

## Conundrum

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# Conundrum

by [aphelionns](#)

## Summary

Keith always thought his life would always stay the same. Wake up cold, and go to bed hungry. It wasn't any easier with the masked villains threatening the city. Keith never cared about what they did, as long as they never hurt anyone. But after he is kidnapped and used as a bargaining device against the city's superhero, Sharpshooter, he comes back out with a little more than just a story to tell.

## Notes

Hello, so I got this idea at around 2 am I couldn't get it out of my head, so I wrote this! This story will be rated M just to be safe. There is a trigger warning for torture its pretty graphic I guess and that will be in later chapters, so please be safe. This story was also inspired by The Dark Knight Trilogy, Throne of Glass series, and Six of Crows duology. Those are great books. Read them. Well, enjoy!

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

# I'm Only Human

Piss and blood. Not a very unusual smell in this part of town, but a brick to the senses, nonetheless. Unwashed bodies filled the air with a stench that burned the nose and the cheap, watered-down-ale stained wood floors didn't help the Pit's case either. The underground fighting ring, located in the worst part of the slums, was filled to the brim with blank eyed courtesans, mafia bosses, and any other sort of low life imaginable.

And from the very center came roars of hundreds of spectators and gamblers. The screams could be heard from nearly a one-mile radius, echoing against every wall, and even though the Pit was painfully obvious, no police officer dared to challenge it. For, most were corrupt; bought off by the higher mafia boss' or worked beneath the law when the sun went down. Even the true and good-hearted officers were either terrified of the power the Pit held in its decrepit hands or had little to no power to shut it down. So, the Pit flourished in its man-made misery while law enforcement was forced to watch from afar in their own hell.

So, the cops never really got to see with their own eyes, what produced so much terror in the first place, only got to hear the rumors that plagued the city of Altea. For what the culprits of the scream's witnessed that day were two other desperate souls beating each other to a pulp, hoping to gain a small fraction of the Pits almost endless stash of cash.

What made it almost barbaric was the large circular ditch that barred in the two contestants. The gambler's and spectators were placed all around the crosshatching fence, cheering and booing the two fighters. Many of them reeked of intoxication.

While the gamblers crowded around the fighting ring, higher forms in the crime world oversaw them in personal or private booths raised just a story above them. Each had a perfect view of the showdown as well as complementary wine, red velvet couches, and blood money encasing them in greed.

The Pit was no place to make a living, but people got desperate. Keith got desperate.

That's how he wound up bouncing on the balls of his feet, hands wrapped in white tape, and hair pulled back in a ponytail; waiting for his turn in the ring. Another uproar echoed around the Pit, almost causing Keith to hold his hands against his ears. The smaller fighter, who had been struggling the entire match, hung limp between the other fighters triangulated arm. Either dead or unconscious. It was hard to tell.

An ear blasting horn temporarily drowned out the noise of the howling spectators around the poorly lit cavern, signaling the fight was over and time for them to place new bets. Keith looked back at the 'Cage Master' and snarled when he was shoved out into the circle. The echo of the cage door shutting, and shouting filled his head with a buzz. Bets were placed.

Keith willed his face to emit pure confidence as he turned to face his opponent. And that's when Keith broke out in a cold sweat. The fighter towered over Keith, eyes glinting with blood lust and a crooked grin that showed off yellow and chipped teeth. He cracked his

knuckles, rolled his neck and laughed. "Where are yah? I hope 'e didn't run away, 'cause I can't see 'em."

The crowd burst into laughter. The man grinned. Keith narrowed his eyes and cupped his hand around his ear, "Sorry I didn't get that, I don't speak bullshit." Keith knew he wasn't a skyscraper like most people, but he never counted is 5'8" stature tiny, so he couldn't help but get annoyed. Again, the crowd erupted, just before the horn screeched. Keith's opponent barreled towards him, arms outreached, and his fingers curled into fists. Keith, in return, rolled to the side. Dust floated behind him in response.

The man skidded to a stop before whipping back around to face Keith. He growled. A grin graced Keith's face as he couldn't help but say, "I was hoping for a battle against someone with wit, but I'm afraid that I have to attack an unarmed man." The crowd roared. More bets placed. Keith's opponent swung a meaty hand at his face.

Keith's muscles strained and spasmed as he blocked the fist just inches before it connected with his nose. That would've hurt. Gritting his teeth, Keith shoved his opponents arm to the side. He let out a roar of his own. The man took a short step back, so Keith took his opportunity and sucker punched him.

Beads of blood flew from his mouth and landed in the sand. From up above, the screaming turned feral.

Bets closed.

A bead of sweat slid down the side of his face, Keith wiped it away with the back of his hand. It was ungodly hot from all the body heat, and the sand was able to retain most of it. The opponent had swung his legs across Keith's shins, and he crashed to the ground. Sand clawed at his forearms and his teeth sang. He then rolled to the side almost instinctively realizing there was an unnatural breeze and just barely missed the fist landing right where his skull used to be. The man spoke again, but it was drowned by the screaming that now consumed every thought, every breath.

The rest of the fight turned into a blur of fists, kicks, and pain. At one point the other fighter's nose collapsed under Keith's fist, him wiping away a trail of blood that had just started to trickle down his forehead, and then the 'Cage Master' was lifting his arm above his head; the other fighter face-down and still.

A chorus of groans and yelps of glee filled the Pit in response of his win, but Keith's adrenaline hyped, and pain filled mind barely registered it. The focus was the cash prize. A prize that was now his for the taking.

Instead of staying in the ditch and rallying up the crowd, Keith smirked and limped straight out. He needed to collect the prize money . . . and a drink.

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Plenty of eyes bore into the back of his skull, each with a goal less savory than the next. Keith tightened his grip around the bottle set before him, making his knuckles turn white.

The feeling wasn't new, he was used to his every move being watched. He couldn't expect anything less from the lowlifes here. They were attracted to pretty things, much like a barracuda to shiny metal.

The Pit's famous bar was located on the back wall of the fighting ring and had the ability to look piss poor as well as kept up at near the same time. For the bar was always filled with drunkards and awaiting pickpockets, passed out across the splintering wood, reeking of the smell of mildew and watered-down alcohol. But, at the same time, the stools were red velvet (to match the elevated booths) and even if the booze was not the strongest, there was never a shortage of it.

Good riddance, Keith needed to stare down a bottle that never dried.

Keith heard heavy footsteps approaching him from behind and scowled at the red liquid. The footsteps stopped just behind him and a burly and grimy hand was placed on his shoulder; he stiffened before shoving it away from him.

"What the hell do you want?" Keith growled, still looking into his alcohol.

Keith felt the person draw close to his ear before chuckling, "Guess." the same hand then found his shoulder again and dragged itself down his arm, goosebumps trailing behind it. Keith shot out of his seat and pulled out a small pocketknife; the stool clattered to the ground.

He waved the weapon in front of the other man, "Don't touch me."

Keith's latest attacker stood about a foot taller than him and had the most hideous face Keith had ever seen. A crooked and swollen nose protruded from his face, and a deep scar cut across his right eye and down to the other side of his face. Keith could almost see an aura of the stench of booze around the man. He scrunched his nose. How Keith didn't notice the man reeked of alcohol he didn't know.

Ugly leaned in close, both arms gripping the counter and caging Keith; he held the blade tighter. A deep chuckle rumbled between them. "You're a pretty lil' thing aren't ya?"

Ugly's eyes were nearly pitch black with intoxication and he was beyond the point of rational thinking. So, Keith, now wanting to get the hell out of there, bared his teeth, and then shot his knee between Ugly's legs. He doubled over with a bark of pain, and Keith took his chance to slip away, but not before snarling in his ear, "Do me a favor and go rut yourself."

Keith stalked away from the man, pushing and shoving his way through sweating and flushed bodies. Sweat dripped down the back of his own neck, plastering his hair against it. Keith's goal was to make it to the stone-lined doorway, which was at the other side of the Pit.

As he made his way over, a stray body was thrown into his side, making Keith stumble into someone else. The faceless person then bumped into another, thus causing a train of people to fall into one another, like dominos. A little closer to the door, a puff of smoke was exhaled into his face. The signature smell of nicotine made him crunch his nose and let out a small cough. Keith frowned, how someone could inhale that black air always perplexed him. But he kept his opinions to himself and pushed his way through the crowd.

Keith could see the grooves and cracks of the stone doorway when a cold blast of wind made its way into the Pit. His body trembled.

If only he could afford a jacket.

# What Are You Doing Here?

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Despite knowing it was in the middle of winter, it was still a shock to go from the sweltering heat of the Pit to the clear and crisp air of Altea. It was like walking into a freezer. Very few streetlights lit up the dark roads and alleys near the Pit, each one spread apart just enough that in each gap there was almost complete darkness and the flickering created the illusion of torches.

With almost every step Keith took, glass crunched beneath his feet. It reminded him of the snapping of bones, a sound he'd heard too often. Keith passed building after building, each were boarded up and crumbling with abandon or age. No one there had any money to repair things, let alone to get a decent meal. A particularly cold breeze shifted down the alley he was in, playing with his hair and engraving in his skin, causing him to shiver. He rubbed his hands against his bare arms and looked down at himself.

His black jeans had gaping holes in the knees (He wondered how the two pieces stayed together), his stolen red Converse had holes at the soles of his feet and the laces were frayed to the point of no return, and his once white tank top was the only thing he owned that covered his abdomen.

His attire didn't stand out among the other's here. Everyone here was the same; cold, hungry, and desperate, it was just something they were accustomed to. Keith was grateful for what little he did have, but he couldn't help but dream. He had always envisioned having a warm apartment with new, clean clothes and a meal to look forward to. Was that too much to ask from a street rat like him?

Of course, there was the Altea presented to the rest of the world, pictured in tabloids and displayed on billboards across the country. The hundreds of clubs, casinos, and flashy hotels attracted tourists and natives alike to enjoy. But at night was when the city really came to life. Skyscrapers that nearly touched the clouds lit up the night sky and flashing billboards flashed in the streets, nearly blinding anyone who looked directly at the ads. Not to mention the high-end restaurants looking over the city in the penthouses with the best food from around the world.

Altea was like the two different sides of a spectrum; full of millionaires and homeless; humanitarians and murderers. There were people who wondered when their next meal will be and the people who threw up because they ate too much. It was always a push and pull between the two groups. One day the papers would talk about who went to who's party and the next, they'd be talking about the body found in an alley just a few blocks away from where Keith lived. Keith was always looking behind him to see if he was being followed, it was something everyone learned early in their childhood.

Keith chuckled darkly to himself as he turned a corner. Pure white snowflakes drifted down from the sky and stuck in his pitch-black hair. The only way home was down a dark alley

where hardly any light shone. He'd been jumped more than once down there; Keith shivered and rubbed his arms.

That's when he saw it, just barely out of the light of an upcoming streetlight, a man. A man surrounded by three other desperate people, who each had a makeshift weapon in their hands. They were yelling at the man for his wallet.

Keith was about to turn his head and walk away, when he caught a glimpse at what the man was wearing. It was nothing like he'd ever seen before, only dreamed of. The man was wearing a light blue suit and tux, his brown hair was slicked back from his face, and wore gleaming shoes that Keith would die for.

He stopped.

What the hell?

Dumbstruck, Keith took a step closer. The man was backed into a corner with hand reached before him, as if it could protect him from the rusting daggers aimed at him. Keith's eyes landed on his face and saw his eyes pinched shut and his lips pulled into a teeth-baring grimace. What the hell.

Something in the back of his consciousness pushed to run and save the man from losing his no-doubt priceless items, as well as his life blood. The small whisper fought against the smothering self-preservation 'instincts' bombarding it and slowly grew into a roar. Before Keith knew it, he was running towards the outsider.

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For the second time that night Keith fought. Arms swinging, legs kicking, and weapons clashing as he picked off each of the would-be thieves. He almost felt pity for them, as it was downright too easy to send them running with their tails between their legs.

It took only one punch to the nose to send one scampering into the shadows with blood dripping down their face. Keith took care of the other two by turning both of their own weapons against them through a series of direct hits to various places on their arms.

As soon as they realized the odds were piled against them, they followed their friend back to whatever hole they crawled out of. He took the liberty of staring after the thieves in disgust. That was the easiest fight he'd had in a while.

Keith spun one of his new knives around his index finger, then slid it into his pocket and without a word or look at the man he had just saved. Yes, that man had no business in this District and Keith knew it, but at the moment he was cold and wanted to go home. Keith turned to continue his path home, and a small trail of footprints was left in the freshly fallen snow, following his trembling body.

There was no audible sound coming from behind him, so he assumed the man hadn't moved. So, Keith jumped out of his skin when he felt something draped across his shoulders. Warmth dripped through his body like ink in water.



Keith almost melted before his mind was jumpstarted and he whirled.

"What the hell?!" Keith snarled as he took a step away from the person behind him, his hands curled into fists.

The Man in Blue raised his tanned hands in mock surrender; the gold watch gleamed on his wrist. That one thing could feed his entire carea for a month.

Keith's lips curled into a sneer as his hands moved on their own accord to fix the suit coat sliding off his back. The man winced before he stuttered, "S-so-sorry. You l-looked cold."

Keith growled, "No shit."

Keith noticed belatedly that he had to crane his neck quite a bit to look into his -- dazzling baby blue eyes. Damn.

The man smirked, and Keith realized that his gaze softened. Keith's glare came back ten-fold as The Man in Blue said, "The names Lance McClain."

Keith's eyes widened, of course that's who he was. The man basically owned this city, the prince of Altea, the playboy billionaire. How did Keith not recognize him? He turned on his heel and pulled his new coat tighter around him as Keith continued his way home.

"Wonderful." he said, deadpanned.

"Isn't it customary for you to give me your name?" Lanced called after him.

Keith scoffed and looked over his shoulder, "Figure it out, Pretty Boy."

Keith could feel Lance's blue eyes piercing the back of his skull, up until he was enveloped in the alley's darkness, snowflakes drifting towards the frozen ground and crunching under his feet. A dark smile made his lips twitch as silence was Keith's only reply.

Of course, Lance was used to getting everything he wanted and while standing in the spotlight; that was just part of his life. And even if it was a simple as not giving him his name and turning away without a second of hesitation, it gave Keith a sense of retribution for what he's been through.

After all, if only the rich got the headlines, along with their good for nothing 'superhero', Sharpshooter, they deserve to struggle for something so simple as well.

## Chapter End Notes

So, Keith basically just hates everyone.  
Thank You for reading.

# The Dads of Marmora are Great

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Keith owned the suit coat for thirty minutes before he gave it to one of the children in his careavee. She looked so cold, her shirt in tatters and her face bright red. So, forgoing his own comfort, he shrugged the coat off his shoulders and wrapped it around her. The people in the careavee may not be related through blood, but they were family.

The little girl, Sarah, who Keith gave the coat to, raced to her parents and presented it to them eyes glimmering and her shivering not as noticeable. Her arms were opened wide, the sleeves draped off her arms and the rest shielded her too thin legs from the bitter cold. Keith's arms had gone numb from it, but his he shivered so much, it looked as if he were vibrating.

Many small fires were scattered around the littered and weed infested cement. Every time he past one, it gave Keith a brief reprieve. Each bonfire had a least three people curled around it, sharing their body heat and the meager amounts of food the careavee had managed to obtain and distribute around. He greeted most of them with a smile or a nod of the head as he pasted them.

Over the sound of clinking metal silverware against tin cans, Keith was able to grab snippets of conversations, mostly rumors and gossip. He'd learned most from listening. Keith rubbed his hands against his frozen arms as he maneuvered his way through the crowd, he was set on the one fire near the back of the careavee's encampment.

Five near giants sat around a dying fire, talking amongst themselves in a language incomprehensible to everyone but them. A grin broke his lips apart as he lifted a hand and called out. "Kolivan, fe torga! I'm home!"

The man, turned to face Keith, his long, braided hair whipped across his back as his normally stoic face pulled into a small smirk. The rest of the carea turned towards him, each having a similar expression on their faces. Kolivan replied in Galran, "Now where did you run off to, Kit?"

Warmth blossomed in his chest at the term. Keith had always loved being called that, knowing he was considered blood family. Even after all these years it was nice to know that he belonged somewhere. That someone regarded him as their son. The same couldn't be said about his birth parents.

Because of them Keith was forced to grow up quickly, but in this area, in this family, Keith finally got to act like the twenty-year-old he was, rather than a widow who lived through two wars. Maybe . . . more like the teenager he never got to be.

"Kit?"

Keith recognized the soft voice as Ulaz and realized he'd been staring into the coals of the fire. Keith snapped his attention to the angular face man. He was leaning against Thace - the

quietest one of the small group, but the most affectionate and reliable. He always had the glint of quiet teasing in his eyes.

Keith blushed and stuttered, "What?"

Regris started to laugh, slapping his knee. The sound reminded Keith of a witch. Keith thought he would've saved such a reaction for something that was amusing. But the man found humor in the oddest places. Yes, the man was . . . interesting to say the least, but everyone around him couldn't help but be drawn to his personality.

Antok folded his arms, suspicion coming off him in waves. That's when the alarms went off in Keith's head. Did he notice his limp? "Where have you been, Kit?" he asked, eyes narrowing slightly. Regris' laughing dialed down to chuckling wheeze as he rubbed his hand across his lips.

Every pair of eyes of the carea were glued to Keith. He looked down and messed with a pebble with his toes. "Just . . . around town."

A wall of suspicion smacked him in the face; even Regris became solemn. They could always tell when their Kit was lying. "Where." Kolivan growled. Keith eyes didn't leave the ground.

"I -" he paused and took a breath, his eyes never leaving the ground, ". . . nowhere."

"Keith."

A chill went down his spine. His carea never called him that. He twisted his hands together and bit his lip, dreading what was to come next.

"I went to the Pit?"

Keith's mumbled statement somehow came out as a question, which was followed with the carea letting out barks of protest, anger, frustration, and worry. He cringed as he was slammed with the verbal assault.

Keith noticed heads turning their way throughout the careavee, each person curious why the men were yelling at him in a strange, foreign language. It was a rather odd sight to the careavee, for their carea mostly kept to themselves. He waved his hands frantically, hissing, "Can you at least keep your voices down? I don't need the entire world to know you're mad at me!"

Regris continued to rub his hand against his smirking mouth. Thace sighed then waved Keith over to him. "Kit, join me. You must be cold." Keith shuffled to him with his eyes downcast and sat between his outstretched legs. Next to him, Keith really did look like a child.

Thace shrugged off his own thin jacket and promptly wrapped it around Keith. Keith was enveloped in a bear hug as Thace leaned in close to his ear and whispered, "No more going to the Pit, we care too much to see you hurt." His voice was quiet but firm.

Keith sighed and nodded before remembering the winnings he'd made. His face brightened for a second before he pulled the money from his pockets. "I got enough . . ." The look on

Kolivan's face made Keith stop dead. Great.

"You fought. Didn't you." Not a question.

"That's why you're limping." Antok added, terrifyingly calm.

So, he did notice. Keith drew his knees into his chest. "I know how to fight, you know."

Kolivan sighed and massaged his temple. "Yes, you are more than capable of holding your own," he paused. "but that money you're holding was made by blood."

He knew where that money came from, but when he heard it uttered aloud, it made it all the more real. Color drained from Keith's face even as he replied, "Yeah, but at least we're not using it for anything bad."

Regris' face smiled and chuckled, "You're something new, Kit."

There was a soft chorus of agreement before Antok changed the subject. "Why don't you have a coat of your own? Didn't we find you a new one just a couple days ago?"

Keith played with a stray piece of hair; his back was resettled against Thace's chest. "About that . . . I kinda lost it." The soft looks of agitation made him hasten his words. "But! This guy gave me a new one!"

Kolivan raised a brow, "Then where is it?"

Regris made a sound close to a balloon losing air. Keith glowered. "I gave it to Sarah." "Ah, Diane's kat. You're quite fond of her, aren't you?" rumbled Thace. Keith angled his head up, to look at his chin. "Maybe a little." He said sheepishly.

Regris joined in, leaning over his knee and grinning. "Get too fond, and she might just join our carea."

Keith made a face and squelched, "And why on hell's earth would she do that?"

Antok's deep chuckle joined in, "Only the stars know."

Eventually, they settled into their routine conversations involving their days. Each person, however, pointedly avoided talking about the Pit. That would be expected. Those nights were always the best, they were always part of Keith's most treasured memories.

Keith wished he could live in those moments forever, but alas reality always had to take the reins. Though he hardly owned any possessions, he realized that the people laughing with him were the greatest treasures he had ever received. So, what if he survived in horrible conditions. That didn't mean he couldn't look to where the sun shone and be thankful for what he did have.

After all, that outlook had gotten him this far.

## Chapter End Notes

Does anyone know how to keep the ends notes on the right chapter? I'm new and clueless and need help.

# And We Meet Him

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Following the robbery, the vigilante known as Sharpshooter arrived at the scene. By noon he had apprehended the culprits. Police say the motive behind the attack is unknown—"

The television silenced with a click and the sound of ice clinking against glass filled the room as Lance knocked back his remaining whiskey. He scowled and draped his leg over the other.

What dreadful weather.

Lance smirked as he realized that most people would expect the view of a dark and cloudy sky with howling wind that ripped at their clothes and rain coming down in sheets. Not his dreadful weather. His definition was the stark contrast; a bright sunny day without a cloud in sight, accompanied with a dreadful sunburn and thousands of crowded, sweaty, people. He shuddered just thinking about it.

So, when the blinds were slowly drawn up the windows by an automatic timer that afternoon while his alarm blared in his ear, it was safe to say he was annoyed when the sun's rays landed in his eyes. The annoyance weakened slightly when he sat up, hair tousled in every direction, and soaked in the amazing view of Altea through his floor to ceiling windows. Miniature replicas of famous buildings, enormous fountains dancing to the music in front of massive, elegant hotels, and thousands of people milling about; either on foot or in cars.

Lance could never tire of it.

And with that love of this city, came the need of protecting it and the people. Which coincidentally led him to his current problem. Waking up sleepy and sore and littered with bruises and cuts he knew were going to scar. Rest in peace flawless skin.

Speaking of flawless skin . . . damn -- if that man was able to wash his filthier than sin face, Lance bet his skin would've been smoother and fairer than any other he had ever seen. With his adrenaline spiked body, he was able to take in almost every detail of that man in the span of a few seconds. Like the way his midnight black hair curled around his ears and shoulders, or how he subconsciously tapped his thumb and index finger together. But those eyes drew him in the most. How anyone could acquire that shade - let alone the color - of lilac purple was beyond him. Lance could've gotten lost in their depth if it weren't for the blatant disregard and edge of survival shining in his eyes like a flame.

Oh, and that man just had the nerve -- "Lance McClain!"

He nearly jumped out of his skin when the bang of his door being kicked open filled the silent room and scrambled to snatch his glass before it shattered against the -- very expensive -- carpet. The voice paid him no mind as it continued, "I swear to all things holy if you don't get your ass over here and help me!"

"To the stars, Pidge!" Lance hissed while scoping up a few pieces of ice that had fallen during his scuffle.

"Come. Help. Me."

For someone so small, she carried herself with the confidence and regality of a movie star. Every step she took was with purpose, and she was able to look down her nose at anyone who annoyed her. Pidge was able to read the most stoic of people like a book; there was no strength or weakness she couldn't pick out. So, the growl she sent Lance was enough for him to break into a cold sweat, set the ice on the coffee table, and rush over with his arms outstretched, ready to take the enormous box from her hands.

Never mess with a woman, Lance learned that during his rebellious teenage years; when the underside of a chancla became a serious concern for him and threat from his mother. Except at that moment, it wasn't going to be a chancla thrown at him at the speed of light, but the blast of Pidge's latest invention if he didn't help her out with that box. A box twice her size no less. Lance eased the object from her hands and grunted as he nearly dropped it.

Make it a box twice her size and weight.

"Dios, Pidge! What did you bring this time?! Your ego?"

"Oh, go to hell! Just use your damn mind powers to move it!"

He chuckled and took a timid step. "You know I only use them when I'm on the job." He then nearly toppled over when the hellion purposely nudged his shoulder as she passed him. He could barely glare over the box at her shock of sandy-brown hair as she made it over to the marble kitchen island.

"Bring it over here and I'll tell yah what it is."

Lance could sense her smug smile looming even as he growled, "Why did you have to pick the furthest possible place from the door?"

She didn't answer, just allowed him to watch her short hair bounce towards the marble, light as a feather and without a care in the world.

Prick.

Lance let her know as much, but only got a snarky chuckle in response. Her laugh was cut short just before he reached his long-awaited destination as the heart stopping sound of glass losing its balance reached his ears.

