rest of him couldn't help but feel pleased, thinking that Ace *finally* learned his lesson.

But he knew Ace.

He knew Ace would continue being reckless.

And while he knew that was a part of Ace, he couldn't stop himself from feeling helpless.

He couldn't protect him while resting in bed.

That recklessness of Ace's would never change.

It was up to *him* to look after Ace and protect him.

Lance let the rest of his anger melt before reaching up with his free hand, grabbing his chin.

Ace opened his eyes at the touch, blinking as his head moved. He looked into Lance's eyes, feeling guilty at the sight of the concern, sadness, and regret.

"Promise me something."

Ace blinked, surprised before nodding. "Anything."

"Promise to be more careful." Lance closed his eyes, resisting the urge to form fists. His eyes opened, his fear from his nightmare returning to his eyes. "*I can't lose you. Promise me.*"

Ace nodded, raising his free hand to grab the one that held his chin. Lance quickly let go of his chin, letting Ace capture his hand in a tight grip. Ace raised their joined hands, kissing them while keeping his eyes on Lance. "*I promise.*"

Feeling his heart race at Ace's solemn promise as well as the action itself, Lance's eyes widened, unable to stop himself from flushing a light pink.

Noticing his boyfriend's light pink cheeks, Ace couldn't stop himself from grinning triumphantly.

It definitely caught Lance off guard.

It didn't take long for Lance's cheeks to return to their normal color (much to Ace's disappointment), but he felt determined to lock that memory in his brain, never wanting to forget it.

Lance narrowed his eyes at noticing the triumphant grin, but instead of saying something, he leaned in and kissed him on the lips.

Compared to a lot of their other kisses, this kiss was slow.

Lance put all his love and affection for Ace into the gentle kiss, needing and wanting him to realize how much he felt about him.

And while Ace felt embarrassed over his previous action, he responded to the kiss eagerly, closing his eyes as he felt Lance's feelings for him through the kiss.

He couldn't keep losing to Lance.

He put his own feelings into the kiss, hoping Lance would feel them.

The kiss didn't last long much to Ace's disappointment. He opened his eyes as Lance pulled away with a smirk on his face, the sight of it immediately making Ace wary.

"Don't forget your promise."

Ace frowned, resisting the urge to pout. "I promise I won't. In fact..." He paused, pulling his right hand away from Lance's hand. Lance watched confused as Ace made their pinkies interlock. "If you tell a lie, you'll have to swallow one thousand needles. It's a promise!" Ace smiled cheerfully, removing his pinky from Lance's.

Lance glanced at his pinky before looking at Ace, bemused.

Ace furrowed his brow. "You've never done a pinky swear before?"

Lance blinked, feeling more confused. "What's that?"

"It's a way to seal my promise." Ace's cheeks flushed pink. "I-It's not as formal as what I did earlier. It's common for children to do it."

Lance raised an eyebrow, amused at the sight of Ace's pink cheeks.

He was only just *now* feeling embarrassed? What an idiot.

"It's informal?"

Ace nodded. "The pinky swear signifies a promise that can never be broken."

"You have to swallow one thousand needles if you lie?"

Ace almost laughed at the baffled expression on his face, but he resisted, reminding himself that Lance didn't know anything about a pinky swear. "It's just a vow. No one takes it

seriously.”

Lance nodded. If Ace didn’t know any better, he could’ve sworn that Lance looked... relieved. “Of course. If it’s informal, what about your promise?”

Ace smiled cheerfully. “Even if it’s informal, a promise is still a promise. I won’t forget either of the promises I made to you tonight.”

Lance shook his head, an amused smirk forming on his face. “You’re childish.”

Ace narrowed his eyes. “What did you say? I’m not childish!”

Ignoring Ace, Lance picked up Ace’s shirt with his free hand and held it out to him.

Ace glared at him, but he accepted the shirt, reluctantly letting go of Lance’s hand to put it on.

But before he could, Lance stopped him by holding his hand out, palm outstretched.

Ace blinked, confused. “Lance?”

“Let me do it.”

Ace wordlessly handed the shirt back to Lance, his boyfriend giving him a small, soft smile as thanks.

After helping Ace back into his shirt carefully, Lance wrapped his arms around his waist once more, leaning in to give him a peck on the lips before pulling away.

Ace smiled, wrapping his arms around Lance’s back and letting his head rest against Lance’s shoulder.

Lance tightened his grip, resting his chin on top of Ace’s head. “Stay.”

Ace pulled away a little. He was still close to his boyfriend, but it was enough to make Lance move his head, looking disgruntled.

But his disgruntled look quickly disappeared as Ace leaned in to kiss the spot where Lance’s heart was. “I’m not going anywhere.” He leaned back in, resting his head on Lance’s chest and turning his head sideways.

Lance felt the rest of his fear from his nightmare disappear at his action and words, knowing he wouldn’t see the nightmare again that night.

His eyes closed, wishing he could protect Ace from everything while he was in his arms and rested his chin on top of Ace’s head once more. “*Stay.*”

Ace closed his eyes and tightened his own grip, wishing he never had to leave Lance’s warm and protective embrace. “*I’ll never leave you.*”

He wouldn't let anyone or anything separate them.

And he knew Lance felt the same.

End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed this story.

I was struggling with the title of this story, and I ended up using a lyric from Bill Withers' song "Lean on Me". It wasn't something I meant to do (especially since I used the title of that song as my title last time), but I couldn't think of anything else. It also seems to fit my story.

I'm sorry if this wasn't what anyone expected. Honestly, I wasn't expecting this kind of story either. I know some of you hoped that I would write about Ace and Lance's first date, but unfortunately, I couldn't think of anything for that plot bunny. Rest assured that I'll write about Ace and Lance's first date some other time. There's always next year.

This ended up much longer than I thought it would be. Oops.

I remember in canon that both Ace and Lance have their own cell phones, and I had this thought that they mainly use their D-Gears when communicating with each other. Ace uses his cell phone to communicate with his mom, but other than that, he doesn't use it. I had this thought that Ace and Lance probably exchanged numbers sometime (just in case something happened to their D-Gears), but since they mainly use their D-Gears, Tamazo and Devi use their phones instead.

Well, Tamazo steals Ace's phone to take pictures of delicious food and sends them to Devi. Devi doesn't use Lance's phone (unless Lance separates from him and needs to contact him), and while Tamazo's constant texts annoy him, he secretly doesn't want them to stop. He would never admit it out loud, though.

I also had this thought that pinky swears would be something only humans (mainly human children) did to seal a promise, and since Lance is a Dragonoid (and he didn't interact with any other children when he was younger), he doesn't know about pinky swears. "If you tell a lie, you'll have to swallow one thousand needles" is a vow Japanese children say when sealing a promise with each other.

My semester ends at the end of this month, so I might be too busy to write for a while. As such, I don't know when I'll post another story. I do have this plot bunny (inspired by something in the last episode), so I'll start working on that story, but I can't promise that I'll finish it anytime soon.

I've been trying to get into the habit of writing something every day, though, so who knows? I might post something before the end of my semester.

See you next time!

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