

Carry Me Home

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Carry Me Home

by [F-117 Nighthawk \(F117_Nighthawk\)](#)

Summary

So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.

Or: Shiro, after the war, builds himself a home.

Notes

Hello there ~~general kenobi~~! So I've been working on this on and off for the past few weeks, between exams and TA stuff and just generally being overwhelmed. It's close to done, so I was gonna post it after the US election is decided, but I figured if I need a boost of fluff while waiting, someone else might. So here's the first part of my contribution.

This is a bit of a transition fic between the two 'halves' of Dark Matter. The first half is the only one that actually has like. full plot and all that jazz worked out, but this does contain important hooks for both halves. Point is, it's in the future from almost everything I've written. The title of the fic is from [Phantasma's Carry Me Home](#) as well as all the chapter titles.

Also, chapter word counts are the LEAST consistent I have ever managed but this was the way it split up.

On the Wings of the Night

Chapter Notes

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

Shiro wakes up and has to convince himself he isn't dreaming. He pinches himself hard enough to hiss with his prosthetic before he finally admits that, okay, maybe this isn't a dream. But how did he *get* here?

His memory finally starts working again, giving him flashes of the past few days. A desperate message from forces almost beyond salvation, Keith and Pidge gaining them a ride in, yelling at Sanda because *surely she knew this would happen?* Stopping by the cell door for a moment in disbelief that this was *actually happening*, teleporting in front of them because the Witch had seen fit to target their most vulnerable points, Voltron's shield failing before them as they use themselves as the last defense between Earth and that which could destroy it in one fell swoop. And then, memories that are both his own and not, like the meld with the Lions but so much *more*, of portals and the Thuranial and words that were not of any language in the known universe.

Then he'd woken up, the fourth out of five, quintessence drain close to the worst of them all because as Coran had said, "the more you dip, the deeper you dip, and the harder it is to come back." Keith is still in a pod, will be for a few more vargas, so that leaves Shiro here, in his bed on the Castle.

And it leaves Adam next to him.

He pinches himself again, for good measure, trying to process just what it *means* that Adam is next to him, breathing sleep-even and face half-buried in his pillows. He's been dreaming of this day for almost eight years, seven spent in a war and one spent in memories he no longer has. He's been dreaming of quiet mornings with no alarms, of whispered i-love-yous and morning kisses that draw out into something else. He's been dreaming of the missing pieces of his family, of big December dinners with Keith on his right and Adam on his left, of loud Mario Kart tournaments between all of the several dozen people clustered into the house, of sitting quietly with the children when it gets too much, of Adam coming up to sit with them as they color.

He's been dreaming of Adam for eight years.

Most people, at this point, would probably have moved on. He's honestly a little surprised that Adam is *in* his bed at all, but he remembers the end of that hurried transmission: *God, I hope this works. I never stopped loving you, Takashi, even when I thought you were dead. Come back home.* Apparently, he's not the only one that had trouble moving on.

What a pair they make, huh?

Across from him, Adam snuffles and shifts his head slightly, shifting in that way Shiro knows means he's about to wake up. Brown eyes blink open and meet his after a few moments,

frowning in early morning confusion. “‘m I dreaming?”

Shiro smiles. “Funny, had to ask myself that same question.”

Adam reaches out with one hand, and Shiro catches it with his human one, twining their fingers together. Adam stares at their hands. “So I’m not dreaming, and this isn’t some hallucination from Imperial torture devices again.”

Shiro frowns, instantly fully alert and all thoughts of sleepy mornings thrown out the airlock. If the Witch had so much as *breathed on a single hair* on Adam’s head--no, that wouldn’t help, she was already dead. “Again?”

Adam doesn’t respond to that, merely studying him for a moment. He pushes himself to a sitting position with a yawn and stretching his arms upwards. (And if Shiro can’t help but look at him, barely resists the urge to wrap an arm around him and pull him back down on top of him, well, can he really be blamed?) “I think we need to have a talk,” he says, obviously meaning to continue before Shiro’s stomach gives a very grumpy grumble. Adam raises an eyebrow, lips tilting into a grin. “But perhaps we should get some breakfast, first?”

Shiro is absolutely certain now that Hunk picked up his stress-baking habit from his parents because almost the moment he and Adam walk into the kitchen, Tiana Lemaota is sitting them down with a stack of pancakes nearly as big as his head. Hunk waves hi from where he’s standing by the stove, teaching his parents what space ingredients are digestible by humans and shoveling agriord into his mouth. Lance pops by, looking a little tired but eyes bright, and gives him a good-morning hug before he’s whisked away by Veronica, saying something about wanting to use the training room before Keith wakes up and hogs it. Adam snickers at that, well aware of Keith’s usual habits from way back at the Garrison. Sam and Colleen wander in and chat after being given their own stacks of pancakes, informing him that Pidge and Matt have been working on the Lions all morning but will probably be forced out of the hangar by Jade’s blunt demands for them to get some food soon enough. Even Krolia stops by, not speaking a word as she grabs some fruit without looking away from her datapad and ruffles Shiro’s hair on the way out.

Overall, it’s a good breakfast. He gets to see people he hasn’t seen in years, is introduced to even more that he knows he’ll be seeing a lot of, and eats far more food than he probably should. Only when Sam is called away to help fix some of the Blade’s ships, and Colleen follows him out, does Adam look at him with a look that says *ready to talk now?*

“I want to check on Keith, first.” is his response.

Adam nods. “Somehow figured you’d say that.”

They stop by the medbay, and Coran pats Shiro on the shoulder. “Still a few more vargas for Number Four,” he says, “probably right in the middle of the next night cycle. Don’t worry, I’ll wake you all up. Or Allura will.”

“Has Allura slept?” he asks because he’s pretty sure he knows the answer.

“Not as much as she should have.”

Suspensions confirmed, Shiro puts getting her to sleep on his to-do list for the day. First, however, he needs to have that talk. He takes Adam’s hand and nods. Adam nods back and tugs him out of the room. They almost run into Lance when the door opens, a datapad in his hands, and a set of blankets around his shoulders. He waves Shiro’s concerned gaze off and sits down next to Coran, eyes flicking between Keith’s pod and the Altean. Shiro takes a deep breath, assures himself that Lance will be fine once Keith wakes up, that Coran has him in good hands for the moments his siblings don’t, and follows Adam out the door.

They end up in one of the big observatories, the one that the entire Voltron team has at one point or another had a breakdown in. Shiro tries not to see that as an omen. Adam sits down on one of the couches, staring out at the wreckage that still covers Sol. Shiro sits down next to him. The damage doesn’t look as bad from out here. The wreckage of the Lagrange stations and what’s left of the Rings blends in with the remnants of the battle that are slowly being cleaned up by Rebel salvage teams. Even Luna and Mars don’t look as bad as Shiro knows they are.

“Do you think we’ll be able to fix it?”

Shiro glances at Adam, sure he’s talking about more than just Sol. “Yes. It might take a while, given all the damage, but we’ll get Sol back on its feet. I’m pretty sure the Holts already have plans.”

Adam nods once. “And... us?”

“I hope so. Look, Adam, I know--I know before I left, we said some shit, and you honestly have every right to be mad at me for it.”

“I wasn’t mad at you for what you said. I was mad at you because I couldn’t take watching you slowly destroy yourself despite everyone around you’s best efforts to get you to stop. You were *willfully* obtuse about it, and goddammit, I love you, but that was going to destroy us both.”

Shiro sighs and leans back. “I know, now. I’m sorry. I guess I needed to prove to myself that I was capable of everything I said I was, and it backfired spectacularly.”

“That’s *one* word for it.”

“Hey, it hasn’t been all bad up here,” Shiro says, gesturing with his prosthetic at his prematurely grey hair and scar on his nose. “My lifespan has been extended by a couple dozen years, at least, despite how it looks. Coran’s pretty sure he’s got however Haggar cured me distilled into something that will work for others, too, without a year and a half of torture this time around. But yeah, there have been bad parts. Leading a universe-wide war isn’t all roses and chocolate. Honestly, Adam, I’m tired. I never thought I’d say this, but I think I’ve seen enough of the universe.”

Adam gazes at him, and Shiro can feel the weight of eight years in it. He sees the same year of pain he sees in Keith's eyes sometimes; he sees three years of confusion and four years of desperate hope, of messages sent and seen too late. But there's something else in it too, the feeling of a hand in his at his mother's funeral, of stolen kisses in the dead of night, of exasperated but fond smiles when he finds him and Keith after a day of racing through the desert, of three years spent facing the world at each other's backs. He gives him a wry smile. "I guess neither of us are really the same people we were."

Shiro laughs and waggles his prosthetic fingers. "Guess not."

"So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?"

He looks Adam in the eyes, the weight of eight years in space heavy in his words. "To go home."

Adam leans in at the same time he does. Eight years feels like nothing when their lips press together, and Shiro thinks *home*.

It's not the same as it once was. Adam's right, they've both changed through war and occupation and torture and fear, but there's something there. They still fit together, even if the edges are a little rough, but that's nothing they can't work through. It'll take time before he can say the words that threaten to tumble out of his mouth as Adam pulls away with a soft smile, repeat the question he asked so long ago. But that's time he's willing to spend, and he knows it'll be worth it.

After all, he's finally home.