Pidge cursed as she scrambled to save the vase. Lance couldn't help but let his nervous amusement show as he came up to the counter. "I really hope you saved it. 'Cause if that's my new vase, you're gonna owe me a few million bucks."

"You can shove it up your ass for all I care."

He scoffed before sliding the box on the marble; curiosity boiled inside him. He'd been needing a new weapon to neutralize the newest criminal terrorizing innocent people for no sane reason at all, so he contacted Pidge in hopes she'd be able to engineer it for him. Maybe it was his order?

Lance prayed it was. It had been bugging him for so long; how he always got so close to catching the pyromaniac, but somehow, the villain would always slip right through his fingers. It had frustrated him to no end.

Lance was sure this new weapon was going to end this stupid cat and mouse game between the two of them. Anticipation crawled through him as he reached into the package. He smiled. But when his hand was slapped away from reaching inside the mystery package, he couldn't help but scowl.

"You suck, Pidge." He whined.

She just clicked her tongue and flipped the bird before reaching her own hand into the box. "I'd like to present my own child, thank you very much!"

Lance chuckled and folded his arms, shifting his weight to one foot. Pidge grinned and pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose before she dove into the box. Half of her body disappeared and a series of clinking and shifting floated over the room. Lance bounced on the balls of his feet.

There were a few more tense moments of waiting before she hauled herself out of the box, legs thrashing around. Lance had to cover his mouth with his hand to smother any laugh that might have escaped him.

If that happened, he would've been dead.

He was not kidding.

When she finally managed to escape from the box, Pidge turned her head towards him so fast, he was surprised she didn't get whiplash. She narrowed her eyes. Lance dropped his hand and replaced his smirk with a bored expression.

At least he hoped it came across as bored.

She grinned, baring her teeth and death glinted in her eyes. Lance took a step back, if looks could kill, he'd be nothing but powder. Pidge clicked her tongue, something she did a lot when she was around him, then hauled the object into sight.

It was beautiful.

The reflective titanium body melted into the slightly luminescent blue chamber to create the perfect balance of flare and quality. Each color from the black on the grip, to the silver muzzle matched perfectly with his persona's color scheme. That thing was a beauty. Lance squealed and bounced. "Oh Pidge, déjame verlo! Es tan hermoso que voy a morir!"

Pidge sighed, "Lance you're doing it again."



He let out an annoyed growl and paused, trying to rewire his brain to English again. "I want to see it! Please, please, please!" He reached out his hand to grab it.

His hand was slapped again.

"Oh no, you're not touching this yet. I don't want you to kill anyone." Pidge said, pulling the gun to her chest.

Lance groaned and bounced on the soles of his feet. "Come on Pidge! I know what I'm doing, promesa!"

She glared at him and immediately Lance thought of every single disaster he had caused that started with that sentence alone. He laughed once, then drifted off into a sigh. "Okay, okay tell me how to use it then!"

Pidge just lifted her brow.

Lance rubbed his hands together, "Hurry, Hurry! I want to mess with it!"

Pidge lifted her eyes to the ceiling, "You are literally a child."

"Piiiiiddgggeee."

She laughed. "Okay, okay!"

## Chapter End Notes

Don't you love Pidge? She's my spirit animal.

# Superhero

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Even at ungodly hours of the night, D.A offices were never quiet. The ADAO was no exception. Whispered conversations alleviated the silence of the office, and the sound of the coffee machine was a constant background noise to the occupants. It was never quiet, but always reserved during the graveyard shift; almost everyone working had seemingly permanent bloodshot eyes and were hunched over their desks typing away at the computers placed not five inches from their faces. Only four lights, one in each corner of the small office, lit up the building. The only other sources of light came from the running computers lining the back wall. There was no need to use much light with so few people working, and if the building was well lit, it would just become a beacon for thieves.

They rarely got up from their seats anyway, so there was no need to see around them.

The computerized mask whirred as it focused on the main target. Sharpshooter's eyes narrowed as he watched the head D.A snatch a cup of coffee from the counter and turn back to his office, looking energized as ever. The masked superhero wondered why he needed the coffee.

The head D. A, Lotor, wrapped both hands around the steaming cup as he maneuvered past each desk to the back of the building; his hips swaying to a beat only he could hear. His platinum hair was tied back in a tight bun, and not a single hair was out of place. And the black suit pants and jacket he wore complemented his hard-earned muscles and the lavender purple tie draped over his chest matched the color of his eyeshadow. The mask's glasses zoomed in on their own accord, wanting to scan and commit the D. A's face to its artificial memory.

Lotor's lips were drawn in a look of amusement, like he was going against the world alone and he was winning. The man looked so awake and presentable at three in the morning; clear lip gloss made his lips glint in the odd light, a faint unnatural flush to his cheeks made his cheekbones stand out more than they already did, and his already long eyelashes were volumized by the black mascara he always wore.

Sharpshooter sighed and hopped off the small deli he frequented. He'd been camped out on that roof for more than an hour, watching and waiting for the perfect opportunity to carry out his mission and he was ready to get home and take a hot bath. The bitter cold that night had seeped into his very bones. However, he was able to easily get up and down from the roof. That was all thanks to his flexibility the cold couldn't rob from him. For that he was grateful, he couldn't count how many times his ass had been saved with his unbelievable ability to bend and twist his body. The looks on the crooks' faces whenever he dodged a seemingly unavoidable weapon was always priceless.

By no means was his flexibility supernatural; it was just the product of 13 years of gymnastics his sister forced him into and got him hooked to. Sticking close to the shadows

the streetlights provided, Sharpshooter slipped into the back alley of the D.A office. He avoided any windows as he maneuvered past overfilled trash bins and abandoned furniture.

He was just about to peek into the head D. A's office window when the yowl of a stray cat destroyed the overwhelming silence of the street. The superhero almost blew his cover when he nearly slammed his head into the glass. He was already wanted by the police, there was no need for him to make their job easier by exposing himself trying to break into one of their offices.

So, instead of screaming 'Holy Shit' like he wanted to, he just muttered a few curses before slowly bringing himself eye level to the glass, barely exposing any of his face, and watched the D. A move around his room. It was dark, just like the rest of the office. Sharpshooter, bewildered, wondered if the other man had super-vision. He waited for a solid minute outside the window, watching Lotor set his coffee on the counter and put away various files throughout the room.

Finally, the D.A sat at his desk and opened his laptop; several charts and numbers appeared on the screen and he rubbed his eyes before placing his hands on the keyboard. The unmistakable sound of clicking keys reached the superhero's enhanced ears.

Sharpshooter took a deep breath before slowly turning open the lock inside the building. To any outside eye, the lock on the window seemed to move all on its own, but it was Sharpshooter. Controlling the power he only used when he was behind the mask. It was an agonizing minute before the lock finally slid free.

The superhero had to make his way through the window without the D.A noticing him so, to make his life easier, he willed the flower vase on the other side of the office to crash to the floor and prayed that Lotor would go investigate.

To his relief, as soon as the sound of glass shattering filled the office, Lotor's attention immediately fixated to his door; leg bouncing. Sharpshooter smirked when the D.A bit his lip and slowly closed his laptop. The man disappeared from the room within seconds.

Taking the opportunity, Sharpshooter cracked open the window and slithered through it. He considered himself to more coordinated than the average person, but there was no way for him to land gracefully in the office.

Since he'd made the wonderful decision to go in headfirst, he landed in a heap of limbs on the carpeted floor. The superhero groaned and rubbed his throbbing shoulder; that was going to be sore the next day.

Sharpshooter had just closed the window and locked it when the door clicked. A cold sweat broke out almost immediately, and he scrambled off the floor to find a decent hiding spot.

The superhero was barely able to cram himself between two filing cabinets before Lotor re-entered the room. The man had a fond smile on his face, and he was shaking his head. The mask was able to detect a small cut on his index finger as the D.A moved past the cabinets and back to his desk. If he noticed the slight change of temperature in the room, he didn't acknowledge it, at least not physically.

Lotor cracked his knuckles before opening his laptop and devouring the charts and plans displayed. Sharpshooter waited in his tiny, cramped, and uncomfortable hiding spot until the other man visibly became completely absorbed in his work. By the time he made his move, his chest was aching from being pressed together in such a way. He willed his breathing to be silent as Lotor moved closer to the screen.

Sliding from the cabinets without making a noise was a challenge, but a welcome one. The superhero hadn't had that much fun in a while. On all fours, he made his way across the office and hid just behind Lotor's swivel chair. Sharpshooter lifted his torso, so he was on his knees; careful not to let his reflection show in the small mirror just to the right of the screen. He was just about to cover the D. A's mouth with his hands when the other man sneezed.

Sharpshooter's body reacted like a live wire. He immediately curled into child's pose, with both his hands smothering the scream that threatened to escape him. Lotor sniffed and rubbed his nose, oblivious to the fact that someone else was in the room with him. How the man had survived with a target on his back from some of the toughest criminals out there was beyond the superhero. It was a tense few seconds for Sharpshooter before the D. A started typing again.

The superhero let out an inaudible sigh before moving again. This time, he was able to wrap his gloved hands over Lotor's lips. The man's breath hitched, and his body became rigid. Sharpshooter leaned in close enough to the D.A that he could feel the others breath against his skin. Sharpshooter whispered in his ear, "I'd rather you not do anything rash, Lotor Daibazaal. It would make everything much easier for the both of us."

The D. A's breath quickened as he recognized the deep, electronically modified, voice. Sharpshooter continued, "Now, I'm going to remove my hands. Don't call for help and don't turn around."

The D. A released a breath through his nose and nodded. The superhero then slid his hands back, making slow and deliberate movements, as not to scare the other man more than he already had. He strained to keep his cool and calm façade up, for Lotor's anxious knee bouncing made uncertainty crawl beneath his own chest. Sharpshooter took a deep breath before continuing. "You're good. One of the few, and you're willing to stare the corrupt in the eyes and laugh."

The D. A let out a breathy chuckle hands shaking where they clenched the armrests, "Where are you getting at?"

Sharpshooter frowned, "You don't have to be afraid of me."

Lotor scoffed but didn't say anything.

"I want you to help me."

By the way the D. A's knuckles turned white, Sharpshooter knew the man didn't like the idea at all. The growl directed at him only confirmed his suspicions. "Like I'd ever help the likes of you! Thinking you can be judge, jury, and executioner. Just thinking about it makes me sick."

“That’s not true.” the superhero’s words were barely audible, even in the near silent dark office.

“What?”

“That’s not my goal, I only plan to make this city safe for the people. I just hope that I can become a symbol of hope, for them .” each word was as soft as the last but filled with such dedication and emotion it made Lotor pause.

There was silence in the office as both men, thought over the other’s responses. They were silent for so long, Sharpshooter drifted off into a dream land.

He jumped when Lotor finally spoke, “If you want to help people, why didn’t you just join the police force?”

Sharpshooter laughed, “I failed the entrance exams, so I improvised.”

The D. A let out a surprised bark of laughter, before giving the superhero an answer, “Alright, I’ll help you, but don’t expect me to let you slip away when you’re in a tight spot. I fully intend to bring you to the station in cuffs.”

Sharpshooter could only laugh. “Of course.”

“Was there anything you needed, or. . ?”

Sharpshooter laughed again before saying, “Do you have any files on Pyro?”

## Chapter End Notes

This chapter was really fun to write and inspired by Batman Begins, so yeah.

# It's Hard

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lance groaned before flopping onto his enormous bed; the perfectly made sheets became a disaster as soon as his body hit the mattress. He had just barely shuck off the top of his uniform before succumbing to the enticing pillow, not that his head ever came close to the squishy object.

The door to his bedroom clicked open, and light poured in the pitch-black room. Lance cracked open an eye. Who dared to interrupt his precious sleep? Lance could barely make out the short frame of his tech genius. “What do you want?” he tried to say, but every word was smothered and made incomprehensible by his cotton blankets. His attempt at being annoyed just turned into a series of grunts and huffs, much to Pidge’s amusement.

She flicked the light switch, filling the entire room with light and blinding both her and Lance. He hissed at her and buried his face into the mattress. Pidge laughed before saying, “Come on, do-gooder, I need you to open up your ‘evil lair’.”

Lance screeched and rolled so his back was to the door and draped his arm across his eyes. “It’s not an ‘evil lair.’ He mumbled.

Pidge huffed. “I’ll drag you out of that bed if I have to, Shitshooter.”

The billionaire lifted his head and glared at the engineer. He sat up. “Why do you have to be so mean to me?” he said, rubbing his eyes.

Pidge rolled her eyes, “I’ll be waiting for you.”

She turned to the door, completely disregarding Lance’s question. She stopped just outside the room and gripped the door frame. “Also, put on some damn clothes.”

Lance huffed as she left and moved to slither off the bed like an ungraceful slug. When his feet hit the floor, he groaned. Somehow, during his night out, he’d been able to pull or strain every muscle in his body. Cursing everyone and everything, Lance gingerly made his way over to his walk-in closet and snatched a shirt too large for him and a pair of black sweatpants to change into.

Peeling off his latex bottoms was a chore he didn’t want to deal with, so halfway through he growled, flopped on the floor and created his own racetrack on the ceiling, the tight latex pants bunched around his ankles. His eyes drouped as he made the track flip, damn he was tired.

He must have lost track of time, because eventually Pidge made another appearance in his room. She popped her head in, expecting to see the billionaire curled up in his bed, not on the floor, barely dressed, and half asleep. Her hard eyes softened before she padded over to him and grabbed the clothes he’d picked out. “Alright, let’s get you dressed, and you just have to open up the door. Then you can go to sleep, okay?”

Lance blinked lazily before huffing his agreement. Pidge sat cross-legged beside him, and gently slid the shirt over his head. Only the sounds of their breathing and shifting clothing occupied the silence of the room, it made the billionaire's eyes drooped dangerously low. Pidge made Lance sit up, after a while of persistent coaxing from her, and she maneuvered his arms through the other holes.

The cloth fell the rest of the way, covering his mid-rift. Pidge sighed when a soft snore reached her ears. She rolled her eyes and patted his forehead until his bright blue eyes looked up at her, he groaned.

"I know you want to sleep," Pidge whispered as she moved to slip on the sweatpants, "but, your satellite is being weird, and I need to fix it. I don't want you getting hurt on my watch."

"Déjame morir en paz," Lance mumbled, barely coherent.

Pidge chuckled. Lance felt the soft inside of the pants reach his thighs.

"Come on, stand up."

Lance was practically dead weight as Pidge hauled him up from the floor. He nearly bent in half as he rested against her; cheek squished against the top of her head. Pidge sighed and lifted the pants over his hips.

Lance blearily wondered how she put up with him. "Lo siento."

Pidge barely caught the garbled words. And her mind scrambled to remember the few words she learned in seventh grade. She frowned, "Why are you sorry?"

"Soy demasiado."

Pidge had no idea what he was saying, but the sheer heartbroken exhaustion in his voice made her wrap her thin arms around him and squeeze. "Whatever you just said, the answer is no."

Lance pressed his nose into her hair. "Lo siento."

Something wet fell onto Pidge's head and she realized he was crying. She held him tighter and buried her face in the crook of his shoulder.

"Lo siento, lo siento, lo siento," he mumbled over and over.

"It's okay, you're okay, I'm okay."

Pidge held him until his shoulders stopped shaking; held him until her feet hurt. She let out a breath when Lance pulled away. He looked in her eyes, his face red and blotchy from crying. They stared at each other, not saying a word.

Pidge licked her lips before saying, "Are you okay?"

Lance looked to the side before nodding.

Pidge tapped his shoulder three times and Lance's gaze returned to her. "Bad day?"

He shook his head. "No, I just --" he cut himself off and growled. It was a frustrated sound; one she'd heard quite often. So, Pidge just waited for him to go through his process, a soft look in her eyes. Lance was never good at putting his emotions or thoughts into words. For as long as Pidge could remember, the Cuban stuffed all his emotions in the back of his mind until he could no longer hold it in, and it exploded. All those emotions were hidden behind a man who was always laughing, always joking. But Pidge knew better, she could always see what Lance was really feeling. And she was always there for him when it happened. Everytime she tried to stop the explosion before it happened, it always made it worse, making him curl in on himself even more.

So, she just waited for him to find the right words and gather his thoughts. Lance's eyes slid away from her again as he whispered, "Stressed. Tired. Hurts."

Pidge frowned. "Where?"

Lance blinked, "My heart."

Pidge let out a small breath and she nodded, "It's hard. I know."

"Does it ever stop hurting?"

Pidge was never one to lie, always told the cold hard truth, even if it stung. So, she just said softly, "No, you just make room for it."

Lance made a soft noise before resting his eyes. Pidge spoke again. "I'm always here if you need me."

Lance yawned, rubbed his eyes and nodded. "I know."

Pidge paused before asking, "You up for opening the door? I can wait until tomorrow I guess."

A look of childish determination passed over his face; the left-over tear streaks adding to the look. It made Pidge purse her lips together. Given that she found him on the floor, barely awake for what seemed only a few minutes ago, Lance looked like he'd taken three shots of pure caffeine. "Yeah. What's wrong with the satellite?"

"There are a few glitches that are messing up the feed on my monitor. Nothing that would suggest a hacker."

Lance let out an indignant squawk. "You wont' let me sleep for that?"

"Yes. I could accidentally send you to your death because the monitor displayed the street names wrong."

"Yeah, but you are still the worst."

Pidge gave him a shit-eating grin. "There's the Lance I know and love."



Lance let out a weak laugh, “Matt’s gonna get jealous.”

Pidge snorted, “Of course, he is! He’s a jealous little shit.”

This time, Lance actually laughed. It bubbled up from his stomach and filled the entire room. Just hearing it made Pidge full of happiness, and she knew she did her job. That’s right. She thought. Lance was the strongest person she knew, and it pained her every time one of these episodes reared its ugly face.

He was like a second brother to her, so all she could do to help him was support him through every turn his life took, just like he did to her. She grabbed his arm and draped it across her shoulders. “Alright sleepy-head, let’s go.”

Lance grunted and wiped his eyes with the back of his free hand. “I wanna help you, but I’m not going to be much help,” he sniffed.

Pidge smiled, her glasses gleaming in the light. “For some reason, I doubt that. Let’s go.” She pulled Lance along and out the door.

The pair was silent as they made their way past the extravagant kitchen, and into the entrance hallway; the ‘front door’ loomed above them. They turned into a small broom closet near the half-bath and closed the door, enveloping them in darkness. Lance tapped the left corner closest to the door three times with his knuckle and a scanner revealed itself from within the wall.

It was a small device that had a little screen and a keypad connected to it. And a camera was placed just above the screen. It closely resembled a laptop. Just. . . smaller. Way smaller.

He leaned over and the scanner analyzed his eye. The small device then displayed his ID and said in its monotone voice, Access Granted. The screen then changed to a passcode bar and Lance quickly punched in the missing digits. After a few moments, the back wall opened to reveal a spiraling staircase. The billionaire looked at Pidge and said, “Let’s do this before I fall asleep on my feet.”

Pidge laughed before they headed into Sharpshooter’s base. Their footsteps echoed around the small corridor as they made their way deeper into the secret compound. Neither said a word to each other until they reached the top.

When they emerged from the doorway, the cramped corridor opened into a large open room. Throughout the room, blue lights glowed, and the many excessively large monitors casted shadows across the tiled floor. On the far-left side, a small staircase leading to an elevated landing held the most damning evidence. There, displayed in the center of the landing, was the ever so familiar garb of the now famous and wanted superhero of Altea. But Lance doubted the police would ever think to check his penthouse. Especially if they didn’t know about the level above it, as no one did. He built the skyscraper himself and he’d made the proper precautions dammit.

The costume (‘uniform’ as Lance put it) was a two piece that consisted of a black tank top with a cross-hatching back that allowed for a pair of Escrima sticks to make residence and a

pair of tight latex pants. The blue that colored them was so deep it was almost navy. He couldn't forget the pair of black cargo boots that completed the ensemble. The costume was not flamboyant or flashy in any way; It made it easier to make multiple sets that he could use and hide around the house. The one downstairs was his third.

Lance wished his was like the other superheroes', but he went with function rather than flare. His mask, however, was his signature, created by Hunk and Pidge themselves. That beauty was their pride and joy. The computerized mask covered all but the bottom half of his face and his wavy brown hair. Whenever he wore it, the shields that protected his eyes from debris or any sort of advanced facial recognition and always glowed a neon blue. It stood out particularly well because the color surrounding it was a solid black. The amount of light it emitted was obviously adjustable, for it would've just been stupid whenever he was trying to move around unnoticed.

From his glowing eyes, the mask flared out like a pair of wings, but they hugged the sides of his head so the tips ended where a ponytail would rest if he could pull his hair back. Lance's favorite part was the blue accents that covered the black mask; the splash of color brought the entire costume together in his eyes. He couldn't thank Pidge and Hunk enough for it.

They were both key parts in his operation; she gave him the bird's eye view from his personal satellites, compiled all the clues and evidence together to create something coherent, and hacked through software like a champ. Hunk engineered new tools and transportation (he even made a helicopter with Pidge's help of course) and was the solid rock he needed through his whirlwind of a career. He dubbed their alias, even though they didn't really need one, Green and Yellow.

Lance walked towards the largest monitor and sat in the large, squishy, chair with wheels and keypad that could control the cursor on the monitors. He turned to look at Pidge, "Alright," he sighed, "let's get started."

## Chapter End Notes

It's almost impossible for me to not write angst. Also, I love lance and pidge's relationship.

# A Man of Many Talents

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shiro was too busy cursing his alarm clock, as well as everything that had to do with time. So when he turned the corner and slammed into someone else, it wasn't a surprise. Folders and their contents flew everywhere; it was like a paper bomb had exploded. This time, Shiro cursed out loud. "I'm so, so sorry!"

The other person just blinked and looked up at him, his eyes shining behind his spectacles. That's when Shiro blushed. Why did it have to be him of all people? If it had been anyone else, Shiro would've just apologized profusely, given them a small raise, and continued his sporadic way to the meeting he was late to. But the man in front of him was the only one he'd set his eyes on for as long as he could remember. There was no doubt whenever he saw the other man his chest fluttered, and his tongue became glued to his mouth. Shiro, ashamed as he was about it, even had several less than decent dreams about him. Despite going through internal panic, he still stuck out his hand, "Are you alright?"

Adam, his secretary, just mumbled adjusting his glasses, "Yea." He then looked down and a look that only Shiro could describe as complete horror danced across his face when he saw all the papers strewn about. Adam pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned. "What am I supposed to do now?" Shiro bit his lip and checked his watch; his meeting started in three minutes. Yes, it was an extremely important meeting concerning how to make his company more eco-friendly, but his mind wasn't really on the logical side at the moment.

"I'll help you!" his voice nearly cracked at the end of his sentence, and how it was possible he didn't know, but his face turned a deeper shade of red. Adam just blinked with a barely visible smile on his face and adjusted his glasses. "Okay."

Shiro didn't know why he was surprised when Adam plopped to the floor, hands already reaching for the stray papers. Shiro somehow got lost just watching Adam place the papers back into the folder, one by one, and placed exactly above the others. He looked up; one brow lifted and the other scrunched. He cleared his throat. "You said you were going to help?"

Shiro cursed himself a thousand times over for not being able to function like a normal human being around the other man. Why couldn't he take his traitorous eyes off the other's mouse-brown hair? Or how it flowed from his head in thick waves? He wondered if it was as soft as it looked. And his sea-green eyes hidden behind the thick lenses of his black glasses nearly undid him every time he looked at them. But why couldn't he hide his attraction like every other sane person in the universe?

He gathered as many papers as he could and tried to file them into a neat pile through gravity. Adam giggled, "You know that's not going to work right?" Shiro sputtered and set down the crazy pile of papers, heart pounding. Adam reached over to grab Shiro's pile and his hand brushed against the others. His hands were warm. And soft.

Kill me now.

“Don’t try and skip any steps, it’ll take longer because you’ll have to re-do it to make it right.” Adam carefully took each paper and placed them in his own pile. He pushed one corner to match the rest of them with his index finger. Shiro was enthralled by every movement he made, and he felt like his soul left his body when Adam beamed at him. “At least that’s what I’ve found out!”

Shiro couldn’t help but smile back. “Then it’s definitely true.”

It was Adam’s turn to blush. He turned away to hide his blush and continued to pick up the loose papers. They worked together in silence until the folder was full again. Adam stood up and brushed a stray piece of hair out of his eye. “Thank you for helping me.”

Shiro followed right behind him. “Of course. Anytime.”

He then checked his watch and paled. “I would love to stay and talk more, but I really have to go.”

Adam smiled, “I’m sure you’re busy.” He turned to continue his way to the file room. “I’ll see you later?”

Shiro nodded, walking backwards. “Yes! Until next time!”