The first thing Keith does once he's extracted himself from the mass of Paladins that threaten to bowl him over after he wakes up is give Krolia a hug. The second thing he does is punch Adam in the arm. "You scared us half to death," he says, glowering. "Next time, send a message *before* you're about to be pointlessly sacrificed?"

"I rather hope there isn't a n-- *oof*" is Adam's response, cut off by Keith pulling him into a bone-crushing hug. Adam wheezes out something about not being able to breathe, begging Shiro with his eyes to free him. Shiro just laughs, trusting his sibling not to kill his boyfriend with his superhuman strength.

Shiro's in the training room in the Sonoran Desert SFGG base when he sees Adam and Lance stalk in out of the corner of his eye. They both look as furious as he feels. He doesn't have time to wave hi, though, because Keith comes at him with a vicious front kick that he's forced to turn his attention to or have a harsh meeting with the floor. They go back and forth a few more times, gaining bruises on top of bruises until the yellow finally bleeds out of Keith's eyes, and Shiro calls a stop. "Feel better?"

Keith huffs and takes the water bottle Lance offers. "A little."

“I’m willing to go punch him again,” Lance growls. “Pretty sure Scarlet’s ready to at a moment’s notice.”

Keith sighs. “As much as I appreciate the offer, I think Torrent’s been scared enough for the day.”

Shiro elbows Adam when he opens his mouth, well aware that what Keith needs right now is not someone teasing him over the last time he punched a Garrison officer. He waits until Lance pulls Keith out of the room for what he calls “flying therapy” (which either means letting Keith drag him around on his hoverbike for a few hours or grabbing two of the Lions and racing each other through the system) before he sighs and lets Adam wrap him in a proper hug.

“Allura told me everything. She looked like she was about to bite someone’s head off.”

Shiro hums. “I was pretty close to punching him before Keith did. I have to give him credit for trying to talk Torrent down, especially for the dramatic reveal bit, but Torrent kinda deserved it.”

“I think he deserves a lot more than a superpowered punch to the gut.”

He snorts. “Trust me, so do I.”

They’re silent for a moment, Adam’s hand soothingly rubbing his back. “How are you doing?”

“Better than Keith. Krolia’s basically made herself my mother, but what Torrent said didn’t affect me as directly as it did him.”

Adam purses his lips in thought for a moment. “I’m pretty sure it’s the Lemaotas’ turn for kitchen duty tonight. Want to get some food, see if they have ice cream?”

Shiro pulls back. “Commander Adam Wasti, are you asking me out on a date?”

Adam grins.

It’s the best date he’s had since before his mother’s death.

(Never mind the fact that it’s the only one. It’s the best because Adam is there and is asking him all these inane questions about the Coalition like “who comes up with the best memes” and Shiro is smitten just like he was twelve years ago.)

Chapter End Notes

Points to anyone who can pick out the playlist references in this fic.

Also since it's relevant I promise once the Federation is glued back together it's by and large capable of being a decent government, you just get assholes like Torrent sometimes. ~~and he gets what's coming to him at blade point eventually, just not this fie~~

May Our Spirits Unite

Chapter Notes

I was thinking about changing the chapter titles around so this one actually went with the wedding, but how it ended up was morning light with that and the goodbye one was pertinent to its events too, so I've just left them in order. Plus there's some chapters that would be impossible to try and match up so order works.

Still avoiding the election results, still hoping my state gets its shit together (I love living in a swing state, yippee)

The cleanup is slow going, the tally of the dead growing faster than the tally of the found. Voltron and the rest of the Coalition help where they can, moving debris or tending to the malnourished former prisoners. The remnants of SFGG are grateful for the support, even if some of the leadership is still wary of trusting alien leadership. Armstrong is clearly not going to be rebuilt in time for New Years, nor is most of Sol despite the Coalition's best efforts, so the celebrations are held in the town surrounding the Sonoran Desert SFGG base, affectionately known now as Bastion. There's a wildness about it, a relief still going strong after the end of the occupation, of the war. Shiro's having fun, doing the requisite fly-over with the Lions with the rest of the team, Adam hanging on to the back of his chair and laughing as Shiro leads them in a loop. Someone vetoed the fireworks that he knew were on the list (he has a feeling it was Sam), so midnight isn't accompanied by any loud booms, but it is accompanied by five happy roars and a kiss that makes Shiro feel a happy-dizzy he forgot he could feel.

Shiro walks onto Bastion's big landing pad from the Black Lion and is immediately grabbed by the arm. "Veronica--what--?" he manages once he gets his bearings back and realizes she's dragging him towards a car.

She gives him a look that is full of pain and sympathy, even if it's buried under the signature Suarez-Espinosa 'you will listen to me, or I will throw you out an airlock, so help me god' glare. "You, Shiro, are going to sit with your boyfriend while I run interference and get Iverson and Holt to convince Torrent to give him a few days off."

"Okay," he says as the car door shuts behind them, "I'm always up for that, but can I ask *why*?"

Veronica sighs and taps in an address on the GPS. "I'll let him say it."

The ride to the house is silent except for Veronica's nails tapping on her datapad as she types up something that Shiro can't quite make out. They pull up to one of the cookie-cutter houses

that used to line every Garrison compound, and Veronica motions for him to get out. “Home system’s online enough it can let you in. I’m heading to the Holts’.”

The car heads off almost as soon as he gets out, and Shiro is left staring at a door. Shiro says his name, and the home system unlocks the door. Hesitantly, unsure of what he’ll find behind it, he pushes it open and steps into the house. “Adam?” Adam doesn’t respond, so Shiro shuts the door behind him and pokes his head into the living room.

Adam is bent over on himself on the couch, elbows on his knees and chin on his chest. His eyes are blank and staring at the ground, which has Shiro moving to gently place his hands on his shoulders. “Adam?” Adam finally looks up at him. Shiro studies the red around his eyes and too-blank expression. “What’s wrong?”

“They found my parents,” he croaks and buries his face in Shiro’s chest.

Shiro sits down heavily next to him, images flashing through his mind of sitting next to an unconscious Keith’s hospital bed as one of the paramedics hands him their mother’s favorite bracelet, bloodied and battered just like she was. He tugs Adam closer and wraps him up in the biggest hug he can manage, tucking Adam’s head under his. “I’m so sorry.”

“I knew--I knew, earlier, because not even Veronica could find them after the collapse and she found everyone else, but to have it *confirmed*--”

His voice breaks, and that’s the catalyst for the rest of him. Shiro holds him as he cries, two years of buried grief making themselves known. He sits there and mumbles soothing words into his hair until Adam falls asleep against him, and then sits there longer until Veronica shows up with a sad frown and a week’s leave secured for him.

Voltron gets called away to deal with some warlord who refused to surrender a few weeks later. Keith tells Shiro he can stay on Earth if he wants, he’s fine with being Black Paladin for this run, but Shiro waves him off. He still feels a sense of obligation to the rest of them, to see the last dregs of this war through to the end.

Pidge grins at him when she drops a message from Earth in his lap when he and Hunk return from a mission. He raises a questioning eyebrow at her, but she mimes zipping her lips shut and walks away. Unlocking the datapad doesn’t help, so he sits in the kitchen with it for a very confusing moment.

Then he bursts out laughing. “You’re a fuckin’ sap, Adam.”

Hunk leans over and reads out the string of numbers, looking just as confused as Shiro for a moment before a slow smile spreads across his face. “The cipher again?”

“The cipher again.”

He keeps the cheesy love note filed away on his personal tablet, where it’s brethren join it at least twice a week for the entire time he’s in space.

Shiro wanders into the kitchen on the morning of February 29th, 2228, to find a banner reading “Happy Eighth Birthday, Shiro” strung up on the wall in Adam’s handwriting. The rest of the team is grinning at him, shouting variations on the sentiment on the wall. Even Allura and Coran, who had to have the joke explained when Keith and Pidge decided that even though they had no idea what day it was, at least four years had passed so they could celebrate Shiro’s ‘seventh’ birthday, are smiling widely at him.

The worst (and best) part is that it could be any of them who are primarily to blame. Shiro rolls his eyes and sits down at the table. “Alright, alright, very funny, all of you. Who did Adam convince to take that?”

Keith is valiantly trying not to laugh. “You’ll never guess.”

“So I take it it’s not you.”

“Nope. Seriously, you’ll never guess.”

“Allura?”

She smiles wickedly. “Nope.”

Pidge is snickering. “I’ll give you a hint: someone who would never betray you like this.”

He raises an eyebrow, but his guess is sidetracked by Krolia entering the room. She glances over the assembly and nods with what he’s pretty sure is a *smirk* at the banner. Sitting down next to him, she says, “Happy eighth birthday, kitokva.”

Things click into place because Krolia wasn’t there for his seventh birthday, and he doesn’t recall explaining leap-years to her, but he’s *definitely* told her his age at one point. He knows better than to call her a traitor even jokingly, so he settles for turning a betrayed look to Keith.

Traitor, he mouths.

Keith just laughs.

It’s only when he’s toppling out of a healing pod after taking a nasty hit to the side into Keith’s waiting arms that Shiro realizes something. He’s not looking for Keith at his side, not looking for Yorak’s curious nose as the wolf pops in and out of his vision, not looking for Krolia’s concerned look.

He’s looking for Adam.

He’ll take Keith’s too-tight grip, fear still keeping his muscles taught, he’ll take Krolia’s awkward mother henning, he’ll take Yorak nuzzling his side. They’re family, people he would destroy the universe for (and that’s a concerning thought, that he understands Haggar’s motivations to that level), but all he really wants right now is Adam.

It's an odd realization. He's spent eight years looking for the rest of the Paladins when he comes out of the stasis, Keith especially after everything that happened with Project Kuron. And now, what he wants most in the entire universe, is Adam to sweep him up in his arms and carry him to bed like a cheesy romance novel.

Shiro thinks it over that night, lying in bed staring at the ceiling as they wait for Blade intel to give them the location of the final base of this warlord's. He knows he'd never convince Adam to come along on Voltron missions. The Rebels would be lucky to have him, he *is* as good a codebreaker as Iverson says he is, but Adam's never had the same wanderlust as Shiro does.

Or, perhaps, did. He meant what he said, that he was tired. He's seen enough of the good and the bad in the universe to last several lifetimes. He doesn't think he'd be able to completely give up traveling the stars, now that he knows what it's like, but there isn't an incessant *need* pushing him to do it anymore. He sees that need in Keith all the time still, the thrill of discovering new places, charting unexplored galaxies, and the pure, simple joy of flying at breakneck speeds through a debris field. Shiro, on the other hand, doesn't want to go galavanting off again.

So what *does* he want?

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

In one moment of clarity, he realizes that once this warlord is down, he would be perfectly fine giving Keith the position permanently and settling down on Earth with Adam.

Keith is an excellent Black Paladin, even if his diplomacy skills are still mostly variations on saying "fight me" as politely as he can. He knows the team inside and out, and not only from spending so long in the Voltron meld with them, and though he's awkward at pep talks, they're so obviously from the heart that one can't help but be boosted by them. Shiro knows that Kuro thinks the same thing; otherwise, he wouldn't have opened their bond so far the two sometimes can't tell whose thought is whose even without the Navarea active.

That and Kuro is currently nodding along in the back of his head. **I will support you, whatever you decide, cub,** he says.

Shiro definitely does not shed a tear at the unconditional support from the Lion. He resolves to think it over a little more when he's not fresh from a healing pod and rolls over to finally sleep.

The warlord is taken down with little trouble after that, but Shiro can't stop thinking. It's been eight months since the Empire surrendered, eight months since Voltron took Haggar and the Thuranial down in a blaze of glory and almost killed themselves twice over in the process, eight months since Earth was freed after years of occupation. Eight months since they got back everyone on Earth they'd missed for years.

He's lying in Adam's bed this time, in the house he'd been living in with Veronica as a roommate before the world imploded. Veronica is off on the *Atlas*, a position he's reasonably sure will become permanent given its status as the only Sol Federation ship in the Coalition fleet and the way she's been looking at a certain Templar. Hence, it's just them in the house. He's thinking about the fact that this is one of the first times he's slept anywhere but the Castle in years and actually felt comfortable about it when he circles back around to the question that's been on his mind since his little realization.

"What if I gave Keith the position?"

Adam pauses drawing lazy circles on his human arm with his fingertips. "What?"

Shiro turns over so he's facing his boyfriend. "What if I gave Keith the Black Paladin position on a permanent basis?"

Adam stares at him. "Can I ask what brought this on?"

Shiro isn't sure how to articulate his tangled thoughts on the matter, so he starts at what he supposes can be construed as the beginning. "I told you I had to get shoved in a healing pod during the mission, right?" Adam nods, clearly still not happy about that turn of events. "I was happy to see Keith right there, and Lance and Pidge and Hunk and Allura and Coran, even Krolia and Kolivan, but they weren't who I was looking for. I was looking for you. And I started thinking and like, I *meant* it when I said I was tired, Adam. I'm tired of war. I want-- I want to *live*, instead of slowly bleeding out of the thousand holes this war carved out of me. For me, right now, that means not being part of Voltron, not on a permanent basis. I want to build a home here, make something for once instead of destroying."

Adam considers him for long moments. "You'd have to see what Keith thinks, and the rest of the team."

"Well, yeah," Shiro agrees, "I wouldn't just spring this on him, and the decision would lock Lance and Allura into Red and Blue Paladin positions too. I don't think it'd be an immediate thing, either, knowing Keith. He's proven he's a capable leader when he tries, but it's been a joint thing between us for so long he'd need some sort of warning. And I don't know if it would affect his position in the Blade at all, and that's important to him, so I don't want to mess it up."

Adam bites his lip while he's thinking, drawing Shiro's eyes toward it and sending his thoughts in a very different direction. "I think if Keith and the rest of the team are fine with it, it sounds like it'd be good for you. You've obviously been thinking about this for a while."

"Consciously, I've been thinking about it for a month, but honestly, I think I've been thinking about it since the first time I got thrown through the side of a corrupted wormhole."

Adam looks confused, probably about to ask what that string of words even means, but Shiro reaches over him with his prosthetic and pulls him into a hug. "Thanks. For listening and confirming I'm on the right track."

"You know I'll always listen, 'Kashi. The right track is another matter."

“Hey, you don’t get to make fun of my Mario Kart skills.”

“You were going *backwards!*”

“I haven’t played in eight years!”

Adam’s grinning up at him from where Shiro’s rolled them over. “Fine, first place in a grand prix gets to pick dinner.”

“Oh, I am *not* taking that bet without you having a handicap.”

“What handicap do you have in mind?”

The mischievous glint in Shiro’s eyes almost makes Adam regret asking.

Almost.

Shiro manages to beat Adam by a measly three points.

(A few days later sees Shiro walking back into the house after a run to find Keith and Adam yelling at each other good-naturedly, old-fashioned steering wheels in their hands, and constantly trading first place. Shiro leans over the back of the couch and asks, “do you think you could beat him if I gave you a handicap?” to which Adam fumbles his controller, and Keith, wisely, chooses not to comment.)

On Paper Wings

Chapter Notes

Several people have some PTSD dreams in this one, and there's a terrible, *terrible* innuendo that's the reason for the tag. I'm only slightly sorry, and Adam definitely isn't.

Shiro wakes up in the middle of the night to what sounds like sobbing. He's instantly awake, war-honed instincts zeroing in on the source of the sound.

He stops halfway sat up. Adam is still asleep, but he's whimpering, curling in on himself in a desperate attempt to protect that Shiro knows too well. "Adam," he says, quiet but firm. It's not the first time he's woken like this, and he knows it won't be the last. Adam doesn't move but to curl in on himself more, so Shiro repeats it, a little louder, hoping to get past the haunting laughter and scraping words he knows are clogging his ears.

Adam jerks and quiets before he finally opens his eyes. The tears threatening to fall from his eyes tug on Shiro's heartstrings as he croaks out, "Takashi?"

"Yeah, hey, I'm here. You're okay; you're safe on Earth with me."

Adam scoots forward and shakes apart in Shiro's arms. Shiro pulls him closer and whispers soothing words into his hair until he stops shaking and lies limp under the covers. "Sorry."

"Don't say sorry for that. I've already woken you up a dozen times."

"Yeah, but you--you were there for *years*--"

"If you're about to try and tell me that you don't get to be traumatized and scared shitless because you were only there for a week, I'm going to have to stop you there. Adam, love, if anyone knows how scary the Witch was, it's me. An hour is more than enough in the Druids' tender mercies."

Adam sniffs but doesn't bring that part up again. Instead, he mumbles, "Do you have any funny anecdotes? Something to distract me?"

Shiro wracks his brain for a moment. The first thing he thinks of wasn't funny at the time, but he really has to agree with Lance's reaction of cackling on the floor in hindsight. "So let me tell you why the Garrison lost track of a year's worth of pizza MREs..."

Shiro hasn't actually managed to talk to Keith about the whole Black Paladin status thing before the next emergency pops up. Keith seems to understand something, though, because he preemptively shoots down Shiro's offer to come as backup and tells him to spend his time

“playing Mario Kart with Adam, or whatever the hell you *actually* meant by that comment and *no, I don't want to know.*”

Adam's wheezing with laughter behind him as they watch Keith run into the Black Lion's mouth and soar through Earth's skies to join the rest of the Lions on the journey to Lozarth. He waggles his eyebrows and stands on tiptoes to lean over Shiro's shoulder. “Well, ‘Kashi? Want to come *play some Mario Kart?*”

“That has no right to work, and you know it.”

Adam cackles the entire way back to their house.

Later, when they are, actually, playing Mario Kart, Shiro realizes he called it *their house* in his head. Veronica had finalized her position on the *Atlas* and left her stuff with her parents while she was on tour, which left just Adam with a claim to the house, so it makes a certain amount of sense that he would think it, but it still throws him for a loop. Adam's reteaching him how to drift with the newest version of the game when he notices Shiro's slightly frozen. “Takashi?”

“Is this--our house now?”

Adam blinks at him for a moment. “Yes, you doofus.”

“Oh. Somehow I never even considered we'd get this far, after everything.”

“We did, though.”

Shiro smiles at him, a soft, loving thing. “Yeah, we did. I'm glad.”

Adam kisses him, and it takes a while for Shiro to remember he was trying to learn how to not drive backwards again.