Adam chuckled and walked away. Shiro watched him disappear into the crowd, a bashful smile on his face. He stood there in his reverie until he remembered that he was almost 15 minutes late to his meeting. “Crap!”

He raced down the hallway and into the elevator, pressing the button multiple times. As he was going up, he straightened his tie and checked his watch more than once, tapping his foot all the while. Yes, it was his fault he was late, and he wasn’t so snooty and stuck up that he’d push his annoyance onto others, but he’d be damned if he didn’t show any signs of a polished businessman late for work.

The elevator dinged as it reached the top of the building and he stepped out into a conference room almost made entirely of glass. A large oval table sat in the center of the room and several black swivel chairs surrounded the sanded cherrywood. Four people occupied the majority of the chairs and they looked impatient. One of them (a short one with dressed in a green, long-sleeved turtleneck) was pacing in-front of the largest side of the room, which overlooked the city.

Shiro cleared his throat before saying, “I’m sorry I’m late, something came up.” The man with his legs draped over the table looked up, surprised. Honestly every person in the room seemed to not have noticed him until he spoke. Shiro recognized the man as Lance McClain as he took his feet down from the table. The playboy smirked as Shiro’s eyebrows rose. “Umm, I’m supposed to be meeting--”

Lance cut him off, throwing out his arms and making his voice slightly louder than Shiro’s, “You don’t have to worry my good sir, we didn’t break in, ‘cause we’re supposed to be

meeting the boss around here!” He strutted up to the other businessman and stuck out his hand, “Lance McClain, nice to finally meet you! I’m the CEO of Ecobize.” They shook hands: “Takashi Shirogane. Please, call me Shiro.”

“Of course,” Lance continued. He then pointed to the one pacing across the floor. “That’s Pidge, she’s the brains of the team.” Pidge paused her walking to give Shiro a small wave before she resumed. Lance then turned to the man sitting in the chair furthest away possible from anyone else. The poor guy looked as if he wanted to hide underneath a blanket and never come out. “That’s Hunk. He’s nervous around new people, but he’s a great guy.”

Before Lance could continue introduce the rest of his team, a man just a bit taller than Lance and looked to be an exact replica of Pidge slung his arms around the billionaire. Lance grunted as the twin of the pacer grinned and stuck out his hand. “What’s up, bro? How yah doing?”

Shiro gave the man a timid smile before shaking his hand, “It’s nice to meet you . . .”

The man laughed before saying, “I’m Matt,” he stuck his thumb out behind him, arm still slung over Lance’s shoulder, “that gremlin’s older brother.” Pidge whipped her head towards them at the nickname and growled, “Matt I swear to God if you call me a gremlin one more time--”

Matt turned to face her, sticking out his tongue. “Or what? You’ll go all gremlin mode on me?”

Pidge clenched her fist, teeth grinding together. “You are so lucky we are in public right now.”

Shiro’s gaze traveled back to Lance when he cleared his throat before apologizing, “Sorry about that,” he rubbed the back of his neck, “We’re a little chaotic, but we get the job done and we do it well.”

Shiro chuckled, “You don’t have to worry about that. Your rap sheet says enough, and I trust that this will work out just fine.”

The businessman glanced behind Lance and his eyes widened. Somehow during the small amount of time he’d taken his eyes off the pair, Matt dislodged himself from Lance and made his way over to Pidge, where he held his sister in a headlock and mercilessly rubbed the top off her head with his knuckles. Pidge was cursing and kicking at his shins while he just laughed. Shiro decided to ignore the pair for the time being and have the playboy deal with them when he found them out. He really didn’t want to start laughing in the other man’s face.

Lance’s eye’s narrowed when Shiro gave him, in his opinion, literally the most suspicious smile ever. So, when Shiro’s eye’s flicked behind him, he immediately turned around. He threw his hands up at the scene and stomped over to the siblings, “Matt! Go stand in that corner over there!” Lance grabbed the man’s ear and dragged him in that direction. Matt grumbled and rubbed his ear but moved to the corner of the room, scowling all the while.

Lance then turned to Pidge and grabbed her arm, “Pidge, you go over there.” he pointed to the corner at the opposite end of the room. Pidge rolled her eyes but moved to her designated spot without a fight.

Shiro on the other hand was trying to hold in his laughter. In all his years of working and meeting with other people, he’d never met anyone, let alone a group of people, that were so comfortable and bizarre and eccentric as the people in front of him. Shiro had to press his lips together and cover his mouth to prevent the laughter from escaping him. And when Lance turned to back to him and attempted to continue their conversation like it was just a completely normal thing to discipline grown people like a tired mother by placing them in a corner, Shiro snorted.

Shortly after, the rest of his laughter burst to the surface until he was belly laughing and tears showed up in his eyes. “I’m sorry--” he was cut off by his own laughter. It was a few seconds before he tried again. “Sorry, I shouldn’t be laughing,” he chuckled again before continuing, “I really--”

He was cut off by Matt, who was still in his corner, when he started laughing as well. “Mama Lance has appeared yet again, and you didn’t even realize it!”

Matt’s comment made Shiro laugh harder. Lance just groaned and dragged his hand down his face, the shells of his ears turning a beet red. “Oh my god.”

Matt cackled and Hunk looked as if he wanted to curl under a rock and hide there. Lance sighed, “I’m so sorry, you probably think we’re complete weirdos now.”

Shiro was quick to reassure him. In all honestly, this was like a breath of fresh air compared to the rest of the people he’d met up with. Usually he was resisting from socking them in the face, not trying to hold back his laughter and he was grateful that he got a reprieve from the uptight and rude businessmen. It was about time he collaborated with someone he enjoyed being around. “No, you don’t have to worry!” he then smiled at the playboy, grey eyes shining, “I feel like we’re going to get along just fine!”

## Chapter End Notes

Did I write over 800 words of Shiro being a gay disaster? Maybe.

# Hello . . . Friend

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After the whole fiasco of meeting one of the richest people in the world, Keith couldn't stop wondering why the ever-loving hell that man was in his part of town. It had even gotten to the point where he was zoning out in the middle of conversations. Antok, one time, even had to resort to shaking Keith to gain his attention and it was pissing Keith off to no end. Usually, he was able to put one hundred percent of his focus into everything he did, but it seemed like his mind was scattered across the globe.

That man had no right to just waltz into his neighborhood like he belonged. And only blocks away from the Pit? He had a death wish. There was no point in him being there, no poorly run charity operations and certainly no well-kept property—so why?

The man obviously never had any experience with Keith's way of life, based on what he was wearing that night. Dressed like that, the billionaire was just begging to be jumped. Keith had been tempted to try and nab something of the billionaire himself, but for some reason a gut feeling told him it wouldn't have been worth his effort.

Keith was tempted to ignore the feeling and just go ahead with it, but his gut was hardly wrong. And that confused him, how would a prissy businessman be able to come close to stopping him? McClain could hardly defend himself.

Keith let out a growl when he peeled away from the bustling crowd and turned into a narrow alley; it was a shortcut he'd learned about a few years back. He had attempted to make himself more presentable to head over to the Business District, but he stuck out like a sore thumb amidst the ironed-pressed business attire and puffy coats. The people stared at him as they moved past him, eyes judging with barely concealed disgust. He stared right back at them, with a smirk on his face, canines exposed, and waited until they looked away, eyes downcast.

He just wanted to get where he needed to go, damnit! He didn't need all of Altea to stare at him with pity written into their faces. He didn't want their pity. Never had and never will.

He closed his eyes and inhaled the dust filled air as he walked down the darkening alley. The shadow of the wall grew with each step he took, the sky behind him painted a deep red as the sun set beneath the horizon. Keith let out a happy sigh and threaded his hair between his fingers, finally able to get away from the crowd's prying eyes.

The further he traveled into the alley, the quieter the sounds of the city became. Granted, he could still hear the hustle and bustle of the people back there, but it wasn't the all-consuming thing it usually was. It had faded into the background, a white noise to his wander thoughts. Most consisted of the billionaire and his motives, but somehow, they drifted to superheroes and villains.

Altea had gained its own masked hero, twin to its neighboring cities. The 'wanted' superhero appeared a few months after the initial breakout of heroes around the globe, (scientist and theorists were still struggling to figure out the origin of such people) saving every person he

could and foiling multiple master plans, all while being chased around by the police. The vigilantly, after he'd established himself, had been dubbed Sharpshooter by the media. Curtesy of the multiple clips showing him accomplishing near impossible shots with his stun gun.

The only reason Keith knew such things was because of the hundreds of electronic billboards hanging against the skyscrapers, each displaying sports events, news, and other useless things people seemed to enjoy.

Of course, with the influx of super-'heroes', came the 'villains'. Keith never really cared a flying shit about what those people did with their lives. They could've become a bank robber or con artist or black-market salesman. As long as they didn't hurt people, he felt no revulsion or bitterness towards them, because he knew what it was like to steal to survive. Granted, Keith knew many of them did it solely for the thrill, but he was still able to relate to the so called 'villains' on a certain level.

However, if the villain killed people or harmed them in anyway, that's when Keith felt something needed to be done to stop them. People could replace a stolen item or re-earn money but no-one could gain their life back. People only get one life, and Keith felt that everyone should get a chance to live it without it being cut short.

Keith turned a corner, hands dragged against the rough wall, and almost froze mid-step. There, it felt as if a claw had dragged itself down the groove of his back.

A mouse walking into a trap.

Keith was immediately put on guard, adrenaline spiking and hands clenching into fists. He looked around him, hoping to find the source of his dread, but was only greeted by the wind, rusting trash bins, and drifting litter. His gut screamed at him, tearing up his insides and urging his heart to race.

A cat waiting to pounce.

As much as it pained him to do so, he gritted his teeth and continued farther down the alleyway. He needed to get away and fast, but he was already too far to turn back, so the only way out was to plow through and hope for the best. The maroon sky had turned to a deep gray.

At every turn he took, he felt as if hundreds of eyes were watching his every move.

Every step.

Every breath.

He was almost through the shortcut when he looked behind him. And, god, he wished he didn't. He wished that he'd just continued in sweet, blissful, ignorance, but the curiosity in his mind outweighed the growing fear just enough for him to look back. Just how it compelled him to head to Haggar, the woman who knew almost everything going on in the city. The woman knew almost everything, all thanks to her moles and spies and contacts who



plagued the entire city, gathering dirt, gossip, and information all sorts of people would pay for, either to keep it quiet or to find out for themselves. And Keith, the situation with the billionaire had been bugging him so bad, that even he was willing to go to the hag.

It took every fiber of his being to hold back his yelp of surprise when he saw the figure. Behind him was a black silhouette of a person enveloped in a wreath of red and golden flames. The person was ablaze but didn't seem to be bothered by it or even acknowledge that the flames were even there. In no way, shape, or form was that person normal. And judging by the way Keith's stomach turned, the silhouette was a 'villain'.

In the brief moment that Keith saw the person, he couldn't make out any notable features, other than the fact that they had an enormous grin plastered across their face. The light emanating from the person's palms glinted against their teeth, extenuating the gaps and divots between them. The smile itself looked too large to fit on their face, gums showing and cheeks threatening to explode from how far their lips spread apart.

A wave of nausea came over Keith. He gripped his stomach and forced back a gag. Tremors threatened to unravel him as his fear grew into panic. He started to speed up, hoping against all hope that the person wouldn't notice the change in his demeanor. His eyes scanned the blurred gravel beneath his feet, and if he focused, he could barely hear his stalker's footsteps.

Without knowing it, his breath had quickened to the point of near hyperventilation as the pressure in his chest got heavier and heavier the further he traveled down the alley.

No.

No, no, no.

When Keith turned around a corner, he took the opportunity to look at the person one more time. Dread curled and settled in the pit of his stomach, causing the storm to build into a tempest. The stalker had gotten closer. Close enough that Keith could clearly hear the other's footsteps behind him, scraping against the gravel path and sending pebbles skittering away from their feet. He never should have let his guard down. Never should have let his mind wander.

Keith turned his speed-walk into a frantic jog; his hand palming the small knife in his pocket. Yes, he could take care of himself. But there was nothing Keith could do to stop the rising horror of being hunted like an animal.

But why? Why did he feel like his life was hanging on a thread? Was it because he'd been singled out from the thousands of people milling about? Or was it the fact that the stalker had the ability to wear flame like a blazer? Keith didn't know, but the thing he knew was that he had to get out.

He broke out into a sprint.

Once he reached his top speed, he looked behind him. The stalker was nowhere in sight, his face broke out into a manic grin.

His euphoria was short lived.

When he turned his gaze back in front of himself, his eyes widened. He had barely enough time to gasp as his mind tried to comprehend what had happened. The stalker appeared not three inches in front of him, grin impossibly larger and flames licking the ends of their fingers.

The stalker clotheslined him.

His back hit the ground with a crack, several larger rocks digging into his skin. All the air was stolen from him as the attacker's hand closed around his throat. Before he was even able to scream, the attacker threw themselves over him, grabbed both his wrists, and pressed them in the gravel on either side of his head. White-hot pain spread through his skin as Keith screamed. Blisters appeared and popped in a ring around his wrists like angry red manacles.

Keith, acting on survival instinct at that point, kned his attacker in the stomach. When the attacker curled in on them self, he knocked his own head against the attacker's with as much force as he could. Skin broke and scarlet blood crept down his forehead.

The attacker grunted and released one of his wrists. Keith took the opportunity to wildly throw out a punch. He was rewarded with the feeling of cartilage breaking underneath his fist.

The attacker screamed, whether in anger or pain Keith couldn't tell, and Keith scrambled away from them. Within that brief encounter with the person, Keith knew that Keith had a slight edge with hand to hand combat, but he also knew that with their unworldly power, Keith would be no match for them. So, while he still could, Keith attempted to run far, far away from the attacker.

But before he could even get out of the persons sight, a wall of fire blazed before him. Heat stung his eyes and seared his hair. He whipped around, eyes wide and watering. The attacker had their hand stuck out to the side; fingers curled at the ends as if they were holding a ball and wasn't even looking at him. Their other hand was placed under their nose; when they pulled away, their knuckle was coated in red.

Keith's chest heaved as he tried to catch his breath. His only way out was past the attacker. Keith looked at his wrists and winced when he saw the damage, even though adrenaline dulled the pain. He took a step away from the wall of fire.

As soon as his foot hit the ground, the attackers head whipped to face him. Keith froze. The cat and the mouse. The two just stared at each other without moving a muscle. Keith could feel his blood drip down his forehead and get dangerously close to his eyes. The attacker just let their blood drip from their nose and onto their chin.

They were stuck in the same positions, neither one moving a muscle. Until Keith, his mind muddled with terror, made to wipe blood from his eyes.

It was the opening the attacker needed.

In Keith's brief lack of concentration, the attacker disappeared and reappeared before Keith, where they wrapped both hands around his throat and threw him into the rocks. The attacker then held him down by sitting on his chest, their hands never moving from his skin.

Keith kicked and thrashed and tried prying the hands off his neck, but the attacker held their grip like a vice. Never once letting go, just squeezing and squeezing until his vision doubled. There was no air, it was stolen from him. He gasped and wheezed as he fought.

The hand just tightened its grip around his throat, nearly crushing his wind pipe. Oh god, it burned, it burned. Keith's fear was almost a tangible thing in that moment, tearing and screeching in the abandoned alleyway. He needed to get out, get away. More blood dripped in his eyes.

He promised Thace he'd be back that night. Promised that they'd go stargazing down by the harbor. Saliva, with nowhere to go, dribbled down his chin. The attacker's horrific smile grew wider.

No.

No, no, no.

Tears burned his eyes as his thrashing gradually became weaker, and weaker still. Until he was only strong enough to bend his knees. His lungs were burning, just like his skin, crying out for air; for any sort of reprieve. Air. He needed air.

Get away, get away, get away.

He again tried to pry the hands away from him, but the attacker only allowed him to lift their ring finger before shaking him.

The knife, the knife, the knife.

The back of his head hit the ground hard enough that his hair began to feel sticky. His doubled and blurred vision began to darken as he croaked. Air. Get away, get away, get away. His cheeks were wet with tears, and his chin covered in spit and blood. He felt disgusting. Pathetic. How could he have let this happen?

The black around the edges of his eyes folded in until he was seeing through a pinprick of light. And just before he could think no longer, the attacker leaned down close to his ear, a long strand of blond hair falling from the concealment of their hood, and whispered in a sing song voice, "Tag, you're it."

Then, the darkness claimed him.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter. How I only wrote one line of actual dialogue I have no idea, but it happened. And just a fair warning, things are going to get real dark real fast, so buckle up children.

# The Challenge

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Steady footfalls filled the cramped room with an eerie aura of anxiety. Sometimes the pacing was interrupted by the crack of the near crumbling walls settling. It was nearly two in the morning, sun long gone to sleep and the stars blinking in and out of existence in the night sky. None of them had gotten a wink of sleep, each too worked up to even begin of thinking of rest.

There was something wrong. Something so horribly wrong that Thace could feel his gut twist and shrivel as he paced. Ulaz sat in the corner of the room, buried under a mountain of ragged blankets and his unblinking gaze fixed towards the door, waiting for someone who Thace feared would never return. He was shaking under his cocoon.

Kolivan, Regris, and Antok had gone around the caravee, asking if anyone had seen their kit. That had been twenty minutes ago, and Keith was supposed to arrive three hours before.

It was a beautiful night; with a cloudless sky, thousands of twinkling stars peppering the night, and the moon shone like an enormous night light. There was a slight breeze just strong enough to cause litter to scuttle across the half-melted snow-covered ground. The perfect night to go stargazing. Thace felt his heart pang at the thought.

He had been looking forward to spending time with his kit. They all loved being around the others, but each Galran had their own special ‘thing’ with the kit.

Kolivan and Keith had always connected through hand to hand combat and weaponry. The two, during the spring especially, would spar for hours on end. Kolivan showing the kit new moves and teaching him how to hold a blade correctly. Sometimes they stayed together all day, until they were both exhausted and covered in sweat, dirt, and the occasional flower that got caught in the crossfire. Kolivan always seemed lighter on those days, and Keith? He always came back with the most devilish smiles and a spark in his eye that made Thace’s heart swell.

Antok always told stories. Ones of romance, or dragons, or even aliens, and Keith clung to his words like a lifeline. Despite Antok being as blunt as a hammerhead, the man was able to concoct the most interesting and intricately beautiful stories. So, naturally, Keith’s favorite story was the most illogical and improbable on out of the whole bunch. Thace never fully understood why Keith enjoyed the story about a group of people piloting flying, robotic space lions to defeat a bunch of evil space cats. Perhaps the reason he liked it so much was because it was so highly unrealistic.

Regris always knew how to make Keith feel better, so whenever the was having a bad day, he immediately went to Regris. He was the youngest of the Galran men, so he was more of an older brother to Keith than a father, and Regris accepted that in full force. The man certainly acted like an older brother, teasing Keith at every chance he got, randomly tackling the poor

kit in ‘a loving hug’, gossiping about whatever nonsense he came up with that day, and he always knew the right thing to say to Keith no matter the situation.

Thace remembers on a particularly bad day, when Keith was too sick to get out of bed, Regris just snuggled up next to him. Regris played with Keith’s hair and bared the bouts of sickness that came over him throughout the day. At one point, Keith wasn’t able to make it to the bowl placed near him and ended up getting vomit all over them both. Keith panicked, but all Regris did was hold Keith close to him as they got cleaned up.

For Thace and Keith, it had always been stargazing. They would walk to the harbor and lay in the sand, looking up at the stars and pointing out constellations. Eventually, they made up a game naming the constellations in the sky. They would go from the first Thace had taught him and alternate saying the names onward. It would go on for hours, until Keith got cold, or one of the other members of their carea came and got them. Usually, it was Ulaz, who came with a soft smile on his face and a few blankets from their stash.

Thace was the most affectionate member of their carea, but Ulaz was a close second. He showed his love to everyone in a different way, and for Keith, he would always wrap them up in about a hundred of their ragged blankets they’d collected over the years and sing. His voice soft and gentle but captured every bit of attention like a siren. Usually, when he did that, it was about the same time they were all getting ready to go to bed.

He would take Keith and sing in his soft voice a Galran lullaby they had all grown up with. It was about jellyfish singing as they float along the ocean currents. Honestly it was a weird song, but the melody always had such a calming effect, Keith never managed to stay awake through the whole song. Even Thace could always feel his own eyes drooping.

Thace always figured Ulaz and Keith had a special bond, for Ulaz never sang for anyone but Keith. Not even for Thace did he sing, he always claimed he had stage fright or made up another excuse. Thace just smiled and pressed their foreheads together.

So, Thace wasn’t surprised when Ulaz curled up in their usual corner and wrapped their usual blankets around himself, like he could bring him back if he held on to the fabric tight enough.

Keith was due home nearly three hours before, and the kit was never late to anything.

“Thace?”

Thace paused his pacing when he heard his name. He’d attempted to comfort his anima before his pacing began, but Ulaz had wanted some space and Thace respected that. Even though he desperately wanted to hold him. So, he resorted to paving a ravine into the cement in their small room.

He hummed in response and looked over.

Ulaz continued, “I’m scared.” His grip tightened around his blankets until his knuckles turned white. Thace walked over to his anima and knelt in front of him, his knees cracking as he went. He gave Ulaz a sad smile and pressed their foreheads together. “So am I.” He tried and failed to keep the waver out of his voice.

Ulaz closed his eyes and squirmed. Even in the cold weather, it was getting awfully hot under all his blankets. His entire body was covered in fabric except for a hole for his face, and his hands popping out of some hidden folds within his cocoon.

Thace huffed a laugh, trying to focus on anything but the building dread in his stomach. “Are you hot?” he asked, voice soft.

Their foreheads were still touching when Ulaz nodded his head once; eyes still closed. He was about to peel away the first layer of fabric off Ulaz’s fortress, when the trio returned. As they entered, the door slammed against the wall, making both Thace and Ulaz jump as Regris cringed from the hallway.

Thace’s heart sunk when he saw the groups grim faces. It was Kolivan who delivered the news. “No one has seen Keith since he left.”

Ulaz whined and he pulled the blankets tighter around himself.

Horror claimed Thace and made the rot in his gut spread to his chest. He took a step forward, “Something’s happened; I can feel it,” he mumbled, taking another step forward, “Something’s happened to him and we- I wasn’t there to help him--” He took another step forward.

“Thace,” Antok moved past Kolivan and Regris and placed a hand on his shoulder. “you won’t be able to help Keith if you’re like this. If anything has even happened. Take a few deep breaths.”

Thace gulped down one breath before he continued, “Antok, I know something’s happened to him. Can’t you feel it? Our kit’s never late to anything--”

Kolivan cut him off, his normally stone-like voice gentle, “We need to trust that our kit is fine. Now, I don’t know if they’ll do anything about it, but we can go to the police about this.”

Thace didn’t hesitate. “Let’s go!”

He pushed past the three in the doorway, completely forgetting the jacket that hung on a loose nail by the doorway. Ulaz scrambled out of his blankets, nearly tripping in the process, and rushed to match Thace’s pace. Just before he left the room, he grabbed Thace’s forgotten jacket. When he reached his anima, he grabbed his hand and squeezed. “Thace, wait for the others. And put on your jacket.”

Thace’s rapid footsteps faltered a moment before he stopped completely. Ulaz handed him his jacket. He shrugged it on, looked behind them to see the others rushing down the hallway catching up, and continued out of the large building they’d taken residence to, half dragging Ulaz as he went. The sounds of their rushed footsteps echoed down the hallway until they were out the door and heading away from the abandoned building.

When they made it outside, Thace immediately headed in the direction of the Enforcement District. Not a word was said the entire time the group was traveling; not until they reached

the Excursion District.

From where they lived, which was the ring around the major city on the southeast side just a few miles away from the harbor, they needed to travel through the Fashion District that filled the southeast side just before the slums appeared. It was one of the largest districts, next to the Business District and Resident District.

As they went through the Fashion District, they kept to the darkened shadows and used the moon as their guide, just as they always did, to avoid traffic and people. They had no problem with being around other people, it was just after so long of being in the BOM branch of the army, it became a habit to stay unseen. Even though the potential enemies were just drunk party goers.

After making their way through the Fashion District, they needed to pass the Excursion District and head into the Enforcement District. The change between the two districts was dramatic. While the Fashion District was relatively clean and proper, it still had a certain raggedness that completely contrasted with the Excursion district. Compared to the Fashion District, the Excursion District was like a child that never learned how to hold a pair of scissors.

Altea was a rather large city, but only had a few police stations in the Enforcement district. Courtesy of a failed experiment to add stations anywhere else. So, the trip was close to 45 minutes long.

When they entered the Excursion District, they were forced to join the crowd, as the buildings were either so tightly packed together there was no space between them, or so spread out, there was no point in walking between them. The hotels grew taller the further they went inland, and large digital T.V screens broadcasted hundreds of advertisements and news broadcastings.

They traveled through the crowd with little incident until a screech pierced through the air. It was so loud, nearly everyone in the crowd covered their ears in pain. Every screen filled with static for a moment before showing it.

Regris broke the silence with scream that sent chills down spines.

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Lance was scavenging his fridge, even though it wasn't recommended to eat at such an early time, when Pidge burst in, breathing hard. The raucous she made coming in caused Lance to look up, spoon in his mouth and yogurt clutched in his left hand. Her face was devoid of any color and her honey colored eyes were wider than dinner plates. "Lance, you've gotta see this."

The spoon dropped to the floor and clattered against the sanded wood as her raspy and strained voice filled the room. He threw the yogurt back in his fridge, disturbing the painstakingly placed items, and rushed to her side. "What's wrong?"



Anxiety swept through him like a disease, as Pidge hardly ever acted like that. She was always the solid rock that stayed cool and calm even through the worst of situations. Something horrible must have happened to shake her up that badly. She pointed to the muted T.V in his living room, not saying a word. There, displayed for all to see, was one of the worst things he'd ever seen.

He could feel the blood draining from his own face as he gasped. Through a thick fog of shock, he saw Pidge unmute the T.V. The fog, draped over his head, began to squeeze the column of his throat.

There, on the screen, was a man. A young man, close to his age he guessed, tied by his blistered and bleeding wrists, lay on red-stained concrete with a black blindfold covering his eyes. The room was almost completely dark, only the light from the moon shone through a window somewhere, highlighting the dried blood matting his hair and the goosebumps covering his skin.

A ring of blistered skin wrapped around his pale neck and adorned his skin like jewelry. Splotches of black and purple accompanied the blisters around his neck. The man was shirtless, and Lance could see his chest rising and falling at an alarming rate. His harsh breathing caused the horror in Lance's chest grow, along with the alarming spark of familiarity.

Bruises and bleeding cuts littered his chest and disturbed the perfectly porcelain skin with an array of reds, purples, greens, and yellows. There was a particularly deep one near his shoulder that Lance knew would leave a nasty scar.

The young man was surprisingly built. His muscles in his stomach were well enough defined that the blood dripping from his chest pooled in the divots of his skin before continuing its way down his body, and a V appeared at his hips and disappeared beneath the hem of his jeans.

The camera view drifted away, and it showed the young man's legs and feet. His ankles were bound together, and his bare feet were on full display. Lance wasn't sure if his captor had taken them, or the young man didn't own a pair.

The jeans he wore were so worn out and dirty that Lance wondered if the young man had ever worn anything else. The young man's scratched knees were sticking out of the enormous holes in his jeans. Again, alarming familiarity flared in his chest. Lance knew he'd seen them somewhere.

Then, the video crackled as a modified voice started to speak. "Isn't he beautiful? Baby wasn't cooperating for the camera, so I had to pretty him up some more!"

Bile rose to the back of Lances throat as the young man flinched back and let out a barely repressed whimper. Lance couldn't tell if he was shaking because the cold or fear. The voice continued, "Aww is Baby sad? Is he hungry?"

The person behind the camera then kicked the young man in the stomach, their heels digging in far enough to make him bleed. He cried out, choking on sobs. "Please, no. No, no, no, no-

It was almost too much for Lance to take, but he forced himself to keep watching; even as he swallowed vomit.

“Babies aren’t supposed to talk!” Another kick. Another cry of pain.

The camera turned around to show the young man’s captor and Lance let out a snarl. On the screen stood a young woman with blond hair that fell well past her shoulders. The mask she wore set shivers down his spine, as it settled over her black eyes and now slightly crooked nose. It looked like deep and bloody scar tissue that would come from horrible burns. The mask seemed to cling to her like a second skin and mauled the top half of her face beyond recognition. The smile she wore was manic and too large for her face.

Lance knew exactly who that was. Pyro. Beyond dangerous, and completely off her rocker. He’d had several encounters with the pyromaniac and each time, he’d barely come out alive. Her flames were nothing to mess around with and her mind was so twisted and dangerous that he could never predict her movements. It was that that made her dangerous. His nausea grew when she continued.

“Me and Baby are having a grand ol’ time! But you can come save him!” She brought her eye close to the lens and stared. “I know you’re watching this, Sharpshooter, so if you can find me, you get to save Baby’s life and I’ll get that epic battle I’ve so desperately wanted.” She then zoomed the shot out to her face, just so the top of her neck and face was visible in the darkness. “You have four days Shooty before he-” she then dragged her thumb just below her jaw, her grin turning into a leer.

She blew a kiss with her blood red lips, “I’m so very excited. See yah then Shooty!”

The screen went silent and displayed static, but Lance never saw that. He was on his way to the bathroom to discard the contents of his stomach.

## Chapter End Notes

Don't you love the angst? don't worry we'll be bathing in it soon.

# Fear You Can't Reverse

## Chapter Notes

TW: Graphic depictions of violence and torture.

Read with caution and stay safe.

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

Pyro dug her clawed nails dug into his skin as she twisted his ankle just short of breaking. Baby thrashed, screamed, and cried as he tried to break free from her grasp, but her grip never faltered, letting the pain soak all the way up his leg.

“Your begging was a nice effect for my message, but your voice is so annoying. I don’t want to hear it again; I won’t ever listen to what you’ll say anyway. It’s not worth it.” She gave his ankle a sharp jerk, and it shattered between her hands. Her prisoner screamed, involuntary tears soaking into the black fabric covering his eyes.

Baby took a ragged breath before whispering, “Go. . . go to h-ell.”

Her larger than life smile appeared on her face before she replied, voice as giddy as a schoolgirl, “Gladly.” She dropped his bound legs unceremoniously to the floor, causing Baby to hiss in pain. Before prowling up his body, she licked the blood from her fingers, heels clacking against the floor. Letting him hear her movements; letting his fear grow with every step.

She let it consume him as he crouched next to his head. Pyro grabbed a fistful of hair and yanked his head back, almost pulling his thick locks from his head. Baby yelped in pain. Now that was a tasteful sound, full of pain and delicious fear.

She whispered in his ear, hot breath gliding against his skin. “Babies are punished for doing something bad.” She stroked the side of his face with her nail. Her grin grew impossibly wider when Baby attempted to pull away, his chattering teeth grinding together. Pyro liked to think the trembles were from fear and not the cold.

His fear almost turned into a living thing when he heard her pull out a thin blade.

“The question is, what should your punishment be?” Pyro shifted her feet, so she was closer to his already battered ribs. Her eyes glinting in wicked delight against the barely rising sun. The blade she held twisted between her fingers, the blade cooling her hot fingers and giving her small cuts that would join the others infesting her hand.

She lowered her voice down to a whisper before saying, “I might have an idea.”

She dragged her fingers down his ribcage, relishing in the way he shivered. “Don’t . . . touch. . . me.”

She gasped in mock surprise, as her knuckle found a gap between his ribs, and said completely ignoring him, “Let’s just cut you up! Shall we?” Pyro pressed the knife against his skin, letting him wait in cruel anticipation before she drew blood.

“No, Please! Stop! No--” Baby was cut off by his own scream as she slid the blade between his ribs, right where she wanted it. She kept the blade just deep enough that he would be able to feel the metal grinding against his bones, but just shallow enough not to puncture his lungs. She didn’t want their play time to cut off short by the little bastard dying.

She angled her blade and was rewarded with a gasp that sounded halfway between a sob and bark of pain when the metal moved. The blade was left sticking in his ribs, letting him suffer with every breath he took. Pyro shifted back to his face, that in despite of the cold had beads of sweat sliding down his forehead.

She leaned down to stroke the handiwork around his neck and he whimpered when she wrapped her hand around his throat, agitating the blisters and burns there. “No amount of begging will stop me from doing what I want. You can fight, curse, and plead all you want, but I’ll never listen.” She tilted her head to the side, letting her long braid drape over her shoulder. “And no-one will ever hear you. It’s not worth it.”

Baby’s wet breathing increased and groaned when the knife in his side shifted. He opened his mouth, closed it. Opened it again and the barest whisper reached her ears, throat bobbing under her grip. “It is.”

Pyro giggled, “Oh look who’s so tough right now! You know, most people would’ve just given up already.” She let go of his throat and moved to sit near his feet. She hummed as she grabbed his smallest toe on the untouched foot. He tried to wriggle away, but she held firm. Then she bent the limb backwards. And backwards. Baby whimpered. And backwards. Let him feel the pain. Let him savor it, let it consume him, let it be the only thing he thinks about.

Then she felt it snap.

Baby bellowed, voice raspy, “It Is!”

To be honest, Pyro was surprised at his outburst. But the surprise turned to giddiness at the prospect of bleeding his resolve away. She laughed as she moved to the next toe.

Bend. Break. Snap.

“It is!”

Bend. Break. Snap.

“It is!”

“Is it?”

Bend. Break. Snap.

His scream seemed to turn into a roar of rage, like a lion trapped in a cage and hell bent of escaping. The sound sent shivers of pleasure down her spine. She took his big toe and bend it sideways, basking in the small whimpers and gasps of pain he made. "I'll just keep hurting you." Pyro said matter of fact. "So, is it worth it?"

He didn't answer, just breathed. Deep, quick and labored. Pyro almost thought she'd won, but then he whispered, voice raw with screaming. "Yes."

Her smiled widened as she yanked his toe to the side. A sharp crack filled the small room. He screamed, strained and choppy with overuse. Pyro laughed and released his foot. Then she walked over to the small door, where a crowbar lay propped against the wall.

She picked it up and bounced it in her hands, taking in how cold the metal was. She sighed. "Ankle or ribs?" she paused for a moment and then added, "Or knees? Those will be nasty to fix up."

Baby shuddered but didn't answer.

Pyro scoffed. "You want to talk, so choose. Ankle, ribs, or knees?"

A rasping whisper. "None."

Pyro draped the crowbar over her shoulders. "How inconsiderate. Making me choose?"

He didn't answer.

She stepped closer, heels clicking against the cement floor. Then let the weapon drop against his bound ankles. She pulled the weapon back up and murmured to herself, words incoherent to her prisoner.

Then without any warning or taunt, she swung the metal down on his remaining ankle with as much power as she could put in it. Her legs felt like jelly when he wailed. It was such a beautiful, broken sound it shook her to the bones. Pyro felt at that moment she could die happy.

Baby was a whining mess at her feet. She tossed the weapon to the side, letting the sounds it made echo off the walls. Taking a deep breath, Pyro closed her eyes before pulling out another blade from her pocket. She flicked it open, almost nicking her finger in the process. There wasn't nearly enough blood, she decided.

Pyro stalked over to the side she'd slipped the knife between his ribs and yanked it out with sickening precision. Scarlet blood welled up and dripped down his side, filling the air with a metallic ting. She squatted and placed her blade just above his hip, putting just enough pressure for it to draw blood. Baby was still making noises that made her chest fill with accomplishment. She was finally getting somewhere; it had been nearly three hours since she'd started.

"Anything to say?"

Baby just whined.

“Great!”

She pushed the blade against his skin and sliced up his torso, creating a single swirling line. Another line was created, branched from the first and curling up to just under his pectoral muscle. “This piece is for breaking my nose you bastard. That took a long time to fix.”

“. . . rot.” The word was just barely a whisper, but it was there. Pyro’s eyebrows rose, but she completely disregarded him, saying, “What should I name it?” She drew another branch, that one curling just beneath his arm. His breath hitched.

“How about, Karma’s a Bitch?” she laughed at her own joke. Blood seeped through the cuts, turning her artwork into a morbid abstract. Pyro continued, “Maybe, Weird Tree Thing?”

She made another branch. Then another. And another. She spent at least thirty minutes ‘drawing’ her artwork, making it the best it possible could be. Pyro wished she could’ve added more branches, but she didn’t want her work to turn into a mass of mangled flesh. Her time would’ve just been wasted if that happened.

Nearly an hour after first starting her piece, she finally stepped back to admire her work. It was satisfying to no end. Watching her canvas shiver in the cold, shaking in pain, and the blood that slowly slipped to the floor. It was the perfect mix of skin and blood all shining in the rising sun that had just started to make an appearance.

Pyro yawned. She was tired, after all she had stayed up into the odd hours of the night to record her message, and mold Baby into the prisoner she wanted, but there was one more thing she wanted to see. One thing that always made her curious. So, despite wanted to curl up and go to bed, she decided to put her little plan into action.

She leaned to whisper in Baby’s ear, voice light with excitement, “I had fun.” By the way his face crunched up, she could tell that he wanted to say something back at her, but just let out a raspy breath. She chuckled and walked away from his prone figure. Pyro made her way over to where the crowbar had landed, picked it up, and then placed it back in its original position near the door.

She had nearly walked out of the room when she grabbed the door frame and said, “Until next time!”

The pyromaniac let herself walk all the way down the dark hallway of the abandoned warehouse before teleporting back into the small room she kept her prisoner, curiosity and excitement growing in her chest.

It was fascinating to see that his rigid body had relaxed with a false security. Thinking he was alone. Thinking he could do whatever and not be ashamed. It was oh so interesting to see Baby still making noises of pain against the concrete, his hands opening and closing behind his back; like if he tried hard enough, he could grasp some sort of comfort.

Goosebumps had risen as the adrenaline in his system began to recede, and he began to shiver in earnest as the cold seeped into his bones. She loved watching him struggle. Fight to

breathe, struggle to move, battle to keep the noises of pain inside. But what really made her all warm inside was when Baby finally let loose a broken sob that shook his entire frame.

She smiled.

And she watched.

Even as the light stretched against the concrete.

\*\*\*\*\*

The mouse clicked and the video played again.

Darkness.

Blood.

Fear.

Click.

Hunk walked through the unlocked door (Lance hadn't bothered to close the various doors to his HQ) with a small plate of food in his hands. Lance had been holed up in his HQ ever since the video had shown and hadn't gotten an ounce of sleep that night. Hunk couldn't blame him, but frankly was a little worried about his friend. He hadn't done anything but replay the sickening video over and over again. Hunk tried to paste a smile on his face, but anyone could see it was forced. "I brought you some bacon and eggs."

Lance didn't turn, eyes still fixed on the monitor and searching frantically for anything. Hunk sighed, his failed attempt at smiling fading away. He accidentally let his gaze wander to the monitor, and he flinched, immediately taking his gaze to the floor.

Click.

The chef placed the breakfast on the table next to the billionaire and stared at him, trying to get some sort of reaction from him. He was rewarded when Lance's eyes flicked to him before gluing back to the screen. That was something, but . . . the look in his eyes. It was the look of a man screaming in vain for help in the void of space. Hunk pressed his lips together.

It was silent, Lance had muted the video long before he'd come in.

Hunk jumped nearly two feet in the air when his friend screeched, curling his hands in his hair and tugging, nearly ripping the strands from his head.

"I've seen that man before! Where? Where? It's so hard to see his face. But the hair, the cloths, the voice. Where? Work useless brain, WORK!"

Hunk's eyes softened, "Hey." He whispered, gently untangling his fingers from his hair. "You're going to hurt yourself."

Lance growled. “I don’t care.”

“Lance.”

The billionaire finally looked at him, his eyes shining in unshed, frustrated tears. Hunk put his hand on the other’s shoulder. “You will figure it out. Just let things run their course.”

Lance looked away and changed the topic. “Thanks for the food.” But he didn’t make any move to eat it. In fact, he seemed to be flat out avoiding the prospect of eating.

“Lance, you need to eat.” Hunk whispered, gentle and still avoiding looking at the screen. The first time he’d seen it was enough for him. Lance just grunted, still not even looking at the food. He wasn’t hungry. Or tired. No, he needed to figure this out.

Click.

Lance watched the video once more before shooting out of his seat. He grabbed the coat draped over the back of his seat and said over his shoulder, “I’m heading out.”

Hunk just let out a defeated sigh, “Where are you going?”

Lance didn’t answer until he was nearly out of the room, “Just . . . out.”

Hunk tried to get an answer out of him “Lance. . .”

But the billionaire was already gone.

Click.

Darkness.

Blood.

Fear.

## Chapter End Notes

So that happened. Sorry for posting so late! Exams have been . . . interesting to say the least.



# Broken

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was cold.

So very cold.

He couldn't feel his fingers, nor could he wriggle his frozen toes without pain shooting up his legs. With every breath he took, his throat burned. Keith couldn't remember the last time he'd tasted water. His tongue felt large and heavy, and stuck to the sides of his mouth like glue.

He'd tried to get out, tried to find a way to escape his bonds. But the rope keeping his wrists firmly in the place behind his back wouldn't budge. No matter how many times he tugged and pulled. He went until the pain grew too much for him to handle. And the cloth around his eyes, soaked with sweat and tears, wouldn't budge. It stayed firmly in place, keeping him in the suffocating darkness that threatened to devour him whole. The darkness curled around him, holding him in a close embrace, but pressed a cold knife against his back.

Keith was trapped in the constant stream of fear-induced adrenaline; always tense and alert. The constant state of wariness did little to help the nausea that slowly built the longer he went without water. Keith could feel his muscles comply less and less with his orders the longer it went on, but he couldn't let her win. He couldn't.

A sharp crack broke the silence and a wave of panic forced his uncomplying muscles to tense. Screaming. Pain. No, no. Laughing. Stop. Pain. No, stop. Screaming. Stop! Keith bit the inside of his cheek until he tasted copper, forcing himself out of the spiral. Stop, stop, stop.

Ragged breathing disrupted the silence in the empty room and Keith, realizing that it was in fact his breathing after a terrifying moment, tried to calm himself down. No one was in the room but him. He was alone in the darkness, and there were no knives hovering over his skin, waiting to mutilate it.

She said she was creating artwork, but there was nothing beautiful about it. There was only pain and screaming and laughter. He was still in pain alone in darkness, but it was sharp and consistent with the pounding of his heart. There was no waiting game with the darkness' pain.

He shifted a fraction and the constant black burned white in a flash. Keith gasped as he tried to regain what little bearings he had left. The swirling pattern trailing from his hips to his under arm began to cry tears of blood, wetting the old and joining it on his torn skin.

It hurt to breathe.

A stray tear escaped his eye and soaked into the fabric as he choked on a sob. It hurt to move, it hurt to breathe, it hurt to just be. He wanted to go home, curl up with Ulaz under their blanket and go to sleep.

Another tear.

Was Sarah alright? He hoped she still had his jacket.

Another.

At least it was him.

He gasped again and shuddered as he tried to catch his breath. Once he started crying, the tears wouldn't stop. Over the course of his stay, he'd lost all sense of composure. He'd been beaten, stripped of his rights, and torn down. All while he cried and screamed and begged. He lost every one of his masks: There was no face he could wear to cover his terror.

Keith wanted to let the world fade away, but he didn't know if he would ever wake up. Only to escape the pain and darkness that was both a comfort and torture. But no matter how much he wished it to happen, the snake of fear coiled in his stomach bore its fangs and bit into his flesh. Each time its poison filtered through his veins a boulder settled on his chest and closed his throat until he had to fight for each breath he took.

He wanted to go home.

His breath caught in his throat and he coughed. Shocks of pain bloomed in his chest like fireworks; There for a moment but engraved into the backs of the eyelids like a tattoo. He let out a low whine.

"Aww, why're you so sad Baby?"

He screamed.

It was a broken, desperate, and terrified cry for help. His eyes burned as tears pooled in his eyes. It was impossible. He was alone, just him in the cold darkness, slowly draining away. She couldn't have been with him. No noise, footsteps or the soft sound of breathing indicated her presence. He wasn't alone, she had been watching him for god knows how long. Watching him break down and whimper in fear. His lungs burned as they rushed to devour the cold air.

Pain.

Screaming.

Pain, pain, pain.

Her heel clack against the frozen cement and he jerked away from the noise. Keith's already agitated cheek rubbed against the rock, flushing it a pale red. His pooling tears overflowed and soaked into the darkness. Another clack.

Small noises escaped his lips as she got closer. And closer. And closer. Then he felt her hot breath against his ear, and he flinched away. "I never actually left you know," she whispered, "I wanted to see what you'd do." She placed a slender hand on his chest and dragged it down his torso, heat turning it a bright orange.

Keith wailed as his nerves caught fire, giving way to hot blisters. His voice scratched at his throat, tearing and ripping until it felt like sandpaper had replaced his cries. Again, tears soaked into the darkness as he tried to escape the pain. He rolled onto his back, old wounds barking in protest and his newest one screaming.

Her hand disappeared from his torso and grabbed his face, squeezing until his skin broke against his teeth. He whined, waiting for her to unleash her power, but only the echo of it was present in her warm fingers. "You know," she continued, voice equally soft as before, "I thought it'd be more fun. But you just made me sad. Making all those little sounds."

She threw his face out of her hands so hard it bounced off the floor. She cackled when he whimpered. "You sounded like a sad puppy. Just like you do now." She laughed again and slipped off her shoes. Keith heard the shoes bump across the floor.

The snake bit him again.

The sounds of his panicked breathing overwhelmed the room with the stench of fear. She clicked her tongue. "I'm sad that its already been a day. I really do enjoy spending time with you." She pressed her bare foot against the new burns and Keith let out a choked cry.

Keith could imagine her tilting her head back, inhaling his fear and using it as fuel. She began to laugh. The sound echoed in his ears and grated against his bones, causing them to shiver out of his control.

She let out a breathy laugh, and Keith flinched. Screaming. Pain. Laughter. He gasped when her foot added more pressure to his ribcage, grinding his ribs together. It was hard to breathe, hard to think. He choked back bile.

And then there was silence. If not for the foot crushing his bones, he would've thought she'd left to watch him stew in his pain. He could feel her staring at him. Assessing him. But no matter how hard he tried; he couldn't find her in the darkness. It stayed silent until he heard her growl.

He tensed.

And then the pressure from her foot increased, causing him to wheeze each time his lungs struggled to gather air. He couldn't breathe. Oh god, she was going to kill him. She touched his forehead, plastered with his black hair, and he jerked away. Despite her touched being gentle, the points of her nails made him want to tear his own skin off. Her fingers glided through a bead of sweat and then they pulled away.

He couldn't breathe.

Her fingers returned to his face. This time, her nail slid under his blindfold and for a moment he thought she was going to take the darkness away from him. Instead, she let her nail scratch just under his eye, tickling his eyelashes. Somehow, a whine escaped him.

He couldn't focus anymore. He couldn't breathe . . . couldn't. . .

The pressure disappeared and Keith greedily sucked in the air, throat and lungs burning. It was a blissful few seconds that ended when her fingers ran down his ribcage. He whimpered as her fingers dipped and bumped across his ruined skin, sending shocks of pain each time they passed over a cut. Her fingers reached his hips, the base of his mangled flesh, then followed the connected paths.

She pressed her index finger into one of the cuts. Keith felt the fresh clot reopen and blood spill from his wound. It carved its way down his body and splatted against the concrete. Her hands left his body, and Keith heard her suck the blood off her finger.

He wanted to say something. Anything. Give her hell. But, he couldn't. His mind and body wouldn't cooperate with each other. No matter how hard he tried, it felt like the words got stuck to the back of his throat, choking him in the processes. His mind held his tongue in shackles, because she wouldn't listen to what he had to say. She would just laugh and make the pain worse.

He tried, he really tried to resist her. But she bent him and bent him until he snapped between her fingers. No matter how much he cursed, cried, or begged didn't stop her. She just made it more painful each time he spoke. So, he stopped. And the pain wasn't as bad.

Keith still cursed and screamed inside his head. Imagining himself winning the battle and it was satisfying. In his reality, however, he was trapped in the dark with no words.

"It's too bad you can't stay with me forever."

Keith's breath hitched. He'd been so trapped by his thoughts that he didn't notice her hands leave his body. What was she going to do now?

She continued, "I mean, we only have three more days of playing until either I kill you or Shooty saves you."

She kicks him, so he ends up laying on his back. He grunts. "Knowing that guy, he's probably stopped for nothing trying to look for you. I am so excited to beat him up."

She appeared next to his ear. "But I'm going to make it so you wish he didn't save you."

Keith couldn't help but let the beginning of a sob escape his lips. "Oh, does Baby not like that?"

He tried to hold back the tears that stung his eyes. No, she wasn't going to break him. No, he was going to get out. Even if it killed him.

"I have something very special for you." She whispered. She didn't say anything else, just started to laugh. It was thick and heavy with manic joy and anticipation. Not for the first

time, Keith's breath quickened.

She was not going to break him. No, he was going to win.

Even if the only thing he felt was terror.

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"Come on Lance, you need to eat."