In hindsight, Shiro's just surprised it took this long for one of the *really* terrible nightmares to hit. He doesn't even remember most of it, not beyond a flash of corrupted quintessence winding around his arm, a sword he never used pointed at something he can't make out but is desperate to make sure is safe. His arm moving beyond his control, slashing and stabbing, and then something makes an all too familiar scream--

“*Takashi.*”

He doesn't snap out of it; that would be too easy. He does wake up, but he can't tell where he is. It's dark, darker than even the Witch's torture chambers, and he's missing his arm again he has to get *out--*

A light blinks on. A familiar face he can't make out beyond that fact is sitting up next to him, a gentle hand rubbing over his fingers and worry in the other's face. “You're fine, Takashi. You're safe on Earth. Easy there, there you go, just breathe, you've got this.”

It could be minutes or hours before his brain works enough to tell him the face is Adam. Adam wasn't on the Castle, was never in space with them, which means... something. He chokes out his name, and something eases in Adam's shoulders. "Yeah. Hey. You back?"

"I don't know."

"How can I help?"

He considers, trying to access scattered memories because he knows this has happened before, but he can't figure out what stopped it. Weight, weight sometimes helps. He can see Yorak sleeping on his legs, but is it the weight or something else? "Hug?" he eventually settles on because he's sure at least that he won't freak out again from one.

Adam tugs him closer, and he goes willingly, shoving his face into the juncture of his shoulder and neck. The touch is grounding, and the fact that it's *Adam* here is significant because he was never on the Castle, he never interacted with Kuron, so he could never be part of the clone's memories he has buried where he doesn't want them. He's safe on Earth, and Keith killed all the clones, and Voltron killed Haggar, so there *can't* be any more clones.

He's not a clone.

Shiro belatedly realizes he must have said something out loud because Adam makes a sad little noise and squeezes him harder. "No, 'Kashi, you're not a clone. You know how I know? You're sitting here with me. The clone would never have done this because *he never sent any messages.*"

"He didn't?"

Adam shakes his head. "No. The only time he ever showed up was when Pidge and Matt dragged him into the frame. He showed up even less than Keith did during that year."

Objectively, Shiro knows this because he has the memories, but it never really registered. Something in him relaxes because, at the very least, he *cares*, and he *loves*, something the clone never did. "I love you," he mumbles into Adam's neck.

Adam presses a kiss to his hair. "I love you too."

Shiro's pretty out of it the rest of the day, but luckily Adam has a day off. They sit on the couch, Shiro's head in Adam's lap as Adam plays with his hair and tells him, in-depth, the history of every meme from every movie they watch. By the time Voltron calls with news that they're heading back, Shiro's aware enough that he can say hi without his brain reminding him of the fact that someone who looked a lot like him almost killed his little sibling with no remorse.

The Castle's under repairs over Olkarion, but the Paladins would rather be on Earth. Sam and Colleen insist on stealing Pidge while both she and Matt are on-planet, while Tiana and Tiamo drag Hunk to their family restaurant. Adelita and Xandria offer a room in their house,

but one glance at Keith's panicked expression, when faced with the half of Lance's family already stuffed into the house, has Lance taking up Adam's offer of the spare bedroom. They're out like lights before their heads hit the pillow, which Shiro counts as a win.

The next morning, he gets back from his run to find Keith sitting at the kitchen table, hair falling out of a braid and sleepy-eyed. "Hey, 'Kashi."

"Hey, Keithva."

The diminutive always puts a smile on Keith's face, no matter how many times he hears it, which is why Shiro keeps saying it. He smiles back as he sits down across from him with a full glass of water. "Can I ask you something important, or are you too sleepy for that?"

Keith raises an eyebrow. "Depends on what it is?"

Shiro takes a deep breath. "How would you feel being Black Paladin on a more permanent basis?"

Keith studies him. "Shiro--"

"Nothing's wrong again!" he hurries to reassure his sibling, "It's just--I'm tired, you know? I want to settle down and live something even approaching a normal life. I want to do something other than fight a war."

Somehow, that earns him a wry smile. "I know."

Shiro blinks at him. "You do?"

"For one thing, there's this," he says, tapping his temple in a way that probably points out his bond with the Black Lion. "You know how sometimes Kuro lets things bleed through he doesn't mean to. The other thing, though, is that I've spent half my life living with you, half of that in space." Keith leans forward, purple eyes keeping him pinned with their intensity. "Shiro, when we got back yesterday was the happiest I've seen you in years."

And Shiro knows Keith isn't wrong about that. He'd been so glad to have them all in the same room, safe and sound on Earth, and he didn't have post-mission stress hanging over his head. He nodded acknowledgment to Keith's point. "So, what's your answer?"

Keith sighs, blowing pink and black hair out of his eyes. "Do you remember what I said way back after the clone business?"

"I never thought relying on people could feel good?"

"Yeah, that part, but some of the other stuff too. I've spent years having you there to back up my command decisions when I'm floundering. Which, in some ways, is both good and bad. It's nice to have someone higher up the chain to call me out when I'm being stupid, like when I rushed out to Morakiluide without so much as a word to anyone else."

"Which *was* very stupid, but also the only reason anyone made it off. But, Keith, you know that none of us are really 'higher up the chain.'"

“I know, but you’ve sort of always been... The Leader,” Shiro can hear the capital letters, “the one that knows what to do no matter what, and I *know* that’s not true, but you give off that impression. I guess what I’m trying to get at is that I need to be certain that *I* can do that. That I can project that confidence that will keep people going even when things are dire, and hopefully have something to back it up.”

Shiro squints at Keith like he’s forgotten how to read. “Keith, you *do* remember what the Blades call you?”

Keith groans. “Kathünínsurid does not imply that I actually know how to lead, it just means I’m good at stabbing druids.”

“No, not that part, the other part.”

“Bakal?”

“Yes, Keith. You’re a *Blade General*. I know a little of that history, and that is not a title to be taken lightly.” Keith opens his mouth to say something, but Shiro reaches across the table and slaps his hand over his mouth before he can. “Don’t you *dare* say you got the position because you’re a Paladin or one of the Marmorait. You earned that fair and square. Kolivan gave you that position because *he* trusts your ability to lead. Hell, you and Krolia basically ran the Blade for a month after Morakiluide fell.”

Keith’s attempt to say “Vanab and Kozur--” gets muffled by Shiro’s hand.

“--Were on Ambar for most of that month. They helped, yes, but they were recovering just like Kolivan.”

Keith glares at him for a moment before licking his hand. Shiro wipes it on Keith’s bare arm in revenge. Keith pouts and sticks his tongue out but turns back to their serious conversation. “Fine. But I still need to feel that I can do it myself, or this is never going to work.”

“Okay. There’s no rush.”

They sit in silence, Shiro drinking the rest of his water as Keith contemplates his dry cereal. “What are you going to do if you’re not a Paladin?” Keith asks after a few minutes.

(So, Takashi, if you’ve crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

“Actually, I was thinking about Mom’s work.”

Keith pauses with his spoon halfway in his mouth. “Really?”

“Hey, I’m the only one of the five of us that actually *graduated*, remember? I may have primarily been a pilot, but I have a degree in exoplanetary science. That included a *lot* of environmental science.”

“A degree you haven’t used in eight years.”

Shiro shrugs. “I’ve got time to relearn, and *someone’s* gotta make sure Earth stays habitable.”

Shiro wakes up the next morning to Allura’s blinding smile and notes on translating Altean alchemy into Earth science.

(It is, in truth, far too early in the morning for this, but he knows what her father did and what his mother did and thinks he’ll take a few early mornings if they can honor their parents in one small way together.)

Like You Did in My Dreams

Chapter Notes

The horse is OUT of the hospital!!!!

I told myself once the election was called that if I hadn't posted it yet I was going to post to the proposal chapter so guess what. two chapters today. (Which is just as well since this first one starts out an angst fest). We've Been Waiting So Long will be up once I finish final edits.

A few days later, Lance is over at the Lemaotas' for the night, Adam is on duty, and Keith is supposedly asleep, so when Shiro gets up in the middle of the night for some water, he doesn't expect to see anyone. Keith wanders into the kitchen a few minutes after him, circles under his eyes, and something haunted in his steps. Wordlessly, Shiro grabs another glass of water and slides it across the table to him--

Keith is already in the kitchen, circles under his eyes, and haunted confusion written all over his face. Shiro pauses halfway to the fridge because that particular look can not mean well. "Keith? You g--"

He hears shuffling in the kitchen, though, so he makes sure to make some noise with his steps. The kitchen greets him with a freaked-out looking Keith, two seconds away from hyperventilating. "Whoa, hey, Keith, what--"

He steps into the kitchen with a yawn and freezes when he feels a knife at his throat. Glancing down, he catches the glint of purple-blue metal in the streetlights' low light through the window. The worst part is the pair of eyes reflecting light back at him in the dark. They're wide and mostly unseeing, a thousand-yard stare he hasn't seen in a while and was hoping he'd never see again.

"Keith," Shiro says, a little unsure how he should approach this since there isn't the Castle's emergency system watching his every move. He can tell that Kuro is doing his best, given how little attention he can feel, and knows that Scarlet will alert Lance if it becomes absolutely necessary. That doesn't change the fact that his sibling is currently holding a knife to his throat and clearly not aware of the world around him. "Keith."