The Cuban just shook his head, pushing the contents of his plate around with his fork. He didn't have time to be sitting here, he needed to be in his HQ with his computers and data, figuring out where the (oddly) familiar boy was. He stabbed a wilting piece of lettuce. Pidge sighed and placed her hand over Lances. "If you don't take care of yourself, then you won't be able to help that boy."

At that, Lance felt his fraying rope of forced calm snap. "Do you know how long he's been kidnapped? Huh? Can you tell me that?" The cloud of desperation and overwhelming sadness that followed him finally started to rain.

He hadn't slept, or eaten, since the first video, and it was taking a toll on him. Pidge could see the tiredness in the way his eyes clouded, the way he flat out ignored his protesting stomach, like he couldn't feel or hear a thing. Pidge knew Lance would go to the ends of the earth to help someone in need, but she couldn't let him run himself into the ground while doing it. The sounds of Hunk cooking in the adjacent kitchen filled Lance's head with white noise. She let out a noise of sympathy. "No, I don't."

Lance slammed his fork to the table, nearly denting the wood with the force and he pointed at nothing. "I went down to the police station and his family was there." He choked on his words before continuing. "they saw the video, just like we all did, and I can't even imagine--"

His breath hitched and he covered his mouth with his hand. He took a deep, shuddering breath. Pidge nudged her knee against his. A comfort and a silent urge to continue. It took a moment before he started again. "His family said they were meeting him at 11. Pidge, that's only three hours! Pyro had him for only three hours and she did all that to him!" he broke off again before he groaned, "Oh God."

He pushed away his plate, and Pidge shoved it right back at him, even though all feeling left her arms at the news. She became white as a sheet. Oh God was right. Pidge had never gotten the chance to talk to him after the video. As soon as he was done disposing of the contents of his stomach, Lance had immediately sprinted to the HQ. Pidge had just stood there, looking at the T.V in shock.

"I feel like I know him too."

And Pidge was knocked back to the present. She rose her eyebrows in surprise. "What?"

Lance dragged a hand down his face and clenched his teeth. "I feel like I've seen him before. He looked so familiar and my brain is running around in circles trying to figure out where

I've met him!"

Hunk walked through the door frame with a tentative smile on his face. Whether or not he was eavesdropping on the whole conversation would not be disclosed. He was not some miscreant thank you very much!

Hunk didn't come alone; he came out holding a tray full of shrimp and a bowl of coconut sauce. Pidge turned to him and smiled, thankful.

"I made your favorite, so eat up!" Hunk set down the tray in front of Lance.

As if on cue, his stomach growled. There was always a special spot for Hunk's shrimp and coconut. It was the closest thing to his Mama's, but he didn't have an appetite. Despite his stomach telling him he needed food, everything he thought of made he want to throw up. He gave Hunk a small smile, "Thanks." He turned back to the food but didn't move to eat it.

Pidge growled. Hunk, wanting to protect Lance from her onslaught of protective anger said, "Pidge, it's fine! Just let him--"

She cut him off with a look that would send lesser men running. However, it just annoyed the cook slightly. "Lance McClain if you don't start eating right now, I'm--"

Without even knowing what her threat was, Lance shoved a shrimp into his mouth. Lance knew that she would make good on it no matter what it was. He scowled at her as he chewed. She just gave him a winning smile. "You can finish eating, take a nap--"

Lance began to protest.

"Nope! You'll take at least a thirty-minute nap and then you can go back to finding that boy. Alright?" Hunk nodded with her statement, his eyes practically sparkling with concern. There was a lot of pressure on the billionaire's shoulders that needed to be relieved.

Lance reached for another shrimp as he thought it over. Just before he took a bite out of it, he nodded his head. "Fine."

Pidge folded her arms and gave a huff, "Great. I almost thought I was gonna have to staple you to your bed."

Lance huffed and took another shrimp and dipped it in the sauce. Coconut blasted against his taste buds and he almost forgot the world for a moment. So. Damn. Good. He gave Hunk his compliments and the Samoan blushed, rubbing the back of his neck.

There was silence when Lance got lost in his thoughts, scanning through every possible spot Pyro could be holding the young man. He couldn't stop, not even now. Pidge spoke up. "Where was the last place you've been outside of the office building?"

Thrown out of his trance, Lance shrugged. "I don't know."

"Lance."

He chuckled, “Okay.” he hummed as he retraced his steps. His face dropped into a frown. “I think. . . Dios mio.”

Hunk leaned forward, hands on the table and eyes wide. “What?”

“I think he’s the guy that I told you about. The guy that fought the dudes that cornered me?”

Recognition lit up in both of their eyes. Pidge found the opportunity to tease him. “Oh yes, you never would’ve met him if you just followed the mission like you were supposed to!”

Lance let out a playful snarl, “I was on the trail! I could literally smell it I was so close.”

Hunk joined in, “Yes, but you weren’t supposed to go to the Pit, now were you?”

Lance gave him a betrayed look.

“I’m just saying.”

Then a thought struck him. It was so completely obvious, he wondered how he hadn't thought of it before. It was one of the only theories that wasn’t half baked or incoherent. He rushed out of the room, standing up so fast from his chair that it almost tipped over. Hunk called out in surprise, “Lance?”

The billionaire didn’t reply, just ran to his office to search through the drawers, looking for a pen and piece of paper. He couldn’t let the idea escape him. Furiously, he scribbled down the words in near illegible writing.

Just as he finished jotting down his idea, Pidge and Hunk ran into the room. “What the hell was that all about?”

Lance grinned, relieved to finally make progress. “I know where to start.”

It was midnight when the monitor flickered.

. . . hi. Sorry it took so long to post this chapter. Between exams, writing, and my birthday it's been pretty hectic and as I was reading through the chapter to make sure everything was good, I realized I switched perspectives and had to rewrite a large section of the chapter. Anyways . . . comments give me life!



# Sleep Is A Must

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The monitor turned to static and little blurbs of black and gray zipped across the screen. It reminded Lance of dancers twisting, twirling, and writhing across the dance floor in a manic display. He felt like a forced participant in the frenzied dance, stumbling behind the rest of the dancers, just a beat behind the music. The billionaire clenched his fists and snarled at the screen, his body tensing from his spot in his chair. His nails almost broke his skin from how hard he was squeezing them. He wanted to break something. Anything. His self-control was slowly chipping away.

Lance heard Hunk gulp before grabbing the back of his chair, muttering something too low for him to hear.

Silence hung over the room like a blanket, smothering the three staring at the screen with unblinking eyes. It continued until the same shriek echoed against the walls, making them wince. From her seat to the right of him, Pidge pressed her palms to her ears and squeezed her eyes shut. Her ill attempt at blocking the noise was in vain, for the shriek was loud enough to rattle skulls.

The billionaire took his attention back to the monitor and saw Pyro's face slowly materialize through the static until the black and white dots all but disappeared. Her appearance was the same as it has always been, blood red lips and terrifying mask, but with the moonlight shining through a small window behind her gave her a shadowed look that sent shivers down Lance's spine. And just before she started talking, the slight sound of bubbling slinked its way through the feed.

"Heya, Shooty! I can't believe it's already been a day! Me and Baby are having a grand ol' time, aren't you, Baby?"

From the corner of his eye, he saw Pidge force her eyes open. The camera shifted from her face to the young man and Lance felt the air forced out of his lungs. He slumped against his chair, unable to keep his composure.

Displayed on the screen, the young man was sprawled across the floor, still bound by the wrists and ankles. His blue lips were dried and cracked. Dried blood caked the skin. He wasn't shivering, a bad sign.

When he saw what was left of the young man's side, Lance smacked his hand against his mouth and breathed deeply, forcing the bile back down his throat. What used to be his ribcage had become a tangled mass of flesh. Dried blood the color of rust flaked against the torn flesh and in some places, new blood still welled in his wounds.

The camera stayed on the young man just long enough for him to take in one more significant detail. His chest. It had become one massive blister in the shape of a smeared hand, swollen

and red.

Lance just stood, staring at the screen, detached as his friends rushed to nearby trash bins. His hands shook. He was too overcome with emotion to control his body. Lance blinked and uncurled his fists. Something burned in his chest, but he couldn't identify what it was. Rage? Horror? Sorrow? Maybe it was one. Maybe it was all three, for the feeling was so powerful, Lance felt it would consume him.

The camera twisted back to Pyro. "I'm really hoping I can fight you, so please hurry up and find us!"

She giggled, "It would be so boring if I have to just kill him."

Lance's fingers twitched, anxious and ready to destroy something. Anything. He was leaning towards bashing his head into the monitor. That would shut her up. But he watched on, desperately searching for any clues. Nothing. Nothing but darkness.

Pyro continued. "Anyways, I have something special planned for Baby and if you don't get here on time, you'll find him a little different than how I found him!"

Her voice carried vicious detachment and glee, sending a wave of dread over him. Lance could feel her clawed hands grabbing at the back of his neck, nails scrapping against the soft flesh beneath his ears. Pyro's dead smile split her lips before she said, "Welcome to day two. Tick tock Shooty!"

The monitor's returned to the hundreds of cameras, loading screens, and facial recognition programs, like Pyro and her video had never appeared. Only the sounds of the computers whirring could be heard. None of them moved.

The screens went black for a moment before returning to the hundreds of software programs running, like the video had never appeared. None of them moved. Only blinking at the screen as the whirring computers filled the silence.

He didn't feel his lips move as he spoke, "Please tell me we got it recorded."

Lance turned to Pidge and watched her nod, eyes squeezed shut and teeth clenched together. "Yeah. I got it."

Lance didn't waste any time. He looked back to his screen clicked around the computer until the video reappeared. Pyro's face mocked him. Lance muted the audio; he couldn't find any reason to listen to her again.

Lance ran through the video again and again. Each time missing anything to find the pyromaniac. He growled, which ended up being more of a huff, and repeated the video. His eyes dropped.

Catching himself, Lance flew his eyes open and shook his head. He needed to start over. With a click, the video replayed.

A few seconds past the minute mark, Lance finally spotted a small piece of graffiti art. It barely showed in the top left corner of the screen for a moment and then it was gone. Lance rewound the video and paused on the frame. He leaned in closer to the screen. "Pidge!"

She stopped her rapid typing to look at him. "What?"

Lance squinted and pointed at the graffiti. "Do you think you can locate where the man is with this art?"

Pidge got out from her seat and nudged him away. She leaned in, mirroring Lance, and frowned. "I might. But it'll be difficult for the cameras to get an exact match. The footage isn't showing the whole piece."

"But you can still get it right?"

Pidge nodded, "Yeah, but I'll probably get a few different matches."

Lance sunk into his chair and sighed. He felt a small piece of the enormous weight on his chest disappear. Finally, an actual lead. He rested his forehead in his hand and closed his eyes. Just for a moment, and then he'd continue working.

His head bobbed. A hand was placed on his shoulder and he jerked up. "I'm awake! I'm fine!" There was a sigh and his chair turned to face Hunk. He was frowning. "Lance, you should really get some sleep."

Stubbornness rose in Lance's chest as he returned his friend's frown. "No. We finally have a solid lead. I'm not going to stop now just because I'm tired."

Pidge butt in, monotonous. "You've slept thirty minutes within the last thirty-six hours."

Lance turned his nose up. "Still not leaving. I'm totally fine!"

Without saying a word, Hunk scooped Lance out of his chair and tossed him over his shoulder. Lance screeched as he did so. As they moved towards the door, Lance kicked and wriggled, trying to escape his friend's grasp. "Hunk I swear-- Put me down! I'm just going to sneak back down here, and you can't stop me! Let me go you jerk!"

Hunk just held him tighter, to prevent Lance from falling, and chuckled. Smiling, he said, "I could staple you to the bed if you'd prefer that."

Lance stopped struggling as his eyes widened. Hunk was scary as hell when he wanted to be. He groaned when Hunk gave a triumphant hum. "You're still a jerk," he grumbled.

"Whatever you say buddy."

They almost reached the door when Lance yelled back at Pidge. "Don't forget to keep an eye on the cams!"

She didn't answer, just waved a dismissive hand back at him. Lance scoffed, then hung limp, letting Hunk hold all his weight. They were almost to the closet door when Hunk spoke

again.

“You know I'm proud of you, right?”

Surprised by the random compliment, Lance squeaked.

“It's true. You are the strongest person I know. You make me want to become stronger too.” Hunk sighed through his nose, “But, you won't be able to be on you're A game if you can't think straight.”

Lance closed his eyes as they made it out of the door to his penthouse. “You -- Hunk you're already strong. You're already awesome. I'm just . . . me.”

Hunk pinched his leg hard enough to hurt. “Being ‘just you’ is the strongest part about you. You don't change anything about yourself to fit other people's views and values. You go out of your way to help people. Whether you're Sharpshooter or Lance McClain.”

Lance felt his eyes watering, the hallway to his room was a blurry mess. He sniffed as Hunk opened the door to his room. “Now, please get some sleep. You can count on us.”

Hunk walked over to his bed and set him down of the squishy material. The billionaire gave his friend a smile. “Thanks Hunk.”

Hunk smiled back at him as he walked out of the room. “Anytime bud.”

He shut the door.

Then, there was silence. Lance rolled out of bed and dragged his feet to his walk-in closet. It was several minutes of cursing and fumbling before he finally came out with his pajamas. A loose black tank top and a pair of fluffy grey sweatpants.

He stumbled back to his bed, exhaustion finally creeping back up on him. He flopped onto the mattress and let out a breath. It was nice to lay down, but he was only going to rest his eyes for a while.

He didn't even wrap the blankets around himself before he fell asleep.

-----

Pidge rubbed her eyes, dislodging her glasses from the bridge of her nose. The algorithm she'd set to find the piece of graffiti ran in the background, scouring every inch of the city to find a match. She needed to do something other than stare at the screen and wait for results. She sighed and looked over to Hunk; he was fiddling with something in his hands.

Sensing that she was looking at him, he looked up, eyebrow raised, and lips quirked down. He stopped fiddling with the object. “What's wrong?”

Pidge sighed again. “It's been seven hours since my algorithm started.” She looked back to the screen. “And it's found nothing.”

“You know these types of things take time, Pidge.”

“Doesn’t make me any less pissed off.”

Hunk laughed and resumed tinkering with the thing in his hand. Various clicks and squeaks accompanied the whirring of the large computer. She narrowed her eyes at his hands, trying to see what was between them.

From what little she saw, there was a single branch that broke off from the rest of the black device. The end of the stick had an oval covered with a soft material. The main body was rather small, as Hunk’s hands covered most of the black device. She tapped her finger against her armrest. “What is that?”

Hunk turned the thing around in his hands. “Just something I’m working on.” He took the thing from his palm and stuck it out in front of him, it being lodged between his thumb and index finger. “These are something we can wear while Lance is in the field. Instead of communicating to him through the computer, we can use these earpieces. It’ll be much easier to hear and talk to him.”

Pidge nodded and grinned. “I can’t believe we haven’t been doing this from the start. Honestly, trying to have a decent conversation with him right now is a pain in the ass.”

Hunk laughed, “I guess it is.”

The two fell into a silence that was neither comfortable nor uneasy. After what seemed like forever, Pidge began to fidget, tapping her fingers, bouncing her knee, or twisting her chair. Hunk had abandoned the earpiece to watch her move around with surprising intensity. His stare was starting to annoy her when he finally spoke.

“Why haven’t you used facial recognition to find him?”

Pidge stopped her fidgeting and used her middle finger to push up her glasses. “I’m not trying to be rude, but do you really think I’m that stupid?”

Hunk held his hands up, “Just wondering. It’s been bugging me.”

“Well, there’s no doubt that if I could use it then I would, but from the footage that we have available; it’s impossible. The lighting is wonky and most of his face is covered, so I can get a clear picture for the computer to match. And even if Lance describes what he looks like we could still get a completely different person than who we are actually looking for.”

Hunk snorted, “Okay, thank you, Genius of Geniuses.”

Pidge gave him a shit eating grin, “I can’t tell if your being sarcastic or not.”

He wiggled his eyebrows, “Figure it out.”

Pidge let out another bark of laughter just as the distinct creak of metal added to the room’s noise. Both Pidge and Hunk turned to see Lance, frozen just inches away from the glass case that held his hero costume. The look on his face resembled a child caught sneaking into the cookie jar. Pidge scowled. “Lance, go back to bed I swear to all that’s holy.”

Lance flapped his arms, pout on his face. “I’m fine! I got sleep and I need to go--”

“Go. Sleep.”

“No!”

Pidge stood up from her chair and began stomping towards the metal platform. Sensing that he was in eminent danger, began to scramble for his costume. He was shoving his legs into the pants as Pidge was prowling her way up the stairs, a dark aura pulsing from her.

Lance got his second leg into the pants just as she reached the top of the stairs. He hopped unceremoniously away from her, pulling the material up from his ankles along the way. Pidge growled and walked faster. Just before she grabbed his wrist, she said dangerously, “If you take one more step, Lance, I will not tell you when we find a match. I’ll go rescue him myself.”

Lance glared back at her, eyes not as cold as he wanted them to be, “You wouldn’t dare.”

Pidge’s grin was devilish. “Try me bitch.”

After only seconds, Lance ended back in his room, severely annoyed, and eyes drooping without his permission.

## Chapter End Notes

yeah so I'm alive. comments give me life.

# Lose the Battle, But Win the War

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His stomach had turned into a feral beast, pounding and writhing around inside him until it turned his insides into painful mush. Its partner had overrun his mouth, turning it into a desert devoid of any water. His tongue felt massive and wouldn't move even with his most desperate attempts.

His traitorous jaw wouldn't accept his commands. Instead, it followed the lead of his stomach and tongue. Despite trying to regain control of it, it hung open against the cold, letting it seep into his teeth and turn them into ice. His constant panting pushed past his freezing teeth and created small clouds that hung around his blindfold, mocking his lack of sight.

Everything had turned against him. Keith felt like a general in a losing battle, fighting to keep his terrified and uncommitted soldiers fighting against the enemy that was his own body. But by then, he was the only soldier on the battlefield. Mind against body, and the body was utterly destroying him.

Keith wanted the battle to end. Wanted his stomach to stop eating his insides, the nausea to retreat and never return, the desert to become an oasis. He wanted the pain to fade away and the darkness to give way to light.

But they had thousands in their armies, while he fought with a single sword. They crashed into him, wave after wave of soldiers, hurting him, slashing at, and destroying him from the inside and out.

His mind had begun to succumb to the body, for dizziness had started to spin his world and thoughts. After endless lashes from his body, his mind began to turn into mush. And after a moment's hesitation, his mind fell victim to his body.

The dizziness and nausea mixed with exhaustion made his stomach clench and his throat burn. He retched and heaved but was only able to choke up a small amount of bile, as there was nothing in his stomach to expel. Everything had gone according to plan for his body, and it was only a matter of time before his mind fully surrendered to its might.

His mind no longer knew what time it was, its internal clock tampered with the constant pain he was experiencing. But it knew that with the sound of footsteps came pain and his world would continue to stay dark underneath the cloth. The morbid thought of dying in the darkness had taken to his mind quite often and replaced his blood with ice.

But he knew the cold well enough now, as he was nearly numb with it. His body no longer shook; his body had long overcome that weakness. But with every swift breath he took, it scraped against his raw throat and coated it with unforgiving ice. His lungs burned with it and the rest of his body cursed them for being weak.

The battle raged on, but it only met silence. The silence jabbed at his face, knowing that the battle was only visible to him and no one could join his lone battle against his mind and body. It was a reminder that the world was unknowing and unwilling to help him.

A click disrupted the silence's leering and a brief and small piece of hope slipped through his mind before it was crushed. The silence made a tactical retreat, but not before reminding him that the world wasn't helping him. It was only watching as she did as she pleased.

Keith didn't stop. He lay there raging against the thousands of soldiers and waited for the pain to come. Accepting it, for it had become a constant the past days. For periods of time, his body would gain more soldiers from an outside force, making it all the more powerful. But who was he to stop it?

The familiar sound of clacking high heels mimicked the marching of the new soldiers on their way to join the empire. They stopped, and Keith imagined peering over to a hillside and feeling despair as he saw row and row of new, fresh, enemy soldiers ready to join the fight.

He waited for the pain to come and expelled any thoughts. There was no war, no armies, and he was certainly no general. Leave the mind blank, focus on the pain and let it join the rest of his aching body. Let it join the hunger, thirst, and bleeding wounds. Let it join him in the darkness.

He and the darkness had become quite the companions. The darkness accepted him, and Keith begrudgingly accepted it, so she wouldn't break him in it. He would accept the pain she brought in the darkness, but he wouldn't accept defeat from her. Accepting the pain made it easier, as well as not uttering a word.

Speech made the pain excessive and harder to accept, so he let his tongue hold reign in his mouth like a cowardly and gluttonous king. She said he wouldn't hurt as much if he'd stop talking, and the king accepted it.

Keith didn't want to listen, didn't want the king to accept her will, but she made it hurt so much. She created so many armies to fight against him that he was never able to attempt to fight, and she laughed at him as he fell beneath their might.

He couldn't stand the way she laughed. So full of delight and arrogance, like she knew he would break against her will.

So, the fat king sat idly on this throne and the extra pain went away with the laughter. That was good. Now the king could sit peacefully on his throne.

No, there was no king. No wars. No armies.

Keith then felt a wave of confusion, no pain and come to join the rest of his beaten body. And it was silent in the room. Usually, he was just fine in the silence. With it, he could think, if his mind allowed him to. In the silence he was alone in the darkness. With the laughter, she invaded his darkness and stole even that from him.



But, with the silence now, it unnerved him. She usually said something right as her footsteps appeared. Not good. Not good.

“You’re not looking so hot Baby.” Her voice echoed against the walls.

Good. She didn’t sound angry. The wave of nervousness started to ebb.

Keith kept breathing as she clicked her tongue and with a light voice said, “You must be thirsty!”

Keith’s tongue didn’t bother to listen to his mind as he screamed his silent scream. With the mention of water, he became hyper aware of the dryness that held his mouth and scraped down his throat.

Oh god did he need water. He needed that water to fill his desert and make it fruitful again. Needed it to flood the battlefield and get rid of the enemies.

He was so desperate for water that when she requested him to turn to her, he didn’t hesitate. He twisted his head, so it faced upwards and let his jaw fall open. It was the first time in a while that his mind and body were agreeing with each other.

Keith was rewarded with a waterfall of liquid splashing across his face and bouncing off his nose before it landed on his tongue.

As soon as the first drop of water landed on his tongue, it triggered something in his mind, making the thirst even more powerful. The soldiers turned into feral beasts, blinded by rage. They gained the upper hand against his mind, and he felt himself lifting his heavy head from the concrete, following the stream of water closer to its source.

He guzzled down every bit of water he could, not caring if the water overflowed from his mouth and dripped down his chin. He’d just lick the rest away. The flow of water stopped, and he gasped, finally allowing his lungs to take in air.

He heard her put something down. His mind supplied that it was most likely the jug of water before he panicked. What had he done wrong? He did nothing against her rules!

No, no he wasn’t following her rules. He was biding his time, waiting for her armies to come to his ground before they were crushed.

Keith clenched his teeth and waited for her to add to her army of pain, but it never came. Instead she said, “I don’t want you throwing up!”

Her words made him aware of the water churning inside him, his blessed water had turned the desert into an oasis but had flooded his stomach. It fueled the nausea that wouldn’t retreat. His mouth betrayed him and twisted into a grimace. The anger at his own body muddled her next words.

“See? I told you. Your vomit would just make this place smell even worse!”

Keith wanted her to leave. Leave and never come back, walk away without a second glance. But she had the water. She was his only lifeline as well as his doom. And even if she left him and the darkness alone, Keith couldn't leave on his own. His ankles were pulverized and if he moved just a fraction, searing pain would shoot up his legs. Not to mention they were bound together, as well as his wrists.

His weak anger quickly morphed into sadness, another emotion he'd become quite familiar with. Keith let out a short, barely audible sob, his torn throat screeching with the sound. He wanted to cry but wouldn't allow himself to. Crying would waste his newly acquired water.

He heard her huff before the water splashed against his face again, wetting the dirty black fabric around his eyes.

He found the stream again and guzzled down every drop of water as greedily as the last time. It was pulled away again, but he was allowed the water for a little longer. Give it back, he screamed. But no sound came from his lips aside from his heavy breaths. The water in his stomach subdued the dull aching in his stomach, but he needed more. Needed something to make the ache disappear.

She allowed the stream of water to flow once more before taking it away. Keith took down as much as he could, forcing the nausea in a corner. He wouldn't let it overtake his army this time.

Once the water disappeared for good, she filled the silence with her horrid voice. "Now, don't waste it by throwing it all up, okay?"

Keith didn't need her to tell him that. He knew what a waste it would be, and he didn't know the next time he would be able to get water. However, for all he knew, that could've been that last drink he ever could have taken. He pushed that thought away with the nausea that had started to break his army's front lines.