Keith's eyes flicker over him for a moment, a little life coming back into them before they harden. Shiro's eyes have adjusted to the low light enough he can see Keith's claws half extended around his blade and the yellow that has wholly overtaken his scleras. Whatever had spooked him had spooked him good. "Zizvogartovungal," he spits.

Imposter, comes the watered-down translation, even though he's heard that word enough to have a good idea. "No, Keith. I'm Shiro, not the clone. You killed all the clones, remember?"

Keith narrows his eyes. Shiro can see when the memory makes it through the haze because Keith lowers the blade a fraction of an inch, and his eyes gain a little life again. His voice shakes as he hisses the next part, a demand he hasn't heard in a year. "Convince me, then. Tell me something only you would know."

"When you and Kuro pulled me out of the corrupted meld, you told me it was time to come home."

It takes longer than Shiro hoped it would, but Keith drops the blade. It hits the floor with a clatter, and Keith stumbles back, breathing close to hyperventilating. "Shit," he gasps out.

"Easy, breathe, Keith." Shiro desperately wants to take a step closer, but he knows how that turns out, and neither of them will forgive themselves for it.

"I-- '*Kashi*-- I--"

"Shh, I know, it's okay, you're okay, I'm okay. Didn't even touch me. Can you breathe for me?"

Keith ends up sitting on the floor with his back in a corner, and Shiro cross-legged a few meters away from him. He watches as what he's pretty sure is Kuro calms him down as best he can until Keith is hunched over on himself, heels of his hands pressed to his eyes. His claws are retracted, though, which is the best sign so far. "Do you want some water?"

Keith nods, so Shiro stands up and fills a glass for each of them. He places Keith's as far across their little no-man's-land as he can reach and takes a sip from his own. Keith reaches out and grabs it with shaking hands, taking a tentative sip. "I'm sorry," he croaks.

"It's fine, Keith."

"But it almost *wasn't*."

"Keithva--"

"Sooner or later, that line isn't going to *work*, Shiro. I'll remember you've said it before but I won't remember when or something and I'll think you're lying or--"

"Then we'll deal with that when we get there, Keith, okay? No sense worrying about that until it happens."

"And what if it does? What if you can't worry about it because I have a *sword to your throat*?"

"I'm pretty sure Kuro would rather break a lifetime's worth of rules that prevent him from forcing the meld open to teleport one of us away than let you kill me without knowing who I am, and he would rather talk you down than do that. It won't happen, Keith."

Keith falls silent, eyes on the floor, still shaking. Shiro stays with him, pawing a datapad off the counter to read through the last reports Allura sent along until Keith speaks up again.

"How am I supposed to lead Voltron like this?"

Shiro looks up at him. “You’ve been doing it for years, Keith. So have I, for that matter.”

“But I could have *killed* you, Shiro.”

“I seem to recall putting you in a healing pod for a bad concussion after a nightmare. Not much difference. What matters is that we’re *trying*, Keith. When was the last time you got spooked like that?”

Keith frowns. “A year ago? Before we came back, I know that. Might’ve been before Iko too.”

“See? I think that’s the longest you’ve gone since the whole thing. Recovery from trauma isn’t a linear thing--”

Keith groans. “Okay, you’re going all therapist on me; I think we’re done here. Go back to sleep, Takashi.”

“It’s *true* though--”

“I *know* it’s true, but I don’t need you spouting it to me at--what time is it even anyway?”

Shiro glances at the bottom of his datapad. “Oh-four-twenty-seven. I think we’ve been sitting here for a while.”

Keith huffs something that might have been a laugh were he not at the tail end of a flashback. “Go back to sleep, Takashi. I’m just gonna--just gonna sit here for a bit.”

Shiro takes his water back up to his room and fishes his phone out of a pants pocket to text Adam. *Don’t go in the kitchen when you get back unless Lance is here.*

The response comes a few minutes later as Shiro pulls the covers back over his legs. *Noted. Can I ask why?*

Keith’s having a bad night, and unfortunately, it’s the one I usually make worse. Rather not have to talk him down for the second time tonight.

Adam sends him a sympathetic frowny emoji and a hug. *You okay?*

Shiro considers. *I will be once he is.*

Get some sleep, love.

Shiro settles down to do just that. He wakes up around six when Adam yawns his way through the door and settles down next to him, but a quick check of the home system shows no signs that Lance is back yet, so Shiro decides it’s probably better for everyone if he gets some more sleep. When he and Adam finally get down the stairs, Lance gives them a wave from the kitchen where he’s quietly talking to Keith, who is somewhat unsurprisingly still on the floor.

It's a long day between the four of them, but they get through it bit by bit. Keith is convinced that getting off the floor won't kill anyone, and Shiro curls up with Adam on the couch watching old animated movies, the running meme commentary carried on by Lance when Adam dozes off.

All in all, it's not the worst.

Lance cooks dinner, and Shiro 'supervises' because Adam's catching up on sleep and Keith went out for a bike ride to clear his head, so there's not much else he can do. In reality, he's being fed bits of fruit that Lance leaves on a plate for him and dejectedly staring at the countertop. Eventually, Lance looks over, sighs, and points a spoon at him with the 'I will throw you out an airlock' glare. "Spit it out."

"Spit what out?"

"I've lived in a confined space with you for eight years. You're worrying yourself sick. Spit it out unless you enjoy burned mac'n'cheese."

Shiro sighs but relents. "I'm worried about Keith. He hasn't been set off like that in a very long time. And like--I don't even know *what* set him off? If it was a dream, then how the hell did we get down to the kitchen before I ran into him? I wasn't quiet on my way down the stairs."

Lance pauses for a moment, staring down at the melted cheese on the stove. "I don't think he really remembered what triggered it until I tried to ask him. Shiro it--" he huffs, turning the stove down to a simmer and sitting at the table across from Shiro. "It sounded like what Krolia described a few months ago. The record skip that only she can remember. He came down after a nightmare, and you gave him some water, but you were also at the door, and by the fridge, and then you were at the door again. He saw four of you at once, and that meant *clone* meant *Thuranial* meant *kill it before it kills me*."

It's funny if you look at it in a very twisted way. Shiro lets the wry smile pull his lips into something sad. "So, if Allura's theory on what happened with Krolia is correct, spacetime itself decided to pull a very cruel joke."

"Unfortunately. But, Shiro, why does *only he* remember it? If you don't, then it can't be Paladin-capable quintessences that sense it. And what if these aren't isolated incidents? What if they're happening all the time, there's just no one able to remember them? And we never saw these before the end of the war, before what happened to Haggar and the Thuranial. Why is that? I find it hard to believe, after two incidents in a few months, that if these were happening we would have never seen one."

"I don't know, Lance, I don't know."

Lance goes back to the stove. "I think we need to find out. Not today, because today is a day for comfort food and sleep, but we need to."

Spacetime doesn't pull any more tricks on them, but he does find Keith in the living room far earlier than he usually wakes up the next day, circles visible under his eyes. He's curled in the corner of the couch, phone cradled between his legs along with a bowl of cereal as he talks in a low intertwining of Galran and English that can only mean he's talking to Krolia. Shiro dips into the kitchen before he goes out for a run and grabs a chocolate heart from the bag in the cupboard, dropping it next to Keith as he passes. Keith blinks at it for a moment before calling out a "Thank you" just as Shiro closes the door behind him. Shiro lets himself release a bit of the tension that's been in his shoulders since the day before; they'll be okay.

"Hey, Shiro, you wanna go for a ride? I wanna show you something."

Shiro pauses his game and glances up at Keith. He's got a backpack slung over his shoulder and his biker style Voltron jacket on, red blazing across his right arm and back and purple accents stitching the Blade of Marmora symbol on the collar. "Sure. Where're we going?"

"Somewhere you've been before."

He raises an eyebrow at the deflecting answer but presses a kiss to Adam's cheek and hauls himself off the couch. "Don't burn the house down while we're gone."

Adam rolls his eyes. "Don't worry, I won't burn the water cooking dinner."

Shiro grabs his own jacket, not a Voltron one, and they're off. Keith flies his bike like he always does, releasing himself to the wind and sand, and Shiro is fascinated as always. The landscape around them changes from Bastion's tree-lined streets to sand and cliffs, the Sonoran Desert stretched out before them.

He *recognizes* that cliff.

"Uh, Keith? Didn't I tell you not to make that jump with other people on the bike?" Shiro yells above the wind, anxiety rising in his chest.

"I made this jump with Pidge, Hunk, and Lance holding your unconscious body on the back while outrunning Garrison cars."

"You *what*?"

Keith makes the jump.

Shiro definitely does not scream, he's made this jump himself plenty of times, he *does not scream*.

"Wow, Shiro, I didn't even know your voice could get that high."

"*Shut. Up.*"

Keith's grinning, and after the past few days, Shiro doesn't have the heart to be mad at him for it.

They follow a trail that doesn't exist, but Keith seems to know exactly where he needs to turn, which sand dune to crest, which cactus means which way. Shiro is thoroughly confused by the end, only recognizing anything when the sand-covered roof of a tiny shack comes into view. "It's still here?"

"Miraculously. Sasa and I came back once when we first got back, but we didn't get much time here before we got dragged back into things. She sort of inadvertently reminded me of something I stashed here forever ago yesterday, and I figured it was time to bring it back."