She spoke again, "I need you to be all big and strong for your surprise!" then she laughed. "I can't wait to see his face when he sees you!"

Keith didn't want to think about what she had said, didn't want to know the implications. Was she finally going to kill him? Finally overbear him with her armies and pummel him into the ground? Keith mentally shook his head; he didn't need to think.

"Well, I'll see you later, Baby!"

Keith pictured her waving, with her terrifying smile plastered against her pale face. He felt a shiver run down his spine, and it was his mind's turn to curse his body. And the sudden clarity that his mind had found an opening against his body's defenses, caused a surge of pride.

Then, after her final statement, Keith felt her presence disappear. With how ever long he'd been here, Keith had long gotten used to sensing her presence. He never knew what she had in mind, or where she was, but he could feel her. Feel her observing him and mocking him

within the dark. He'd gotten very good at knowing when she was with him. By then it was almost instinct.

Keith waited an extra few minutes after she'd gone, making sure she hadn't changed her mind. And tried to flex his stiff and numb fingers. Each movement caused him pain, but he knew if he didn't move them, he'd have hell to pay. The cold was a horrid thing that stole heat and movement, but it at least numbed the pain.

Keith withdrew back into his mind. He found himself retreating further and further into his headspace. And found himself once again in the heart of battle, but it wasn't against his own body. No, it was against an enemy kingdom with dragons, and wizards, and fae.

The further he continued his journey, the more the pain faded into the background. Instead of useless pain, it became an injury he got defending someone. Instead of worthless pain, it became sore muscles from training. And sometimes he went so deep, the pain faded away into nothing.

The darkness she kept him in helped him create his worlds. His false friend made it easier to focus. There was nothing to look at but black, so his mind created something to see.

Without her laughter and with the silence he was able to clearly hear the clash of swords, the breeze rustling leaves, and rivers roaring past. Without two of his main senses, all he really could focus on were his stories. And he was fine with that.

He drifted away in his story and waited for her to come back.

## Chapter End Notes

I've read a lot of books that have war in it recently and as you can see I was inspired. Comments give me life.

# Orange Juice

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He was chasing someone, following the barely discernible silhouette in the surrounding darkness. The person's shoulder length hair whipped against their back as they ran further and further into the black. They had started to blend into the rest of their surroundings, disappearing from his vision.

He pushed his footsteps further into the ground, willing himself to go faster. His slamming footsteps meshed with the silhouette's, echoing against unseen walls surrounding them. Outstretching his hand, he tried and failed to grab them, stop them from running any further away from him.

His fingers curled around air.

He silently growled at himself. He needed to catch the person, stop them from running away from him. His chest burned with the need to protect, to get the person within his reach so he could shield them from whatever danger was approaching.

He pushed himself to go faster, but the person was still just beyond his reach. Never seeming to get closer or farther away. He was stuck just short of them. He gritted his teeth and forced his legs to move faster than they ever had before, his hand still reaching out to the person.

His lungs burned as he pushed himself, breaths coming out in raspy pants. Pumping his legs, his footsteps fell out of synch with the silhouettes and grew in volume. But the person never looked back, never once acknowledged that he was right behind them, desperately chasing them through the near impenetrable darkness.

He was about to try and grab them again when a countdown appeared above their head. In red, the number illuminated nothing around it but itself. The countdown started from twenty.

A second later, it dropped to nineteen.

The apprehension in his chest grew into dread. He let out a soft sound, almost a whimper as he forced his now numbing legs to go, go, go. He coiled his back leg and sprung against the floor, trying to reach the person in one large leap.

His fingers barely grazed the cloth.

He let out a frustrated growl and closed his eyes, forcing the tears that had begun to bead fall down his cheeks.

The numbers above the person's head reached twelve.

He needed to stop the person, stop them from running and keep them safe. But he couldn't. He couldn't catch them, and he couldn't grab their attention. The person just kept on jogging

away from him, never once faltering in their steps.

He looked again at the numbers. The red number was five, then four, three. He needed to help the person, save them from whatever was coming. He let out another noise and prepared to leap with the last bit of his strength.

This time – this time he was going to stop them. He was going to stop the silhouette from disappearing. He coiled again for the jump.

Three.

He leapt.

The person kept running.

Two.

He reached as far as he could go.

One.

Light and color appeared just as the ground beneath the person fell from beneath their feet. He was able to see everything in perfect, slow motion, detail.

He saw the persons pitch-black hair trail behind their body as they began their fall. He saw them turn up towards him, eyes blown wide in terror. Tears had beaded in the corner of them.

Their shirt had disappeared, revealing the blood, bruises and deep cuts that coated nearly every inch of their skin.

The person opened their mouth and screamed. That's when he recognized them. He knew that scream. He'd heard it over a wicked video, on his living room T.V.

He watched and listened as the young man fell. Down and down and down the gaping hole, unable to do anything. He failed. If he'd just reached a little farther, run a little faster, thought a little harder. Maybe he could have saved the young man.

He fell to his knees and clutched the fabric over his heart, still looking into the cavern that had swallowed the young man whole. He couldn't see the young man anymore, but he could still hear his scream. It echoed all around him. He couldn't tell if it was really there or his mind was torturing him.

Fat tears rolled down his cheeks and splashed against his lips, making him taste bitter salt.

A pressure grew in his chest until he couldn't stand it anymore. His chest cracked and he screamed under the pressure. There was nothing to hold him back, he let himself scream and scream until his voice gave out. He screamed until his lungs completely ran out of air.

He'd failed. Failed so horribly and completely that an unfixable hole appeared where his chest split in two. The young man was right within his reach, but he'd failed to save him.

He'd failed and now the young man was gone forever.

He fell to his side and curled into a ball, sobbing. The ache in his chest was nearing unbearable. How could he have let this happen? Oh god it was all his fault. If only . . . if only . . . if only . . .

He let the tears cascade down his face and drip onto the ground. Once again all he could see was darkness. Color and light had disappeared completely, leaving him to be alone. His chest cracked again. He screamed, unrestrained, and this time it was filled with a different kind of pain.

Why couldn't he have saved him?

He was a complete failure.

A complete and total failure.

He sobbed again, curling in on himself further.

He deserved to be left alone in his sorrow. He deserved to suffer alone, in the blackness that surrounded him. The isolation was a deserved torture. Just let him--

“LANCE!”

His eyes flew open and snapped around the room, taking in his surroundings before landing on Pidge. She was breathing hard, her chest rising and falling at almost the same pace as his. She swallowed.

Her voice cracked as she said softer, “Lance?”

He broke down, letting his real tears soak into her shirt. Clutching at her shirt until his knuckles turned white, he watched the dark purple stain on her shirt grow. Pidge rubbed his back as she pressed her cheek on the top side of his head.

Lance shielded himself in her arms, not letting himself look around the room any longer. Instead, he opted for the safety of Pidge's purple shirt. He couldn't stand to look at his failure any more than the few seconds he's already had.

He'd been sleeping in a warm, comfortable bed for who knows how long while the young man had suffered alone. Slept late into the day, while he suffered unthinkable horrors. Alone.

Pidge spoke again, still rubbing his back in circles. “Do you want to talk about it?”

No.

No, he didn't, so he chose to ask her a question. His throat scratching with the word. ". . . how . . ."

The circles on his back stopped. "You were screaming."

Lance stiffened, tightening his grip. Pidge moved her hand from his back and placed a finger under his chin. "Hey, can you look at me?"

Even though he desperately wanted to stay in his little cocoon, he lifted his head. He could do this one thing for her. Wincing at the different colors, he looked more closely around the room, pointedly staring past Pidge's face.

Beams of light filtered through his blinds and created stripes across his walls, highlighting dust that fell like snow around the room. The blankets he used were kicked to the side of the bed, oozing down the frame like glue. His door was just inches away from being shut, most likely from ricocheting against the opposite wall.

Pidge gave him a small smile when he looked into her eyes. She placed her hands on both sides of his face. Lance closed his eyes and tried to take a deep breath, failing miserably. Instead his breath caught in his throat and he was forced into a coughing fit.

"Lance, hey." she grabbed the hand that wasn't covering his coughing and pressed in on her chest, making sure he could feel her heartbeat. Despite everything, her heartbeat was slow and controlled.

She took a deep breath, "Can you breathe with me for a second?"

Lance nodded, so she continued. "Breathe in, just follow me."

She patted the seconds on the top of his hand as she breathed in. "Okay. Breathe out."

And five seconds later they repeated the process. Every now and then Lance would have to stop and cough, but she kept going. The two sat there breathing together until Lance had stopped coughing and calmed down.

Pidge let go of his hand but didn't move it from her chest. Lance was grateful, the feeling of her heartbeat was a comfort. It reminded him that she was alive and safe, that she wasn't going anywhere. But he was missing someone.

"Where -- where's Hunk?"

"He left two hours ago; said he had a date with Shay."

Lance nodded before resting his forehead on her shoulder. He'd just woken up and already felt the need to crawl under a rock and never return.

It was silent for a moment before Pidge said, "Do you want something to drink?"

"Yeah."

“What do you want?”

Lance thought for a moment before replying, “The whole cartoon of orange juice would be nice.”

Pidge’s breathy chuckle tickled the back of his neck before she poked him in the side. “How ‘bout you come with me to get it?”

That was a fantastic idea. His skin crawled the longer he stayed in the room. Anywhere but his bedroom would be great. Lance sighed and leaned away from here, sighing and rubbing his eyes.

“Yeah.”

“Alright let’s go.”

Lance huffed as he rolled out of the bed and followed her to the kitchen. His orange juice was awaiting him.

Pidge sat down on one of the stools that lined one side of the marble island while Lance poked his head in the fridge, digging around. He shoved aside a box of grapes and prepackaged guacamole before he got to the orange juice.

He opened the carton and took a swig.

Pidge playfully rolled her eyes and said, “You jerk, now I can’t steal from you.”

Lance smirked, “It was my plan all along.”

“Bitch.”

Lance stared into her eyes, smirk still on his face, and took another sip of the orange juice. Pidge smothered her laughter with her hand, and it was normal. A normal day with a normal interaction between the two of them. . . if he ignored his nightmare and the dark purple stain on her shirt.

He looked away and swallowed. No, he did not need to think about that right now. Didn’t need to think about it at all in fact. He should just shove the nightmare in a dark corner somewhere and forget about it. Then, go finish his mission.

Speaking of. . . “Did you get any matches yet?”

She muttered what Lance thought was a ‘You’re unbelievable’ before she said louder, “Yes, but we haven’t scanned the entire city yet, so there might be more.”

Relief flooded through his system as she spoke. Thank all the gods. “Where’s the first match?”

Pidge propped her foot up on the cushion of the stool. “It’s in an alley near the outskirts of the Business District. And it’s right in the middle of one of the largest pockets.”



Altea was mostly high end, but sporadically through the city there would be sections, or pockets, where the area would closely resemble the outside circle of the city. The pockets usually housed high end criminals and the slightly more fortunate homeless.

The people there were exceptionally territorial and dangerous, as they had to fight for their positions in the pockets. Each pocket rivaled the Pit in ferocity.

Lance wasn't surprised in the least that that was where one of the matches was. The pockets were a perfect place to execute a kidnapping.

Lance cursed and Pidge scoffed before she said, "Agreed."

Lance took another sip of the juice before he asked, "Do you really think that Pyro would be so out in the open like that?"

Pidge shrugged. "She could have moved locations to film the videos, but that doesn't make very much sense."

Lance raised his eyebrow, "Nothing about Pyro makes sense."

"True."

He let the fridge close and moved to take a seat next to Pidge, sliding the carton along the counter as he went. Huffing, Lance let himself collapse onto the soft cushion of his stool. He circled the rim of the carton with his thumb. "Can you think of any other reason why a match would be in an alley?"

Pidge looked at him through the side of her eye and hesitated.

Lance frowned. "What?"

"It could just be a dead end. You never know."

Lance grit his teeth. "You know I can't think like that."

"It's always a possibility Lance." Pidge turned to face him fully, her feet barely touching the foot bar.

He looked away and allowed himself to guzzle down half the juice left. "I'll go check it out."

"When," Pidge sighed.

"Right now."

Lance stood up and walked over to the fridge. Pidge stood up with him, adjusting her glasses. "Lance you look like shit, and I know you feel like shit. So, just wait a little longer and then you can go check it out."

He froze just before grabbing the handle and whirled on her, his anger flaring. "I've already spent god knows how long sleeping! We're on a clock Pidge and we can't afford --"

Pidge through her hands up and cut him off but didn't raise her voice to his level. "I know that, Lance. I know, but I have to look after you too. You're my friend and I can't let you run yourself into the ground."

And just like that, his anger dissipated and something akin to shame replaced it. He turned away from her, clenching the fridge handle. He whispered, "Sorry," and opened the fridge, not bothering to put the orange juice back behind the grapes and guacamole.

"You're good, but you just have to remember that you're important in this too."

"Yeah, yeah."

Pidge huffed and crossed her arms. "Lance."

Lance's mouth pulled into an exasperated (and slightly annoyed) smile. "Okay, okay! Jeez I get it!"

Pidge opened her mouth to say something more when a short ding cut through their conversation. She immediately pulled out her phone, her face a blank slate of stone. Lance waited in baited silence as she tapped around her phone.

It felt like a million years before she left out a breath and rubbed her eyes. The several seconds she didn't say anything caused anxiety to fizz through him. He gave her a few more seconds before he shouted, unable to take it anymore. "What?"

Pidge kept rubbing her eyes with her thumb and forefinger as she locked the phone with her other hand. She took a deep breath before saying, "My algorithm just finished combing the city. There's only one other match."

-----

He was floating away again.

Keith was floating away, and he didn't know where he was going. He couldn't feel his body, didn't know where it was and didn't know if he could find it again, not that he wanted to.

He was watching nothing as he floated further and further away. It didn't bother him as much anymore.

Even though everything seemed fake, manipulated, and made up, it was still a safe haven from everything else. He was a spectator to the emotions and sensations as he floated away from his body.

In this place, he could let his body experience the pain, while he watched as a distant spectator. He was the character and reader in his own book. The feeling was neither relaxing

nor agitating. In fact, he felt nothing at all. He was just there, watching as everything played out in front of him.

But he'd rather feel nothing than everything. Every time he came back, the resulting pain that followed was nearly unbearable. The gaps in his memories were disorienting as well. Once, he never recalled drinking, or her visiting, but found that his thirst had been parched. It was strange, but it was better than dealing with the pain and terror that had become a constant.

He liked floating away he decided.

And it was always a tragedy when he found himself back in his body.

## Chapter End Notes

this chapter took ages to finish, sorry bout that. comments give me life.

# Torment and Darkness

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lance didn't bother taking a discreet route, rather opting for the most direct, and consequently the one that attracted the most attention. Short gasps and the shutters of cellular cameras followed him as he pushed past a sea of warm coats and heavy sweaters, but he hardly paid them any mind. If he lingered at all, he'd have the police to deal with as well and he didn't have any time to do so.

The address rattled against this skull once more and echoed in his brain, reminding him over and over again of his horrible failure to protect. His jaw pulsed with how much pressure he was holding his mouth closed. Why was it always the good that had to suffer? The young man didn't have to do anything that night. He could have just kept to himself and walk away, but he chose to intervene and save him from those men that night.

That young man was a diamond surrounded by the blackest of obsidian and now that obsidian was now threatening to take over. It was Lance's job now, to help fight the darkness off. The address may have been a reminder of his failure, but it was also a signal of hope.

A signal of hope that he wished would not be crushed by the damning fist of reality.

He took many different turns and side streets, all of which were a messy blur, until the population grew thinner and the city became dirtier. Upturned trash bins lay across broken and unkept asphalt; the garbage occasionally skittered along with the wind that blew through the narrow walls.

Gravel crunched under his booted feet as he walked further and further into the pocket, him shivering with the newfound cold that resided there. No streetlights or lamps stood anywhere, giving the alley a deeper sense of foreboding he could feel in his bones.

Minutes before leaving his home, he had decided, with the advice of Pidge of course, to investigate the first match they'd found. They both decided on it for different reasons than the other, but Lance didn't really think about that too much. All he needed was a lead.

Lance rubbed his gloved hands against his bare arms. Goose bumps had scattered across every inch of his exposed skin. Then he froze, his hands clutching tightly to his arms and his feet firmly planted to the ground.

He blinked once. Twice.

The wind moaned.

Something he couldn't describe with words filled his body to the brim and he began to shake as he took in everything that he saw.

Undisturbed and frighteningly peaceful, the alley rested in all its disgraceful elegance, presenting a piece of spray-painted graffiti that matched the art he'd seen in the video. Only the colors were a brighter shade against the stupidly happy sunlight.

He took a timid step forward at the sight of what he knew was the rusty and blotched color of old blood scattered around the short spit of rocky land. "Pidge?" his voice shook as he spoke into his tiny hidden microphone.

Her voice was devoid of emotion. "I see it, Lance."

He let his hands fall from his arms and he clenched them into fists. Steeling himself, he walked over to the largest cluster of dropped blood. Kneeling to look at it, he let go a large, shaky breath. He pressed his finger into the gravel and shifted the little rocks.

Lance picked up the one with the most blood on it and tucked it away in a little bag. If the current lead turned out to be nothing, Lance hoped to all the gods that the blood could at least find out who he was.

Closing his eyes, he stayed crouched. Another gust of wind whistled through the alley and bit at his cheeks. It was cold, even in his specially made material that was made for weather like this. If the young man were still in the same clothes, or some similar to it, Lance couldn't imagine how he would be feeling.

With that thought in mind, Lance opened his eyes and scanned the small area that held everything teetering at the edge of a cliff. Nothing else was in the area but the graffiti and the screaming splashes of blood.

Then, something caught his eye. Just barely visible from his angle and slipping dangerously from its place wedged behind the dumpster. The tiny piece of paper flapped a little when there was another gust of wind.

Lance narrowed his eyes at the offending object. It was too deliberate, too well-placed for it to be inconsequential. Standing up, Lance moved towards the rusting dumpster.

The paper was a little ripped and battered between his fingers, so he pulled it from its spot gently. It took a few tugs before it was free from its trap. Lance honestly had forgotten that Pidge was 'with' him until she spoke in his ear again. "Lance, what is it?"

He didn't bother replying; instead, he flipped the little paper over, making sure Pidge was able to see it through the camera.

Scrawled in elegant, yet somehow unhinged handwriting read:

Almost there, Shooty ;)

Pure, unfiltered rage made his fist curl around the paper, effectively crushing it. That damn monster . . . "She is leading us on, Pidge. That psychopath is leading us on--"  
"Hey, hey, let's stay calm. You're no good if your irrational."

Lance growled and tried turning the ball of paper in his hands to ash, using just his eyes. He's not going to show any mercy when karma comes to bite her in the ass. He hurled it towards the opposite wall, where it crunched against the brick.

"Pyro is going down and if that means I go down with her, then so be it."

That was obviously not the right thing to say, as Pidge immediately reared up on him, her voice tight. "What do you mean, Lance?"

The superhero took a deep breath and tried to see past the red. "I'm getting the police involved."

"You'll only end up in jail."

Lance rolled his eyes, full knowing that she could see it, and not listening to her reasoning at all. "Whether you like it or not, I'm going to need help with this final stretch."

Her soft sigh barely made it over the speaker. It was silent as she thought things over, and Lance waited in hard fought patience.

"Alright. But only call them when you know for sure you're in the right spot."

Lance started to bolt away, but her voice stopped him from any further movement.

"Grab that piece of paper, you stupid shit! It's evidence!"

Muttering a soft curse to himself, Lance scrambled over to the abused paper and shoved it into one of his pockets, right next to the bloody pebble. "I don't see how this could help us anymore you asshat."

"It could possibly be the only thing that keeps you from getting cuffed, dickwad."

The arguing was a lovely distraction from what was to come.

-----

He knew better than to defy her. He knew it was better for him to stay quiet, unless it was when she was hurting him, and then and only then was he allowed to use his voice. But no words were allowed. Only sounds. Crying, screaming, crying, screaming, screaming, screaming.

He couldn't remember what it was like to feel heat. Couldn't remember what it was like to feel safe. And honestly . . . he couldn't remember his own name. Well, he did know a name. He knew the one she called him, but he knew it wasn't his name.

Oh.

His mind started to slip again, apparently it was time to stop thinking. To stop feeling.

He liked being in the nowhere. He liked letting his mind slip away into nothingness, where he couldn't feel or see or touch or think. It was a nice place, the nowhere. There, he could

escape from her. He couldn't be touched by the pains he brought with her.

He was nearly invincible behind the thick fog of nothingness. Her punches, and kicks, and knives touched him only through a seven-foot-thick wall. There was nothing she could do to stop him from slipping into the nowhere.

He let himself go, and he fell into the state where there was nothing and he let himself float.

In the nowhere, he had no senses. In the nowhere, he could not think. In the nowhere, he was safe. Safe from her.

He didn't know how long he stayed in the nowhere, but eventually he was ejected from his safe zone and back into his broken body. He hated being in his body. Here, she was able to hurt him, decimate his already decaying body.

In his body, he could feel every ounce of pain that she had inflicted upon him; old or new, it didn't matter, he still felt it. It was hard for him to describe the pain. But the best he could do was compare the old one to a constant, dull pressure that never faltered. The new pains were the once he despised the most. They felt like the knives she drove into his skin, but with a cold fire that she couldn't produce with her flames.

In his body, he was numb with the cold that sunk deep into his tissue and wouldn't pull up.

Being in his body was a constant pull of agony, while the nowhere was peaceful and a much better place to be. His frozen and burning lungs let out a puff of air that aggravated the wounds. There weren't any specific spots where he could detect the extra amount of pain, it just came from everything.

The usual silence of the room was disrupted by a soft splashing noise, and he couldn't help but get mad at it. The silence of the room was the only good thing about it, as it resembled the silence of the nowhere.

The anger was a welcome emotion. It bubbled inside him like the blisters on his chest and briefly overpowered the fear that had settled in his heart. That momentary overlap of power was what allowed himself to muster the strength to let out a voluntary burst of noise.

The tiny and short-lived growl tortured his shredded throat but gave him a type of satisfaction he hadn't felt in a while. He wasn't allowed to tell her what to do. But he was allowed to tell the water to shut up.

He smiled.

-----

The way over to the second match was a blur Lance had no hope of deciphering. Individual colors mashed together to create a blob of disorganized shapes as he sprinted towards his destination, the slip of paper heavy in his pocket.

Nothing could be heard over the pounding of his heart as he raced across the city. And somehow, he was reminded of his dream. The pounding of his feet; the burning in his lungs

and legs.

The only thing clear in his mind was the map displayed on his wrist, much as the only visible thing was the timer above him. Even in that moment, Lance could feel the boulders of the timer waying down on his shoulders, slowly getting heavier and heavier with each step.

Lance growled at himself and yanked the boulders away from him. He needed to focus.

Looking down at the map once more, Lance cursed and turned down a street so fast his feet nearly gave out. There was a tiny twinge in his left ankle, but he ignored it in favor of pushing harder. Eventually, the pain faded into nothing.

Then, as if he'd ran past a wall, the signature smell of the salty sea pushed against his nose. From that point on, the sea wasn't overpowered by the smells of the city. He crinkled his nose against the sudden smell, but he kept running against it.

Lance followed the map until he reached a warehouse. The little electronic beeped, signaling he had arrived, then went silent. A soft groan of wood haunted the air as a gust of wind disturbed a coil of rope hanging from the slanted rooftop.

The roof was peppered with holes born from neglect, exposing the now decaying wood beams. Thick wood planks barred the windows and warded off any sane person from entering. It was warmer here, as the warehouse was just by the sea.

The wind blew again.

Lance walked up to the locked door and kicked it in.

-----

The door slammed open and immediately, he began to recede into the nowhere. The only thing that came with that sound was pain, and he knew better now to avoid it at all costs.

He forced himself to relax against the cold floor. Forced himself to lay limp and his breathing to be controlled. He wasn't allowed to fight or talk back. That was against her rules and she didn't like that. She made it hurt worse when he broke that rule, so he let himself lay there, displayed like a slab of meat to be purchased.

Food sounded wonderful. If he could just have a little bit, he would be happy to be gone away forever. He couldn't remember what apples tasted like. He couldn't remember what . . . what was it called?

He squeezed his already shut eyes. He'd given up long ago trying to open them. What was the point? All he would have seen was blackness anyway. That never ending blackness wasn't at all comforting like the nowhere was.

Clicking heels against concrete. He knew that sound. He hated that sound. He hated that sound because she was always attached to it. And she would always talk to him in that awful voice. Her voice was the equivalent to nails on a chalkboard and he couldn't stand it.



So, he blocked out her words, turning them into a mush that he couldn't understand. But there was this one word that he couldn't block out and he hated it. She used it constantly, called him that constantly even though it wasn't his name--

“---Baby!”

*He flinched. That was not his name. That word was not his name. It felt so wrong, so ugly, so disgusting. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't keep that word away from him. And no matter how much he wanted to scream at her, his mouth wouldn't listen. It stayed firmly clasped shut.*

*She spoke again, and he let the words mush together, not listening at all. She grabbed his face and squeezed his cheeks together painfully as she dragged his face upwards. Her fingernails dug into his skin, drawing little points of blood.*

*He hissed as he was dragged up and she spoke again. Why was she mad? He didn't do anything. Was there another rule he didn't know about? Panic took over the slipping claws in his mind and kept him grounded.*

*He was thrown to the ground and her foot snapped into his stomach. The oxygen was snatched from his lungs, and he immediately started to wheeze. He didn't want her to be angry, her anger always brought more pain. What did he do? What did he do?*

*Above his ragged breath came the scrape of a knife leaving its scabbard. He forced himself not to inch away, that would only add to his suffering.*

*There it is.*

*Just under his chin was the cold edge of the blade. Trying to swallow, he cut his throat on the perfectly kept piece of metal. She spoke again.*

*He stayed perfectly still.*

*The knife dug deeper into his skin, drawing a line of blood from his neck. Again, she spoke, and she sounded furious. He didn't understand.*

*Her voice was a whip against his ears, so he whined, hoping it would get her to stop. Ever since he got here, he noticed that she rather liked it when he made any noise of distress. The knife's pressure lessened just a fraction, and with a little broken piece of hope, he whined again.*

*The knife fell away completely. He sighed through his nose. He didn't like it when she held the blade near his head. The knife, however, was quickly replaced by her hand. It wrapped around his neck and held him loosely. She spoke again and when he didn't give any sort of reply to her words, her hand squeezed.*

*His breath was whistly as he tried to breath around the pressure. She grabbed at his ear and yanked at it. She pulled hard enough to elicit a pained yelp from him. She spoke again and pulled at his ear.*

*What did--? His thought process was stopped by another tug at his ear. Distracted at the burning pain at the base of his ear, a few syllables of her vicious voice made it unscrambled to his mind.*

*“Listen -- right – ruin--”*

*Listen?*

*She tore at his ear again.*

*Oh.*

*He clenched his teeth together. The thought of listening to her screeching, mocking, laughing brought a horror to his mind that he himself couldn't fully comprehend. He didn't want to have to listen to her; it was the only thing that gave him comfort other than the nowhere. The only thing that kept him from falling farther than he could crawl back from.*

*He couldn't disobey her. But he didn't . . . he didn't . . .*

*The fire spread from his ear down to his neck. He hissed.*

*She spoke again and he forced himself to comprehend the words, tears budding in his eyes as he did so. The water was hidden by the black blindfold, but he couldn't hide the tremble and fall of his lips.*

*Her voice destroyed his ears and tortured his very soul. He wanted to slip away so badly, but listening was one of her new rules. “Do I have your attention now?”*

*His whine was choppy with a sob.*

*She laughed. “Oh good! I couldn't have you ruin your own surprise!”*

*She knew she wasn't getting a reply from him. She knew that there was no use talking to him because he knew not to break her rules. Breaking the rules always spelled out something horrible for him. But she talked to him anyway, trying to draw out anything from him. She was better off talking to a wall.*

*She laughed and before he could figure out what was going on, she slipped her hands underneath his arms and began to drag him across the floor. A new type of fear let itself be known. This was new; this was dangerous. And against his will, his breathing picked up.*

*The ground was rough and ripped away chunks of torn skin. He felt the blood weep from the aggravated wounds and soak into the pores of the concrete. Trying to hold in the sounds of pain, he forced himself to take a deep breath. The air lodged in his throat and he choked on nothing.*

*Panic increased and bundled next to his heart, adding to the growing knot of hopelessness.*

*She yanked him up rather harshly and wrapped her arms across his chest, her touch like ice to his veins and crushing his insides. The yelp that escaped him was a mix of surprise and*

*pain. Then the back of his head was enveloped with fire when she started to speak again as she choppily dragged him around.*

*“You know, I didn’t get both powers naturally like the others did.”*

*He was thrown from her grasp, landing jumbled against something hard and biting his tongue in the process. His breath hitched as he tried to wriggle away, but she held him still and restrained his wrists. A few seconds later, his ankles were shut away as well.*

*He knocked his head against the backboard of whatever he was sitting on, trying to dissipate the pain her voice gave him. She grabbed his hair and he stopped. There was nothing he could do to resist her.*

*He felt her draw her face close to his and he grimaced when her breath brushed against his face, hot against the rest of the room. “When I got my power, I was just like anyone else who got one. My teleportation was quite the handy tool when stealing.”*

*He couldn’t control his breathing with her this close to him, couldn’t focus on anything other than the words she was saying, and it lashed away any last protective shield he built. She threw his head from her grasp, making his neck crack with the unexpected movement.*

*She continued, her words getting softer just as she walked away from him. “I used to be a scientist, but no one respected me or my ideas. So, I kind of went . . . rogue for lack of a better word.”*

*He snapped his head against the backrest again. He could feel himself slipping into the nowhere, his clipped claws clinging desperately to his awareness.*

*“Stop doing that,” she growled.*

*And again, he stopped. The nowhere crept up further without his permission.*

*She continued with the story he didn’t want to listen to. “No one would support my ideas, so I had to steal to get the supplies I needed, and no one would volunteer to be test subjects. Eventually--”*

*The sharp buzz of exposed electricity cut into her monologue and he welcomed the distraction from the torment of her voice. Though he was grateful for the distraction, he didn’t understand why the electricity was there.*

*She was talking again, and he twisted his wrists under the shackles, flaking off dried blood from his skin. It drew less attention but allowed just as much pain. She didn’t say anything about it, so he kept sawing at his wrists.*

*“You see, I’ve always liked to play with fire. And since there were no volunteers to test my formula, I had to use myself in the experiment.” She grunted and something metal screeched. “That night I ended up with a smoldering building and a new power. One created from my own genius. You wouldn’t believe how happy I was, but I couldn’t send it out to the public*

*because people wouldn't believe something from someone who is supposed to be dead and crazy."*

*She was right next to him again, but instead of torturing him with her hands, she was attaching something to his chair. He couldn't help feeling like the clicks of it falling in place were counting down his doom.*

*"So now I have two powers, one given to me and one created by me."*

*She walked away from him again, the sounds of her ever-present heels clicking against the ground. Then the room went silent. It went so silent; he could hear his own heart pounding in his ribcage.*

*His heartbeat got louder, and louder the longer the silence continued. He slipped a little.*

*His heart nearly leaped out of his throat when she reappeared and grabbed his jaw. Something sloshed off to the side. She squeezed him hard enough that he thought his teeth were going to cave in and yanked down, exposing his throat to the cold air.*

*Before he could even comprehend what was going on, a liquid that was thick and horribly sweet was poured down his throat.*

## Chapter End Notes

Hey y'all I'm not dead. Just took a little break that escalated into being a three month hiatus. . . . oops? My excuse was that I was trying to do whumptober and school is an absolute bitch. I hope this was worth the wait though.

# Pieces

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His lungs flexed uselessly, the icy pinch he had become so used to replaced by a building pressure and dizziness that came with the lack of oxygen. The muscle was shriveling in his chest, unable to combat the thick liquid oozing down his throat.

He gagged, further increasing the rising pressure, and involuntarily jerked his arms against the cuffs wrapped around his wrists. He felt whatever ooze she'd forced into him slip further down his throat, and he gagged again.

There was nothing he could do against the force in his throat; he was left only with the small, jerky thrashes his broken body could handle. He was burning from the inside out, slowly flaking away until only desperation and blood remained.

The wood of the chair scraped and agitated his skin, adding splinters to the morbid painting of ripped skin, crusting brown blood, and purple bruises. He barely noticed the new additions, his mind too clouded with the familiar acid of panic.

He tried to swallow the liquid down, but it only coated his throat with the ooze. It glued his throat closed and stuck his tongue to his teeth, silencing him completely. And it seemed that the silence of the room spoke louder and bolder than he ever could. It was a deep-seated, powerful voice that poked and prodded until it was heard; he was a flower petal, drifting along with a breeze, and forgotten not a moment after he was seen.

There seemed to be a lot of silence in his life now, but most of the time, he was too far gone to know it was there, watching him. Waiting for the perfect moment to strike and create a fear so deep, he felt like he'd never escape it.

Now the silence's spear pierced his heart. Through all the other pain, there was a way to not feel, to not think, to not hope. He could breathe and breathe and scream until the pain became a dull throb in his skin, but now that it was an essence within his body, there was nothing he could do to quench it.

It withered everything he'd come to know, and all he could do was watch it happen. There was a roaring buzz in his ears. He couldn't figure out if it his body betraying him once again or the aftereffect of her voice.

It grew louder and louder until even through the blackness he was allowed to see, a truer, darker version crept around the edges of his vision and tunneled in. Even the shackles restricting his movement couldn't stop the near unnatural arch of his back as he struggled to get away.

He swallowed and gagged and swallowed again, desperately trying to stop the withering disease that spread from his lungs and into the heaviness of his limbs. And then there were

fingers at the base of his jaw.

He tried to jerk away, to get away from anything that could possibly hurt him further, but the hands held fast. He wanted to care that he couldn't do anything. He really did, but the liquid was still suffocating him, and the heaviness of his body continued to rise.

The fingers drifted to the corner of his jaw and the curve of his throat and squeezed. And without the conscious movement, he swallowed. The fingers followed the movement of his throat and with a delicate pressure unfamiliar to him, helped squeeze the liquid down his throat.

There was a moment in that process that his throat squeezed so harshly he believed he would die on the spot. But it was brief, and that moment was soon followed with the euphoria of air filling his lungs.

The fear-inducing silence was then combated by his deep sobs of breath. It didn't win, and he hoped it never would.

The roaring in his ears softened with each breath he took, easing away much like a tide. With the gradual fall of the fearful noise came the awareness of his hair plastered against his skull in sweat and the harsh burn in his throat. But as quickly that awareness came, it faded.

His lungs greedily sucked in another breath, and despite knowing the episode had passed, he hoped it wasn't his last. A soft whine mixed in with his heavy breathing and it took a moment for him to realize it was coming from him.

It felt like there was a switch flipping on and off in his brain, pitching him back and forth between reality and the nowhere. He could feel his lungs rapid firing in his chest, and then, just as fast, he felt nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothi—pain, pain, pain.

He could remember what happened. He could. He could.

There was nothing but space. Stay, stay, stay.

He was hurting, please, someone save him.

Drift.

Drift.

Drift.

“All I have to do is make a few adjustments and we're all good to go!” Her voice was a hook in his mouth, dragging him away against his will. The nowhere was swept out from under him and the pinnacle of his focus was on her. He clenched his jaw so tightly the bone began to ache.

The nowhere was something she wasn't supposed to be able to take from him, and yet she did. With only a few words. And that, more than anything, made him want to cry. There was

the pain, and fear, and the endless dehumanizing. She had taken away everything that made him whole and real. Taken everything but the nowhere.

And now that was gone as well.

His lips trembled.

“Aw, what's the matter, Baby?” Her voice was full of poisonous revile that slipped between the ever-growing fractures in his soul, expanding until the fractures tripled in size. There was nothing he could do to shield himself from the attack. “Is there something wrong?”

He broke completely.

-----

Lance knew that every person had a honed instinct to detect when something was off. He knew that through thousands of years of the existence of humanity, there have been horrible occurrences avoided through the most miniscule of actions through this instinct. And he knew that his was refined farther than any else he'd ever met, courtesy of his hero work.

So, the moment he stepped into the rotting building, he knew he was in the right place. With the echo of wood against stone, came the overwhelming pressure of dread. He took another step into the building and was bathed in the flickering light of a hanging bulb.

The superhero took a deep breath. “Pidge,” he whispered. “I need you to get me on the phone with the police.”

There was a short buzz of static before she replied, breathless. “Are you sure you're in the right place?”

Something crunched beneath his foot and he cringed. The feeling of dread blossomed in his chest. “Positive.”

Something was mumbled on the other side that he couldn't make out. “Pidge?”

“Yeah. Yeah, Hunk's dialing right now.”

Lance huffed and flicked his hands, trying to warm them up. Somehow, it was even colder in the building than outside. He exhaled, and his breath came out in a white puff. “I need you to put me on the line.”

“Lance--”

“No, they won't believe either of you. I may be on the watchlist, but I at least have some credibility on this kind of stuff. This is the best chance we got at getting back up, so please, put me on the line.”

The building settled, and Lance couldn't help but tense up. The next few minutes would be the first and only chance he would get to save the man from the alley. And he wouldn't fail him. Not again.

Pidge sounded like it physically pained her to say, “Alright fine. But you better come home safe.”

Lance knew he shouldn’t make a promise he knew would one day turn on its head. He knew that even if he did his best to keep safe, there could always be a moment when everything came crumbling down. And though he had a feeling today wouldn’t be the day, he could never be so sure.

But there were worse things he could do. Like fail. Fail so completely and horribly that they both ended up dead. The stronger half of his brain beat that thought into temporary submission.

He was going to win, and the day will end with Pyro in cuffs and the man back safe with his family.

So, even if there was no certainty, Lance could give his friend some comfort.

“I will,” He promised.

There was a sigh from the other side. “Thank you. I – I’ll put you on the line now.”

Lance hummed. Then, he heard the shortest sound of a waiting phone before it was picked up.

“911, what’s your emergency?” a distinctly familiar voice asked. And for a moment, Lance let himself feel a piece of hope.

He moved faster down the hall, making his way towards a turn. So far, none of the rooms were occupied. Just a sad wall of crates or a pile of trash in a corner, none of which were his goals.

He cleared his throat and activated his voice modulator. “I need you to listen and listen carefully. I will only be able to say this once, as I’m in a very time sensitive situation.”

He was interrupted by a breathless Lotor. “Sharpshooter?”

Lance had no time for this. He growled and pushed himself to go faster. “Yes, now be quiet. I need everyone you have to get over to the address 3541 Oceania Court, I’ve found the boy from Pyro’s videos. I’m trusting you to give me as much backup as you can.”

Another room, another piece of the puzzle put into place. The superhero ran faster than he’d ever had in his life.

He opened his mouth to say more, but he was cut off by the most harrowing thing he’d ever heard. Lance halted mid step, and the air followed in the stillness. The scream was the distinct sound that came only from deep within one’s soul, tearing up the body to let itself be known.

It was the type of scream that rose and fell in pitch, sucking up any available oxygen and silencing everything else around it. He heard the D.A fumble the phone.



“Was that . . .?”

Lance nearly lost his head. “Please,” his voice broke from the professional superhero, to the person who just wanted to help. “Please, help me save him.”

“Help is on the way.” Then the line went dead.

-----

They hadn’t moved from the bench since they got there, and their entire world turned into cold metal and the constant chatter of people. Sometimes a short fight would start and be resolved just as quickly as it started; they all hardly noticed it.

Stricken with the worst grief imaginable, they could hardly notice anything beyond the evil sting in their chests. None said a word and even if they were addressed directly, the conversation was short to the point where it was barely a conversation at all.

Ulaz had finally fallen asleep for the first time in days, his head resting against Thace’s shoulder. But even though he was asleep, the worry lines never softened out. Kolivan had barely moved since they had gotten there, hunched over with his head in his hands.

Regris had stolen the pocketknife Kolivan always had on him, and twirled it over and over between his fingers, desperately trying to take his mind off . . . everything. Antok was fixed on the spinning blade, oblivious to anything else.

The police station had been filled with the normal noise, and they paid it no mind. Well, not until there was an uproar in voice and movement. All five of them shot up, Ulaz blinking rapidly to disregard sleep.

“We know where he is!”

They all knew deep within their hearts that they were talking about their kit and terrified relief flooded everything they knew.

-----

With the knowledge that he had backup on the way, Lance followed the trail of where the scream came from. Help, help, help.

He almost ran right past the staircase that led into a deep darkness, but the otherworldly sense of wrong had increased so strongly that he nearly tripped over his own feet. It seeped into every pore and borrowed into each bone in his body.

Wasting a few precious seconds, Lance corrected himself and raced down the staircase, taking two steps at a time. With each foot traveled, the world got darker and darker until he was forced to use his night vision.

There was bitter cold, and darkness, and more frost to spare, but Lance kept going. There was no way he was going to fail. He was going to win.

He reached the end of the stairs and sprinted down the single hallway. There were no other rooms or doors to turn to other than the one at the end. The last fifteen seconds it took to get there felt like the longest of his life.

Lance bulldozed straight through the decaying door, wood chips flying in every direction.

And then there was a hundred-pound weight on his heart.

Blood. There was so much blood.

## Chapter End Notes

hahahahahahaha.

Guess what y'all! now have an instagram!! So go follow me @thatoneweirdwriter if you want. We can scream together.

# And It All Begins

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*Through all his hero work, Lance had never seen anything so . . . so . . . demented. Barely recognizable under the caked blood and mutilated skin was the young man, chained to a wobbly chair that shook underneath his weight. Bare skin was exposed to the freezing air, his already pale complexion unnaturally white and highlighted against the harsh contrasts of blood around him.*

*The young man didn't move, didn't even flinch. He remained in his confinements, in the cold, completely still and disturbingly oblivious to the world. The metal cuffs wrapped around his wrists and swollen ankles glinted at him, making sure he was aware that they were there, digging into his skin and adding to the menagerie of injuries he already had.*

*Splotches of blood adorned the metal and just about every other surface in the room. Ranging from rusted brown to scarlet red, it splattered against the ground, the walls, and with a quick glance up, the damn ceiling. But what was blaringly obvious was in the center of the room. Pyro stood, her black six-inch heels stained with red, in a puddle of dried blood crudely shaped like a person. And reaching out towards the chair was a smear of still drying blood.*

*Lance's breath hitched as he looked up to her face. She looked like a terror herself, a demon who crawled straight from the underworld. There were dots and painted smears of blood on her chin, her cheeks, her forehead, and the ever-present crimson lipstick coating her lips spread wide as she began to smile.*

*A shock went down his spine as he realized no mask was covering her face. Impossible. Pyro seemed to notice his disbelief because a happy gleam made home in her eyes. She brushed a piece of her blond hair behind her ear, a spot was left red.*

*It was impossible for her to be standing in front of him, and yet there she was, smiling at him. Lance could remember quite clearly reading about her death in the papers: Scientist Lights Building on Fire and Perishes. She was impossible, but so was he.*

*Reaching out with his mind, Lance seized her with his power. And though he tried to seem intimidating, his voice came out in a soft breath. "You're supposed to be dead."*

*Her smile became impossibly wide before she started to laugh. There was something so unsettling with the noise, he couldn't help but flinch. It came straight from her stomach, rich and full, and entirely insane. It cut down to the very marrow of his bone. Then she bowed, the movement straining against his power. Long hair fell over her shoulders. "A pleasure," she jeered.*

*Unconsciously, he tightened his hold on her. Her back becomes straight as a board.*

*Pyro, however, didn't seem to mind the extra pressure at all; she laughed again.*

*Lance tried to shake off her laughing and move to the young man, hoping to take advantage of her apparent distraction. He wasn't even able to finish his first step before she appears not two inches from his face.*

*The reaction was instantaneous, Lance takes a short step back and throws a well-aimed and powerful punch. He missed. Pyro teleports to the inside of his arms reach, the choppy movements somehow looking smooth and effortless.*

*Pyro swiped her fingers down the side of his face, her sharp fingernails stopping just short of breaking skin. Heat follows the scratches, making her movement more painful than it should. He hissed and yanked away, only to find her breath against his ear.*

*"I'm not letting him go until I get my fight, Shooty," she purred.*

*Then, she appeared a foot away, a pair of knives in hand and between himself and the young man. Lance felt like he could barely keep up. He felt like he was a beat behind her; no, they were on two completely different pieces. But he's Lance McClain, superhero and billionaire. He would find a way to match her, even if he had to skip a few measures.*

*He rolled his neck and reached for his Escrima sticks. With a metallic shing, they slip from their holsters. "Fine. Let's dance."*

*Lance needed to make the fight as short as possible and give the young man medical attention just as quickly. He forced himself to loosen his grip on his Escrima, it would do him no good to be stiff while fighting.*

*Her grin became feral. Then there's a single twirl of the blade between her fingers before she disappears. Lance took a short breath before whipping around, his sticks raised and barely able to stop her blades from making a home in his back.*

*There's a growl, a sharp whiff of metal slicing air, and an instinctive duck under a killing knife. Lance dropped to all fours and swept at her legs. Pyro disappears and appears at his right; Lance rolls away just as a knife slices the air where his head was.*

*He made his way to his feet and tried to land a hit to the side of her head. The cycle of kicking, and swinging, and dodging continues for several minutes before Lance realizes that he's getting nowhere like this. He needed to find a way to catch her off guard.*

*Hunk's voice cracked on his earpiece. "Lance? Police ETA is two minutes."*

*For a split second, Lance wondered why Pidge wasn't on the other side, but he quickly disregards it when a blade comes dangerously close to his nose. He doesn't bother answering his friend as he dodges and retaliates with one of his own moves. The clash of metal against metal rings down his arm.*

*Gritting his teeth, Lance filed the information away. He had less than two minutes to defeat her, help the young man, and get out. There was so much to keep track of, so much to keep in place. And about half of his problems wanted to kill him. He took a deep breath and*

*unleashed another attack. The array of movement was so quick, their movements had become a blur.*

*Lance grabbed her arm and pulled her forwards and threw down his crossed Escrima sticks right where her head was supposed to end up. Pyro teleported so she was lying on her stomach. A brief flare of hot pain shoots up his leg before he kicks her off, sending her sliding across the pavement.*

*He grabs her with his mind and throws her to a wall, but right before impact she teleports. There was a second when she didn't exist in his plane, invisible to his eye and nearly impossible to predict. But somehow, Lance knew exactly where she would end up. It was a deep gut feeling that he couldn't possibly ignore, so he spun to his left and swiped the air.*

*His metal stick hit something solid.*

*A soft grunt and the rumple of collapsing clothes revealed his achievement. Pyro lay sprawled across the cement for a blessed moment and Lance dared to believe that he'd knocked her out. The superhero made to kneel next to her, but she disappeared once more.*

*Expecting another attack to come, he throws up his guard. However, she reappears several feet away from him, next to the large black box sitting beside the young man. Blood runs down her temple and over an eye. There's an expression on her face that Lance can't decipher from enraged or victorious, but it's decidedly sadistic.*

*Something sits in the pit of his stomach and burrows deeper when she rests her hand on a small switch on top of the box. She caresses the handle and smiles at it before looking back up at him. She winks. His breath hitched as he threw out his power and snatches the switch, forcing it to stay.*

*The struggle between the two is like an arm wrestle, one moment someone has the upper hand and the next they're straining to keep their side from falling. Sweat beads at his forehead despite the freezing air around them. He is so focused on keeping the lever where it is that he is almost too late to dodge the fire ball shooting in his direction.*

*The sweat evaporates as he barely manages to fling the ball in the other direction. With nothing else to do, Lance splits his power between the two objects and sends the fire ball careening in the other direction. It dissipates against a wall, leaving a black mark behind.*

*With his concentration split, his hold on the switch is weakened just enough for her to slam the back end of it against the box. Within the echo of the bang, the distinct buzz of electricity rises above it until it fills the entire room.*

*Then, electricity is born at the base of the switch before it's sent scattering up a coiled wire attached to the metal cuffs holding the young man in place. The energy makes the cuffs glow a blue-white before everything connects and goes to shit.*

*A surge of energy makes the buzz rise to a screech, and the very air around them becomes charged with its power. The former still and silent person seizes against the restraints, his*

*back bent into an unnatural curve. His mouth falls open and for a moment, not a sound falls from it.*

*Tendons strain in the young man's neck and his head slams into the back of the chair, but there is nothing that stops the electricity from dancing over his skin. The young man's chest rises and falls in quick succession, fueling his lungs with air. Then, as if his lungs were just a gas tank needed to be filled, he lets out an ear-splitting shriek. It rose and fell, and then the scream stops dead, as if someone cut the strings from a puppet.*

*He couldn't have been under the torture for more than a few seconds, but it felt like ages before Lance was able to regain control of the switch and shut it off. The buzz was cut away and the electricity ebbed away from his skin, leaving barely visible marks. The young man slumped, his head bowing over and hair shielding his face.*

*The damn broke. Everything he'd kept stuffed behind a wall suddenly exploded, unrestrained and consuming. Lance let out his own scream as he threw his sticks at Pyro, using his power to propel them further. She had no chance of escaping the attack. There was a thump, and she was on the floor.*

*As if he teleported himself, he found himself on top of her, keeping her down while holding a retrieved stick against her neck. Leaning in close, he growled. "You deserve everything that's coming to you, Nyma Shawcross."*

*"You can't stop an artist from creating art," she smiled back.*

*With one last blow, he knocked her out. It didn't quell the rage in his veins, it only continued, unimpeded and consuming. Flipping her over, he grabbed her hands and locked them together, a little tighter than they needed to be. Then, he grabbed a blindfold and wrapped it across her eyes.*

*He stood up and didn't fight the urge to give her one final kick as he stepped over her to get to the young man.*

*There was something wrong. In any world, in any place in time, no one should be that still. The young man's chest didn't rise and fall in the unconscious urge to breathe. He just lay unmoving. Not breathing.*

*Not breathing.*

*With that revelation, his hands began to shake. His trembling hands raced to a small pocket on his belt and reached inside to grab a tiny instrument. And though the small instrument capable of cutting through stone required a steady hand and even steadier mind, Lance couldn't wait. The melted line of the cuffs allowed just enough give for him to pry each one away and throw them off to the side. Carefully, shakily, he places them on the ground.*

*His trembling hands feel for a pulse. Nothing.*

*The superhero's breathing picked up and the signature burn of oncoming tears stung his eyes as he placed his hands on the young man's breastbone. His vision blurred as he gave one chest compression, two, three. "Not again, not again, not again."*

*One, two, three.*

*Lance tilted his head back, pinched the nose, and breathed out. "Please."*

*One. Two. Three.*

*"Come on, breathe!"*

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

*"Breathe!"*

*There were shouts and footsteps echoing down the hallway and into the room. Lance knew the police were here, charging down the steps that held a prisoner within them. He knew that if he was caught here with the young man, he would be arrested, but he didn't give two shits about any of that. He just needed him to breathe.*

*One, two, three.*

*The footsteps grew louder. The shouts were ringing in his ears.*

*"Please, I can't let you die. I can't."*

*One breath. Two.*

*The police were running down the hallway now, the vibrations of their feet mimicked an earthquake.*

*A sob tore from his throat. "Breathe!"*

*"Please, please, please."*

*And finally, finally, there was a soft gasp of air and a tiny, weak heartbeat under his wrist.*

*Lance hung his head and let a moment of silence wash over them. His next words came out as almost a whimper. "Thank you."*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Lotor was the first to reach the room. The first to see Pyro chained up and unconscious, and the first to see Keith, the Galran's child laying on the floor next to a chair.*

*He was the first to see the blood, the scorched cement, and the first to feel how cold it was.*

*He was the only one to see Sharpshooter crawling out a nearby window and the only one to wipe away tears that had landed on the unconscious boy's neck.*

## Chapter End Notes

Edit: Y'all I was so excited to give you this chapter that I forgot to put a note at the end like I usually do! And I really wanted to thank you all for your amazing comments and kind words, they really do mean the world to me and help me stay motivated for this story. I can't thank you all enough.