They pull to a stop at the front. Keith slides off quickly, but Shiro stays on the bike for a moment, an odd sense of *deja vu* overtaking him. The last (and only) time he was here was just before they found the Blue Lion before their lives were turned upside down and thrown so sideways they had no idea which way was forward. "This place doesn't really show its significance," he muses, standing in the doorway.

Keith glances over his shoulder from where he's pulling dusty blankets off the shelves. "What do you mean?"

"I mean... this is the place where we first all met. This is the place where we became a team, the very first time, working to put all the puzzle pieces you'd collected together. But it's a tiny, run-down shack in quite literally the middle of nowhere."

Keith snorts, turning back to the shelves. "Maybe they should make a museum."

"Not a bad idea. I can see the plaques now." Shiro glances around before pointing at the yarn map still on the wall. "'Spot where Keith Shirogane, Kikrolia Marmorait proved he was the worst conspiracy theorist ever.'"

"I'm not a conspiracy theorist."

Shiro raises an eyebrow, gesturing at the walls. "Then what do you call this?"

"Research into something that, may I remind you, is *substantiated*."

"And your 'research' into cryptids?"

"Also substantiated!"

"How?"

Keith stares at him, gesturing to himself in a *really?* sort of way. *"I'm literally half-alien."*

"So you're saying Bigfoot is another halfblood?"

"Maybe! And Mothman could be a Khacon, and Nessie a really old Biboh."

"Okay, fine, but you definitely didn't know it was substantiated before we ended up in space."

Keith grins, picking up the book on the top of the stack he'd made and waving it at Shiro. "Yes, I did. This is Dad's old notebook, one of two things I've had with me since Sasa left. I left it here by accident when we went and found Azul and forgot about it until Sasa reminded me about it. You read it and tell me you wouldn't be convinced aliens exist if the past eight years hadn't happened."

Shiro catches it and flips through it quickly as Keith unzips his backpack and starts putting books into it. He sees anecdotes about Alteans, foods from Taibdee, stories from Aberdén, weapons of the Dalterí, myths from Daibazaal, even a starmap remarkably similar to the one on the Castle. The words Alsaetok Zad catch his eye, words Keith still insists on calling the Pleiades by. He flips the page from there and pauses. A sketched picture covers the entire spread of both pages, the Voltron symbol proudly displayed in the middle next to five Lions drawn in multicolored crayon in a child's hand. "Do you remember drawing this?"

Keith must know what he's looking at as he doesn't bother looking up. "Nope. Looking at my handwriting around it, I must have been less than five. Flip the page again."

Shiro does so and raises his eyebrows at a set of familiar sketched lines. He holds the book up as Keith straightens, comparing them to the lines cutting down Keith's cheeks. "The full Crest of Marmora."

"Still think it's unsubstantiated?"

"How the hell did you keep this away from everyone?"

"I didn't, at first, but soon learned that if I showed it to anyone, they were going to rip pages out. Got pretty good at hiding it and my blade before you found me, and just sort of... never stopped."

"I'm sorry."

Keith shrugs. "Nothing to be sorry for. I didn't drag you out here to look at that, though, as fascinating as it is. Here."

Keith tosses the backpack at him, and Shiro fumbles the notebook trying to prevent himself from being brained with it. He catches it, barely, staggering against the couch. "Jesus, Keith. What did you even put in here?"

"You know how we both took some of Okasan's stuff to the Garrison?"

"Yeah."

"After the *Genesis* was declared KIA, I took most of it. I couldn't grab much when the Garrison kicked me out, but I did manage to grab those."

Shiro stares at him, then looks down at the bag. Gingerly, he sets the bag down and pulls the top book out; it's an environmental science textbook, dated two years before the mission to Kerberos. The stamp in the front cover declares it Garrison property, but it's been scribbled over with red ink, a winking smiley face, and a cheeky *mine now* in a handwriting he

instantly recognizes. He flips hurriedly through, finding their mom's handwriting scribbled in the margins and note sheets, along with a list of hair dyes she hadn't tried yet and at least one note reminding her to show something to Shiro and Keith later. "Are all of these--?"

Keith nods. "When you mentioned taking up Okasan's work, I thought you might appreciate learning from the source."

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

Shiro drops it on the couch and pulls his sibling into a hug. "Thank you."

Shiro sits down with the first of the books the next morning, a small smile making its way onto his face as he spots the handwriting again.

(It's nice, having a piece of his mom with him. Her notes guide him along the theory better than a formal teacher ever could, injecting comedy and memories into a rather dreary essay on carbon capture. Her genius spills onto the page in ways he never saw as a child, every connection and eureka moment in multicolored pen.)

We've Been Waiting So Long

Chapter Notes

Fluff Fest Part 1, coming right up!

A reminder this is part 2/2, make sure you read chapter 4 too!

Shiro goes along on the next Voltron mission, per the system he and Keith have managed to work out. Adam sees them off from the *Atlas's* landing pad, giving Shiro a see-you-later kiss. He's vaguely aware as it goes on longer than is probably appropriate of Keith rolling his eyes and walking up the Black Lion's ramp. Once he can finally pull himself away from his boyfriend, he follows, standing behind the pilot's chair as Keith brings Kuro's engines up to launch power. He waves out the window as they take off, a dopey smile still on his face.

"Okay, Shiro, question time," Keith says as they exit the atmosphere.

"Yes?"

"When's the wedding?"

Shiro chokes on air for a moment. Keith looks back at him with a slightly concerned but mostly amused expression. "You good there?"

"I haven't actually *asked* him yet."

"*Yet*," he echoes, turning back to slide them through the wormhole open to Olkarion.

"Hey, you and Lance just kinda said, 'by the way, we're in a committed partnership now wanna come eat some cake' with *absolutely no warning*, you have *no right* to call me out on anything related to this."

"We did it the Marmorait way!" Keith protests, taking his hands clear off the controls. "It doesn't have all the fancy stuff Earth traditions have, and it didn't *need* advance notice, and it's not like it even has any legal stuff because, oh right, we were *leading a rebellion* until a year ago."

"Okay, fine, so then when are *you* making it legal?"

"Last May."

Shiro gapes at him. "*Keith!*"

He's distantly aware of Kuro doing the equivalent of an eye-roll and taking control as Keith turns all the way around to look at him. "What? We already did the ceremony, we were just

making it legal in Sol, so if one of us somehow ended up in the hospital or something, they would actually listen to us when we told them to transfer us to the Castle. Lance's brother volunteered to be the witness when we landed in Armstrong to say hi. It was sort of spur-of-the-moment, we weren't even sure the Federation was on its feet enough to do it, but everyone was falling all over themselves to help. If I'd known you thought it was that big of a deal, I'd have said something earlier, although I'm a little surprised it didn't make the news."

Shiro sighs and says, "I hate you," but there's no heat in it.

Keith finally turns back to the controls. "Love you too, Shiro. I'm serious about telling me when the wedding is; I want to make sure Voltron's on-planet."

The mission goes off without a hitch. Shiro is glad to collapse into bed when they get back to Earth, even if he really spent the past two weeks playing mission control. Keith and Lance are in the spare bedroom again, this time with Yorak tagging along instead of going with Krolia. (Shiro hopes that becomes a common thing because Keith seems to sleep easier with the wolf around, and he'd rather not deal with their combined issues around clones again anytime soon.)

Only when he wakes up well after Adam leaves for work does he remember what he has hidden in his pants.

Shiro scrambles into a clean pair of sweatpants and grabs the old pair of pants. He'd thought about leaving the things on the Castle or with the Black Lion, but then there'd have been no guarantee he could access the things when he wanted them, so he glances around the room looking for a hiding spot. His sock drawer is too obvious and shared with Adam anyway. Anywhere else in the bedroom is a no-go, so he walks out into the hallway and scans the house. The living room is probably too open and occupied for him to hide even the small box in, so that's out...

His eye catches on a very tall shelf. It reaches all the way to the ceiling, the highest shelf just beyond his and Adam's similar reach. All it has on it is Adam's degree, and how *that* survived all this mess Shiro has no idea, but given that it doesn't reach all the way up the shelf, there must be space behind it. If only he could reach.

Shiro glances down at his prosthetic arm.

He looks back at the shelf.

He looks at his arm again.

His arm is half a meter above his head, and he's making what he's sure must be a ridiculous face trying to concentrate on moving his arm when he can't actually *see* it when an amused voice behind him asks, "What *are* you doing?"

If his arm had been actually connected to him, it would have knocked everything off the shelf. "Allura!" he says, trying to look nonchalant about pulling his arm back to him. "I

didn't think you'd be here for another few hours!"

"It's thirteen-hundred Earth time, Shiro."

"Oh."

Behind where Allura is standing in the doorway to the living room, he can just see Pidge and Hunk. Hunk is grinning, and Pidge's eyes are sparkling in a way that concerns him. "Were you *hiding something*?" she asks, clearly knowing the answer.

"If I was, why would I tell you?"

"And *what* were you hiding?"

Hunk leans in and whispers something to Allura for a moment. She nods in seeming understanding before looking at Pidge. "Yes, Pidge, what *was* he hiding?"

"Well, I think I saw a tiny black box that looked *just* the right size for a ring or two, right, Shiro?"

"Katie Holt, if you so much as *think* a word about it--"

Pidge pumps both hands in the air. "I *knew* it! Don't worry, we won't breathe a word."

"What are we not breathing words about?" Lance says as he walks down the stairs, looking far more awake than Keith does at his side.

Keith takes one look at the scene before him and places what's happening immediately. The sparkle in his eyes matches Pidge's. "Need any help?"

Are you sure everything's ready? Shiro texts Keith.

He's reasonably certain Keith is rolling his eyes. *Yes, Shiro. Pidge and Veronica got him the day off a week ago, and Hunk, Lance, and Allura are in position. Just ask him to go on a walk, will you.*

Shiro takes a deep breath and shoves his phone in his pocket before he can give in to the urge to go running to his sibling for yet more reassurance. There's nothing more Keith can really do here. It's on him. He takes another breath and releases it slowly. He's not really sure *why* he's so nervous about this. They've been talking about it again off and on for the past few weeks, and Adam said yes before the war, so why, *why* is he so nervous about this?

He takes another deep breath and finally forces himself to enter the kitchen. The box is already hidden in his pants and has been since he woke up to Lance's waggling eyebrows (seriously, he and Veronica are so alike) and Keith's quiet encouraging smirk. "Hey, Adam," he starts, voice surprisingly steady, "wanna go for a walk?"

Adam looks up from his book and tea. "Sure."

They tangle their fingers together, swinging between them as they walk through the surprisingly cool July afternoon. Shiro finds himself relaxing as he leads them on a wandering path through Bastion, waving hi to people they know. Veronica shouts something in Spanish with waggling eyebrows visible even across the street (*so. alike.*) that Shiro doesn't get a translation of before she's gone with a wide grin. When he asks Kuro after a moment, all he gets is **Lance told Keith to tell me not to translate it.**

Traitor, he thinks back.

He thinks for a moment that the translator microbes Pidge dubbed Babelfishes (because they've all read too much sci-fi) would never betray him this way. Then he remembers the awful nausea that came from them interacting with an active Paladin bond and decides that maybe he can live with Kuro being a bastard.

They end up in the park in central Bastion. It's seen better days, but the cacti are still going strong, and the land cover around the central reservoir lake is slowly being tamed off the path. Adam's eyes gain a glint of understanding when they make it to a set of benches by the lake and sit down. "After everything, some things stay the same," he says softly, looking over at the trees. "Looks the same as last time."

He'd been worried about guiding them back here, but *last time* hits a note in Shiro's chest and releases some of the tension still in his shoulders. Adam's got that soft little smile that makes his insides all gooey and probably means he knows what's coming, and Shiro is *so in love*.

"It's not quite the same as last time, but it's just as beautiful."

"Are you about to try and make the pond into a metaphor?"

"Hush," Shiro says, but they're both smiling. "I know it's been a long nine years for both of us. We're not the same people we were, but I think that's a good thing. We've learned ourselves better, learned our places in the universe that's broader than we ever dreamed. We're broken and battered and missing pieces, but we've survived through it all."

"Like the pond?"

Shiro almost can't look at him because he's *smiling*, and it's making it hard to speak. "Like the pond. Adam, I've loved you for almost twelve years now, even when we were apart, even when the universe was about to literally implode around us. I've loved you since you sent me those stupid memes about the Operation Snowstorm sim in *code*. I've loved you since you sat up all night talking to me while I lay on the Holts' roof, trying to get Keith to sleep. I've loved you since you tried to talk me out of Kerberos like you probably should have. The thought of you kept me going while I was in captivity and leading a war. Your love helped save me from the corruption. I've loved you since I woke up next to you wearing a smile and laughing and all the parts of my life clicked back together.

"So yes, like the pond, because even after the Siege, it's still here, and it's still beautiful. But you know what's my favorite part?"

Adam raises an eyebrow. "I trust you'll show me?"

He takes Adam's hand and tugs him to his feet, guiding them around the bush he's pretty sure Keith or Allura strategically dragged the bench behind earlier. They come around the bend to the small pebble beach overlooking the pond. On the pond are the usual several dozen solar panels that look like fake lily pads, but they've been slightly rearranged.

Shiro watches as Adam blinks at the lily pads, confused for a moment at why they've been arranged into specific numbers, and grins at the slow realization in his eyes. He turns to Shiro with a goofily big grin. "Now, how the hell did you manage that?"

The rest of the Paladins and Veronica have materialized somewhere over Adam's shoulder. All six of them are grinning widely, and Lance is already taking pictures. "I had a bit of multicolored help." Adam glances over his shoulder and waves, still grinning. He turns back, and his smile softens as he reaches up and cups Shiro's cheek.

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

Adam kisses him, and Shiro closes his eyes and thinks *home*.

When they finally break apart, Adam whispers, "Yes, Takashi, I'll marry you."

Shiro digs the rings out of his jacket and doesn't stop smiling even when Hunk almost tackles the two of them into the pond.

"Operation 'Idiots in Love' was a resounding success," Keith tells him later with a smirk, "Best outcome for a mission Voltron's ever had."

(Shiro doesn't smack him for the operation name, but he comes pretty close. The solar lily pads seem to get stuck in their new positions permanently, which has him and Adam smiling giddily every time one of them passes the pond. He's not quite sure who he should be thanking for that, but given Keith's not-quite-joke, it's possibly all of them.)

(He loves his family.)

For This Moment to Come

Chapter Notes

I got *swamped* this week with work. One more week of classes ;; Unfortunately during that my Writing Brain Juice has to be taken by project reports, so no DM for me :(I also realized while trying to write a bit of this that to write *To The Morning Light* I essentially have to write another fic at the same time, so we'll see what happens there. Maybe that can be my thanksgiving week project.

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

“Someone’s looking snazzy.”

Shiro looks at his reflection in the hotel’s mirror and decides he quite agrees with his fiancée (*fiance!!*). His dress suit looks just as good as the first time he put on the final version. The Voltron symbol is proudly displayed across his back in a deep purple that pops out against the black fabric, and the front flap is lined with the same color. He even managed to find his old set of medals to tack onto the front. “Been too long since I got to wear anything but the armor to a fancy gathering. Looks better than the armor, and it’s slightly lighter too.”

Adam motions for him to spin, and he does so, laughing at the low whistle when he gets halfway around. “Do you *all* have tight pants?”

“They’re not *that* tight. We have to be able to run.”

“Shiro, how often are you running at formal banquets?”

Shiro looks a little sheepish. “Enough our dress suits have marthuzitok weave that brings them almost to the same level of blast resistance as our armor, and the pants have this.” He waves his arm over the delicate, barely visible embroidery on his pants, and it glows quintessence blue for a moment before the black bayard coalesces in his hand. “Not that I necessarily need it because, you know, arm, but Keith said he was going to enjoy the challenge of sneaking his blade in and left before I could yell at him about it.”

Adam rolls his eyes. “That sounds like him, although I doubt the guards will try and search the Red Paladin too hard.”

“Probably not. He’ll be disappointed. You joining us on the red carpet?”

“I dunno, I feel like I’d be underdressed next to you,” Adam teases.

“Aw, come on, you look great.”

“Maybe I should ask whoever made yours to get me one.”

Shiro snorts. “Adam, Lance and Allura have been drawing you and most of the rest of our families suits practically since the war ended. All you have to do is so much as think it in their direction, and you will have one, complete with marthuzitok weave and hidden blaster holsters, before you can say please.”

“Hm. I might take them up on that offer. Think they can make it Garrison standard?”

““Can they make it Garrison standard.’ he says, ‘is the sky blue on Earth,’ he says.”

Adam laughs and links his arm with Shiro’s. “Come on, flyboy, let’s go eat tiny portions of food and congratulate the Coalition on one year of peace and hope we don’t need that fancy armor weave.”

The party is, predictably, given their track record, completely absolutely and utterly crashed. At least one security guard turned terrorist is surprised when he catches Keith in close quarters, and the Red Paladin forgoes his blade for his *claws*. More party crashers meet the business end of a bayard, and one gets a prosthetic arm to the head. The remaining few are kneecapped by the frankly terrifying team-up of Adam and Veronica. Between Team Voltron and SFGG, cleanup goes swiftly, and the few severely injured Federation officials are carted to the Castle for a quick dip in a healing pod.

But there’s one lingering factor hanging over all their heads, one that doesn’t become obvious until Adam and Veronica compare notes. Shiro can’t get the image out of his head, the leader of the terrorists standing in front of him and Adam, vitriol in his gaze as he spits something about silver thorns before pressing the button in his hand that would bring the building down on all of them. The leader hadn’t made it out, although they’re pretty sure he hadn’t expected to.

Lucky for Adam, the Spirit of the Air doesn’t care about simple things like walls.

“Silver thorns,” Adam says with a gravity in his voice Shiro hasn’t heard in years, “was an Éskhayklos code name for something we never figured out. We thought they disappeared with the Siege, but...”

Veronica sighs. “It has to be them again. I can’t think of any other explanation.”

So, Shiro thinks to himself that night, ensconced in his quarters in the Castle with Adam asleep next to him, *neo-luddite terrorists with a probable new anti-alien leaning. Whoop-de-fuckin-doo.*

Shiro’s sitting at the kitchen table, environmental textbooks covered in his mom’s handwriting spread around him along with a datapad full of Allura’s alchemy notes when Adam opens the front door and pauses in the kitchen with an odd look on his face. Shiro raises an eyebrow and shuts the book in front of him. “You alright, love?”