# Searchlight

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

That night the news stations exploded. It was nearly impossible to miss the strained excitement blaring through the speakers, instilling excitement in everyone that heard it. And naturally, as a person who was constantly surrounded by electronics, Shiro was informed of the news the second it began airing.

The night had started like any other: scowling over a hundred different documents and a steaming cup of coffee with a little too much milk and sugar sitting next to his keyboard. Classic rock floated around his office as a soft background noise, mixing with the clicks of his keyboard and masking any noise from the busy city down below.

He had just pressed send on a very passive-aggressive email to a board member when the station he was listening to cut the music. For a solid ten seconds, his office was silent. Shiro stared at the small speaker, both a little defeated and annoyed before the little thing crackled and an urgent voice filtered through.

“We apologize for the interruption of your programs, but I am sure you will all be relieved as we are to know that the Altea City Police Department has just rescued the boy--”

With the grace of a drunk, Shiro stood from his seat, nearly faceplanting when his feet tangled in his desk chairs legs. The soft bang of his side connecting with his Blackwood desk and clatter of the rolling plastic mingled with the radio. His coffee cup dangerously teetered, nearly murdering his computer in a wash of spilled coffee. It was a good thing the brown liquid didn’t spill: paying for the repairs would’ve been quite troublesome.

The businessman rushed to the living-room like space just outside his door and fumbled with the remote to the enormous television mounted on the opposite wall. It took a few baited presses before a man and woman appeared on the screen, both, despite being in perfectly tailored suits, looking frazzled.

Shiro had caught the channel with the man in the middle of a sentence.

“-- is in critical condition. The identity of the boy is still unknown, but we will give more updates as we gather more information.” The man took a deep breath before he continued. “Not much else is known besides the fact that Sharpshooter was also spotted fleeing the scene.”

The two anchors switched off flawlessly, the woman continuing the report without so much as a stutter. “From what we’ve gathered, the vigilante was a key part in being able to save to boy tonight. He was spotted running from the scene by a few officers waiting outside the warehouse where the boy was found--”

Shiro stopped listening and looked for his phone, patting nearly every pocket on his body before locating it. Despite knowing the news channel had a reputation of relatively accurate news, he couldn't help but doubt the information. Couldn't let the hope spark because it would only get snuffed out.

He scrolled through his contacts before clicking on the profile. Shiro knew there was a slim chance she was working on this case and an even smaller chance that she would pick up, but he still had to try. The call was three rings in before she picked up.

Forgoing all niceties, she asked, "Situation?"

"You've seen the news right," he sighed. "I need to know if what they're saying is true."

"Shiro, I am surrounded by intel. Be specific."

"About the boy who was abducted by Pyro."

Footsteps marked their way through his speaker and into his ear. Squeezing his eyes shut, he sighed again. "I know that you can't spill anything. But Romelle, I just need a yes or no."

The businessman couldn't tell what she was doing; the footsteps had stopped. A sigh that matched his own came through, before the typing of keys. Victory.

There was a moment of tense silence before she spoke again. "Look, I'm not going to give you any information that isn't already available to the public. That would put you, my job, and myself at risk. Is that clear?"

Shiro nodded, fully aware that she wouldn't be able to see him. Well, that could be debatable. "Crystal."

"Okay. The kidnapped boy was just recently rescued by the ACPD no more than four hours ago. He's in critical condition as of now," There was a pause. "But I'm guessing this isn't the reason you called."

"Partially. Tell me about Sharpshooter. Was he really there?"

She laughed, a short, strained, bark of a sound. "Yeah. He was there. We've got several different witnesses and a couple cameras catching him running from the scene. Seems he doesn't want to be held accountable."

"He's helping people." Despite knowing Romelle had given her heart to the law, he couldn't help but defend him.

"He's a criminal."

Shiro shook his head and turned off the T.V. "There's a fine line Romelle, and he's standing right on it."

She muttered a few obscenities before saying, "It's a wonder we still haven't figured this guy out."

“Maybe once I figure out Sharpshooter's identity, I could join you,” he teased, only half joking. He took a quick look outside; the window was covered in half frozen rain. Shiro cursed the changing seasons.

There was a small shuffle and the tiny sound of a light switch. “Honestly, we could use your brain.”

Smiling into the phone he said, “Don’t give me any ideas.”

Walking back into his office, he turned off the radio, still spitting the news, and shut down his computer. As the computer turned off, he downed the rest of his coffee and sifted through his drawer, looking for an umbrella.

“Sorry Shiro, but duty calls.”

“Good luck and be safe. I expect you to be at dinner next week in one piece, I have so much to tell you.”

Shiro could practically see her smile as she replied. “I’m looking forward to it.”

The call ended.

Stopping his search, he put his phone back in his front pocket, the familiar weight giving him a weird sense of comfort. And finally, he let the hope bloom a little bit.

Shiro upended a few books and more gum packs than what was considered healthy before he finally located his black umbrella. He closed the drawer and straightened his jacket before walking out his office door and out into the hallway. There was so much to do, but his work could wait until tomorrow: he had a superhero to find.

-----

Blobs of color. Voices that were like knives to his ears. So much noise. Why was there so much noise?

Slowly, the smeared colors darkened. They reappeared a second later. Still blurry. What was happening?

Something was touching him, but it felt so far away. It felt like he was experiencing it from another body that wasn’t his. More voices, loud, loud voices.

*What was happening?*

*He felt so heavy.*

*The colors melted away again.*

-----

*Lotor was the one to carry Keith away from the warehouse and into the stretcher. And though he had no personal connection to him, it was completely heartbreaking to see someone in the kind of shape the boy was in. No one should have had to go through something like that, especially someone who couldn't have been older than 25.*

*The journey through the warehouse felt like a million years, each step forced through thick, unyielding molasses. Lotor could feel the still falling blood soak into his shirt, making the fabric cling to his skin, and hear each broken breath Keith's tired lungs forced him to make. The D.A knew that each one could possibly be his last, and that thought fueled his tiring arms.*

*So, yes, the journey to get aid was torture. But once they finally reached the ambulances, time finally decided to act accordingly. Red and blue lights flashed around the area, lighting everything up with the eerie colors. The sirens had been turned off, but he could still hear them stabbing into his ears. Still feel the rush of the engine beneath his feet.*

*Lotor didn't even have enough time to open his mouth before the boy was snatched from his grip and attended to. He stood completely motionless, unable to process anything. It took a moment before his mind was able to catch up and come to the horrible decision to sit, despite knowing that staying beside the ambulance would cause him further unnecessary anguish. He sat his ass down and listened.*

*Perhaps with just sitting there, he could provide at least a little comfort to the boy. The gods knew he needed it.*

*--the oxygen!"*

*--hypovolemic--"*

*Lotor looked down and squeezed his eyes shut so tight he saw stars. Somehow his hands made their way to the sides of his head and grabbed fistfuls of his hair.*

*"I need the transfusion!"*

*"I.V--"*

*He needed to block everything out. He needed to hear every word.*

*"He's crashing!"*

*At that moment, it felt like his heart was torn out of his chest and pulverized in front of him. What a cruel twist of fate it would be. Surviving through the torture to only die just before he was saved. The D.A became all too aware of the blood-soaked fabric sticking to his skin.*

*"Clear!"*

*Lotor could faintly hear the charge of electricity before it was let go. There was a rattle and a short pause. Nothing.*

*Another charge of electricity.*

*“Clear!”*

*He could still remember the night the five Galran’s had burst through the doors of the police station, each so distressed, he thought they might have torn down the world. Lotor was there as a favor for a friend, flipping through a filing cabinet when they’d burst in. With the powerful energy that only a few of them could understand, they made the precinct fall almost completely silent. He--*

*“Daibazaal.”*

*Lotor looked up, shivering. The already dark sky had become black as pitch, the heavy clouds above them blocking out any light that would come from the moon. A shower of rain had started to fall; it seemed even mother earth was weeping for the boy. Lotor’s hair had become a mop, the strands of platinum white sticking to his face uncomfortably. He hadn’t realized how cold it was. How much he was shaking.*

*“Clear!”*

*“You look like shit.”*

*Yes, he supposed he did. His hair was a tangled mess and probably stained with blood. His hands were too; not to mention the stain on his shirt that was growing larger with each drop of rain mixing with it. Lotor couldn’t confirm it, but he thought his makeup was running as well.*

*He wiped away the rain that had fallen on his forehead before replying. “Why are you here, Acxa?”*

*“I could ask you the same thing. This isn’t your field.” The officer crossed her arms and scowled down at him, giving him one of her famous stare downs.*

*With her words, he felt something within himself snap. “I have just as much right as you to be here,” he growled.*

*She blinked. “Are you hurt anywhere?”*

*The abrupt show of concern did little to shake him of his anger, and he gave her a very heated No.*

*Acxa nodded, then looked inside the ambulance. “He’s alive, so stop sitting there and go home. We can take care of the rest.”*

*That got his attention. With her random conversation, the noise within the ambulance had faded into the background. He didn’t notice the shift in mood the voices held. They were still urgent and rapid fire, but there wasn’t the underlying desperate hope lacing their words. Lotor shook his head; he needed to stay. “But--”*

*She grabbed his wrist and yanked him to his feet. He nearly faceplanted. “Get home and take care of yourself. I’m sure Allura is worried.”*

*At the mention of his wife, he came to realize just how late it was. The D.A had been away from home for just nearly 18 hours, so caught up with his work that he'd completely lost track of time. Guilt piled up in his chest; with no updates from him, he wouldn't be surprised if Allura fell to all the worst conclusions.*

*Lotor looked to the inside of the ambulance. White coats and gloved hands zipped around Keith, each one with a sure purpose. There were needles and bandages and a whole other assortment of medical tools that Lotor couldn't identify swirling around the boy, following each of the EMT's movements. He watched his chest rise and fall in the smallest movements, letting everyone know he was alive, but barely.*

*Lotor wanted to stay and confirm with his own eyes that they boy was going to continue living, but . . . his own family was waiting for him. Waiting without any assurance that he himself was alive. Needing to think, he closed his eyes and let the scene fade away. The debate in his mind was short and fast, but he couldn't help but feel guilty about leaving.*

*He bit his lip and replied before he could change his mind. "Alright. Thank you."*

*With a soft, but strained smile, he put a hand on her shoulder and moved past her. Acxa's brows furrowed, no doubt wondering what in the world he was thanking her for. She opened her mouth to ask just that, but she didn't get a chance to. Lotor was already lost in the sea of first responders.*

*Somewhat the rain began to fall harder, drenching the already bitter world in sheets of near frozen water. The red and blue lights still flashed, reflecting off the water and lighting up the area in an eerie glow. Tension still hung heavy in the air, but there was something new. Something Lotor couldn't quite decipher.*

*And as he moved away from the crime scene and into his own car, he could feel in his heart that this wouldn't be the last time meeting with the boy. He knew with a certainty that their paths would cross once more, and cross very soon.*

## Chapter End Notes

You know something funny? We are now nearly 41000 words into this fic, and Lance still doesn't know Keith's name. Also, I've been referring to Keith by everything but his name, and it felt weird actually saying 'Keith' instead of 'he' or 'the boy/young man'.

On another note, I hope you enjoy this lil break from all the angst. If you've enjoyed this chapter please leave a comment, I love reading your feedback!

# Illusions

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A constant, annoying beep made him open his eyes, then immediately regret it. Despite the room's gray tint, the overall white of the room made his eyes burn. Without the twitch of his hands at his sides, he wouldn't have realized that they were no longer tied behind his back.

With a trembling breath and a wince etched into his face, he stared at his open palms. They looked the same as they always had, but instead of the steady confidence they used to hold, a deep-seated tremble had taken them prisoner. Maybe it was because they were under his confused gaze or the fact that just holding them in front of him was making his arms ache; he couldn't tell. He curled them into fists and closed his eyes, letting himself fall into the complicated comfort of the dark.

What kind of dream was this?

He swallowed and allowed himself to look around one more. A white blanket had fallen from its original place at his chest and scrunched at his waist, providing a warm embrace that he hadn't felt in a long time. With another calculating look around the room, he saw a door that led into darkness, four old chairs that desperately needed love, and a blanket hanging on the wall opposite the main door.

A dozen different machines and devices sat next to his bedside, including an IV drip that snaked from the stand and into his bloodstream. Bedside. Bedside?

Something stabbed his heart.

He looked at the door opposite of the weird hanging cloth, and saw that light was shining from underneath it. Every now and then, a shadow would mold the light into elongated shapes and if he listened hard enough, he could hear soft footsteps over the beeping that had woken him.

A small, muffled voice made the unknown object in his heart dig deeper. "Mama, after we visit Grandma, can we go get ice cream?"

When he realized his chest had started to heave, he expected the familiar cold burn in his throat and lungs to tear him up from the inside out, but nothing came. He grabbed at his hair and pulled, extracting a sharp pain from both his scalp and the place where the IV had been injected.

Why would the nowhere do this to him?

Everything felt so real, as it always did, but instead of giving him a distraction, a peace, all it did was shove an unobtainable dream in his face. He should be swimming in the deepest

ocean or flying atop the highest clouds. He should be laying in the cold, abandoned and accompanied only by the torturous demons he'd been presented with when he had arrived.

The nowhere was a place where he could stand in between the unyielding passage of time and all of history. It was a place where he could pass time without processing anything, without having to be.

But here he was, laying in a soft bed, warm, and floating in a pleasant numbness. None of this should be happening in the nowhere because he didn't --

Someone from the outside of his little room coughed, and startled by the abrupt sound, he flinched back, pulling on the IV attached to his arm. The beeping next to him had steadily increased, ringing louder and louder inside his head. He tried to scream to drown out the noise, but something that felt distinctly like nails curled around his throat, allowing only a soft croak out. The machine beside him kept on beeping, until it was thunder, until it was a metal force crushing his skull, his entire world.

Why was the nowhere doing this to him?

Everything had abandoned him. Everything. And he deserved none of this comfort.

His mouth dropped open into a silent scream, before a deep, ragged inhale scratched at the inside of his throat, forcing a horrible gasp coiling beneath the surface to spring out into the world. But nothing was there to witness it. No one was there to witness the shattered pieces of him scatter across the world, out of reach and irreparable.

Something wet fell onto the white blanket, dotting the color into a dapple grey. And for the first time since he was taken, he wished he could escape the nowhere. Wished for something real because he couldn't even dare to believe that this could happen.

Salt slid past his lips and onto his tongue, and that reminded him, more than anything, that there was no one to save him. No one to help him. Every muscle and every bone in his body ached, overpowering the feeling of his nails racking down the sides of his face.

This wasn't real. And it never would be.

He wanted to curl up and away from the world, but his legs were too heavy beneath the sheets. So, all he could do was clench his teeth and beg to be released.

Only when the beeping machine screeched did the nails digging into his throat free him. He took the opportunity to release a sob that had been building up inside him, gathering the force of a flood, the force of an imploding star. He could feel his chest cave in as he screamed along with the machine, the noise ripping away any sort of false peace the nowhere had given him.

The shadows underneath the door shifted from their peaceful gait to a rush.

He tore at his face, his throat, his arms; tore at any place where the sharp nails could snatch him away. So, when the door opened and allowed for light to flood through his room, he



aimed for his eyes as well. But a hand snatched his wrist, and expecting the nails to appear against his skin, he tried to jerk away, a short wail falling past his lips.

There was nothing he could do against the strength holding him away, and there were figures standing over him--

He couldn't understand what he did do deserve this.

Without the cloth covering his eyes, the tears finally had the freedom to soak his cheeks, his chin, his lips. They were the only thing that dampened the cotton that filled his mouth and hovered over his tongue, keeping him safe from uttering any words that could harm him.

He tried to get away, to escape the nowhere and back into his dark world, but nothing he did let the talons lose their grip. He was stuck.

His lungs were filled with lead and falling deeper and deeper into the pit until he couldn't feel them expand. He wondered if it was possible to die in the nowhere, forgotten and broken. He wondered if anyone, anyone would hear him call for help, anyone real. Anyone who wasn't one of the demons crowding around him.

One of the figures pushed out from their mass and reached towards him, moving to cradle his wet face in their taloned hands. The others were pushed away in their wake and the hands on his wrists let go, leaving them adorned with the memory of their shackles. When their skin connected, the carved lines in his face burned, adding more reason for his eyes to burn.

He had little strength left to fight away the contact, so all he could do was sob in the embrace, hoping things would go back to how they were before.

Then, muffled through his panic, almost like they were speaking under water, a soft voice filtered through the overwhelming sounds of his head. Even though the words were muted and dull, he flinched away. "Kit, my kit, you are safe. We are here. You are safe."

No, he wasn't. This was all a dream, a figment of his demented imagination.

A thumb brushed underneath his eye, wiping away one of his racing tears. His blurred world sharpened in time with the hitch in his breath before his chest shattered once more and the world returned to a mess of color.

The thumb kept up the ministrations, swiping away a tear, rubbing the underside of his cheek, his chin. It nearly tickled, the touch was so soft.

"Sway, sway, swaying between the waves," the voice sang. "Sparkle, sparkle, sparkling their voices drift into the distance."

He closed his eyes, trying to hide away from the song. Away from the comfort that couldn't possibly real. Because he was still stuck in the dark, so deeply intertwined with it that he could never possibly escape.

But the voice kept on singing, unbothered, unhurried. Calm, like they were sure of the world and everything in it. "The dreaming jellyfish sing their song and sleep on the gentle shore."

He needed to run far, far away and never return. But when he lifted his hands to his face, the gentle touch lifted and was placed against the inside of his wrist, careful not to add any nauseating pressure. The remaining thumb tapped against his cheek, reminding him of this made-up world. "Please don't do that Kit. You are safe. You are safe ." For a moment, the overall steadiness of the voice faltered with emotion.

*A soft whimper bubbled past his lips before he let his arm drop to the bed and an equally soft bit of praise followed his action. The voice kept talking, in its soft and smooth tone, cleaning up and connecting the bridges between his senses and his mind. "I need you to take a deep breath for me. Can you do that?"*

*Clenching his teeth together, he shook his head. He wanted to scream out, scream until his throat was raw that his lungs were sewn together with string, but the nails clawed their way back to his throat and squeezed. Another heavy sob made him shake within their grasp.*

*"Here, I'll do it with you."*

*His hand was picked up from his lap and placed on something warm and solid. His hand started to slide down, unable to call upon any strength to keep it up. But a calloused hand that was somehow soft at the same time, held him there. He curled his hand into the wall, balling fabric between his shaking fingers.*

*"Breath in." The wall beneath his fingers lifted, and he realized it was chest. A warm, living, human chest. He leaned in, pushing his hand into the skin, desperately trying to find . . .*

*There it was.*

*A heartbeat.*

*He realized that he hadn't copied the actions of the person when they said, without any sort of exasperation or irritation, "Okay, let's try again. Breath in."*

*His hand lifted, followed by his own chest and the blanket hovering over his eyes. The mess that was the world had slightly sharpened, and through that, he could see the fabric he was gripping was a pale blue.*

*He tried, really tried, to inhale as long as the person, but his breath stuttered halfway through, his lungs jerking against the string. When his lungs rebounded, he couldn't stop the cough that resulted. He couldn't stop the next one either. Or the next. He could feel his panic start to rise again.*

*And it was that moment when he decided he hated the nowhere.*

*However, before the panic could reach its peak, the voice had returned, lulling his focus away with soft words and gentle touch. "Hey, hey slow. Slow."*

*The person's chest rose, as if to demonstrate, and almost instinctively, he followed. "There you go Kit. Slow."*

*His water-stained picture of the world slowly sharpened, allowing his eyes to perceive shape and color. And the mass of demons—things—people. There were people hovering at the end of his bed, behind where the voice had sat at his feet, fidgeting and unsure. He didn't understand why the nowhere decided to make them so nervous. After all, he was the one at their mercy.*

*Grimacing, he looked away from them and to the blue wall. And without making a conscious decision to do it, he rested his forehead against the soft material, just below where his hand rested against the heartbeat. The hand, that damned hand, slid from his cheek to the back of his neck and rested there as a solid warmth.*

*He coughed again, and not long after, a gentle murmur followed. The blinding panic was finally smothered with a sense of comfort and familiarity. He tried to take a deep breath and found that the string had loosened.*

*Freedom.*

*They were silent and still, one in relief and the other in resignation. The annoying beep of the machine had returned.*

*He didn't know how long they'd stayed like that, but it was long enough that he got bored. So, he looked up.*

*The light blue wall gave way to a pair of collar bones, a neck, then a chin. The face attached to all of it was angular, cutting and sharp, but held a kindness so deeply etched within the presence that it counteracted all the potential harshness. Faint wrinkles made home at the corners of the eyes, born from age and many years of laughing. A sad smile lifted the thin lips.*

*He knew that face.*

*He knew that face.*

*He opened his mouth, to scream, laugh, or cry, he couldn't decide. And he couldn't find it within himself to close it as he blinked. His tongue was heavy against his teeth, unwilling to move despite how desperately he wished to say the person's name.*

*His throat burned as a wordless croak slipped out. A stray tear dropped onto his bottom lip and stayed there. He tried to force the connection between his mind and tongue to reforge, scrambling to communicate. To say that he knew, he knew, he knew.*

*With a hand at the back of his neck and the other wiping away another tear, Ulaz whispered, "I'm here, Keith."*

*And there it was. The name in which he'd been deprived of, only to be beaten and forged into something else entirely. The name in which he'd forgotten and abandoned in the cold depths of that hell. The name that was the final blow to his composure.*

*Because how cruel could a mind be if this was all but a dream?*

## Chapter End Notes

This fic is officially a year old!! How crazy is that? I hope that you enjoyed this chapter! Until next time.

## End Notes

Ahahaha. I love writing.  
Thank you for reading.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!