“You remember Veronica and I went to Torrent with the evidence from the party today?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we recommended that ESAU be reactivated. The problem there is that Major Binnian died in the first stages of the Siege, so it can’t just be dusted off.”

“So what, he’s just not doing anything?”

Adam shakes his head, cutting off the tirade Shiro was preparing. “No, no, he’s reactivating it under a new Major; it might just take a bit longer than a few days to get running.”

Shiro blinks at him for a moment before he thinks he finally understands the look on Adam’s face. It’s the mirror of the one he wore when Sanda slapped his LC bars on his shoulder and told him to lead the mission. “Are you going to make me guess who?”

“Well,” Adam finally manages a small smile, “I hear he’s the Garrison’s best codebreaker, and his second in command is one of the best analysts ever to grace the system.”

Shiro grins, crossing the kitchen and grabbing Adam’s arms to pull him into a happy little spin. Adam snorts, a similar grin spreading. “Well then, *Major Wasti*, I think we should celebrate with dinner and a movie.”

Shiro volunteers to help Adam and Veronica find what’s left of ESAU’s documents in the Garrison’s files while Voltron’s off-planet. He finds himself spending more and more time at the Garrison instead of on the Castle even once they’re back, which at least means Keith’s handling Black Paladin responsibilities well. He becomes a fixture of the officer’s lounge, in there with some member of ESAU, or simply just sitting with his textbooks waiting.

It’s Sam who finally brings it up. The newly-minted Rear Admiral sits down across from him, glancing over the mess of books. “Are these Akane’s?”

“Mostly. I’ve got some stuff from Allura too.”

Sam twists himself so he can try to read one of the textbooks facing away from him. He gives up after a moment but looks over the scrawl in the margins with a small smile. “Your mother was an amazing woman. She’d be happy you’re taking this up after everything you and Earth itself have been through.”

Shiro glances up at him. “Figure it’s the least I can do, as a fellow damaged and corrupted being. At least Mom never had to deal with the after-effects of corrupted quintessence because this is *killing* me to try and understand even with Allura’s notes and my own personal experience.” He shudders at the memory of the effects on a person, lost in his own mind at the mercy of the Thuranial until Black broke through and stretched out a hand.

Sam nods in understanding, grabbing one of the books Shiro isn’t currently looking at. “You know, I think my team of engineers probably has some experience that could help you. We got pretty good at interpreting Altean alchemy into something Sol-based science could manage. You shouldn’t be doing this alone, at any rate.”

Shiro sighs. "I know. It just seems a little pointless to try and ask to get this project up and running again without something immediate to show."

"Shiro. Takashi. Have you looked around?"

Shiro blinks at him, then looks around the room. "What for?"

It's Sam's turn to sigh. "Look at the food in the fridge. Look at the materials that couch is made of. Look at the fuel we're burning to keep the air cool. Almost none of it is Earth-made, not even Sol-made. We're not self-sufficient, Shiro, and *that's* what's had the Federation on-edge. We're desperate for a way to get back to self-sufficiency, but the long and the short of it is, we can't. Earth is right back to square one after the Siege, and Mars and Luna took a beating. Shiro, if you go to the Prime Minister and say you're willing, if you go to SFC and show them all these books and notes, if you go to Torrent and ask him to reactivate Project Necromancer, it will happen."

Shiro chokes a bit on his drink. "I forgot that was the name."

Sam grins. "That's Akane for you. But, seriously, Shiro, go to Hedström and show her everything you've been doing. Congress will give you the go-ahead in minutes. I'll personally get you everyone left from Project Necromancer and a few of my chemical engineers that I know would be helpful. Torrent won't say no if Hedström tells him to do something."

"You know I've been telling you the same thing for at least a month," comes another voice from the doorway. Adam leans over the back of the couch, elbows on either side of Shiro's head. "I've seen you working at this since before Keith even found the books again, and you've gone more in-depth since the Éskhayklos showed back up. Even with Congress officially back on its feet and the Siege behind us, our biggest problem is still food, and this will help, *has* helped. I know it doesn't seem like it right now, but with what little we managed to combine of Altean tech and Project Necromancer in between Sam coming back and the start of the Siege, we were eating better than ever before. Congress was even starting to lighten the rationing. If we can get more, if we can get Earth back to anything even close to what it was before World War Three... Think of a world where we don't have to worry about atmospheric pollution, think about temperatures that won't melt anything that sits out for more than five minutes, think of a world *without rationing*."

Shiro thinks. He thinks of family dinners they don't have to supplement with food from the Castle just to compensate for their faster metabolisms, he thinks of falling asleep outside in the sun without worrying about heat stroke or something worse, he thinks of wandering around the park without the inevitable beeping of an air quality alert.

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?)

To go home.)

"So, how exactly does one set up a meeting with the Prime Minister?"

Prime Minister Emma Hedström leans back in her chair and studies him with an appraising eye. Torrent is next to him, arms crossed behind his back and posture military straight, but Shiro's pretty sure he's not exactly happy with this turn of events. "You think you can do this, Shirogane?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I know enough from my studies at the Garrison, and I've been consulting with the premier Altean alchemist. I think we know how to kickstart the terraforming and get us back to self-sufficiency."

Torrent huffs. "I wouldn't call relying on *Altean* tech self-sufficient, Shirogane."

Shiro resists the urge to sigh. He knew this was coming, but it doesn't make the argument any less exhausting. "We're not just using Altean tech. We're using their scientific advancements and combining them with our intimate knowledge of Earth, Mars, and Luna's ecosystems to create our own system. It's not any different than if we found an obelisk on Luna or a library on Mars and used the data to push our scientific knowledge ahead a few thousand years."

Hedström laughs. "You've been watching too much old sci-fi."

Torrent's eyebrow twitches. Shiro shrugs, managing his first smile in this whole ordeal. "It's still good."

"Very well, you have the knowledge. What about your Paladin duties? We can't deprive the Universe of a fifth of Voltron."

"Actually, Keith is capable of handling the Black Paladin duties. We've already been slowly shifting duties around, so he has the position on a permanent basis."

Torrent actually *snorts*. "You're trusting *him* to lead Voltron?"

Hedström wisely chooses not to comment as Shiro turns his icy calm glare on Torrent. "Admiral, he's jointly been the Black Paladin for seven years, on top of being a Blade General for three of those. The Black Lion trusts him, and he's the *only* being who gets a say in the matter."

Torrent glares back until Hedström clears her throat. "In that case, since we're not stealing a national--universal?--treasure, I just have one condition."

Shiro raises an eyebrow. "Which is?"

"The Garrison's training program is set to start back up next August, complete with shiny new MFEs, and you just so happen to be one of the best pilots ever to graduate it, not to mention one of our saviors. So, pass on what you've learned?"

Adam grins when he sees Shiro walk into the house with Colonel's bars on the shoulders of his uniform.

(He's not entirely back in the chain of command, mostly because as a Paladin, even about to be former, there's still some things he outranks Torrent on, some things Hedström would

rather have his years of experience with the Coalition on, but it's close enough. He has the authority, from the Prime Minister herself, to reactivate Project Necromancer. Akane would be proud.)

Chapter End Notes

points to the Space Odessy and Mass Effect references

Tonight

Chapter Notes

Age of Calamity is taking all my free time whoops. I think I've leveled out enough to not spend every waking moment on it but we'll see. Finals week is next week so there might not be a chapter, especially since I'm writing the companion to it at the same time (but I have an actual plot now! There's something along the lines of a heist going on).

Context: Mobius is a social media I made up that is something along the lines of Instagram with a few twitter features. each Paladin has their "@[Color]Paladin" accounts with funny names. Shiro has his as "The Winter Soldier, Apparently" at some point, and Adam's during most of this fic is "[Butterfly Meme] Is This an Adam?" because I think I'm funny.

Also just for its own context: Lemon Tea and TV Murders happens between the last chapter and this one

It's March 2229 when Shiro's phone starts ringing with one of the best calls he's ever picked up. All the Paladins and a few other members of their family are stuffed into his and Adam's house, alternating who's playing Mario Kart with who's refilling the popcorn bowl and sending jabs at the others. Lance and Veronica are in a heated race for second place, while Adam is coasting with a nice lead in first, and Allura is laughing at her own attempts to get past sixth. Hunk is trying to give Allura pointers, Coran peering over both their shoulders, and Pidge is cracking up every time Keith manages to distract Lance into third.

He barely hears his phone over the noise, so he slips into the kitchen before he opens it, expecting Torrent or Sam. What he gets is a young woman with a blue pixie cut contrasting against dark skin. "Oh! You picked up! Oh my god, that was so unprofessional of me. I'm so sorry, let me restart." She sheepishly clears her throat. "Hello, Paladin Shirogane, I'm Dilya Madiyareva, she/her pronouns, a representative of Armstrong Pride."

Shiro grins. "Armstrong Pride, huh? To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Dilya looks like she's trying not to flail. "Well, Sir--Paladin Shiro--"

"Please just call me Shiro. He/him, too."

"Right, okay, Pa--Shiro. Uhm. So, now that the Federation is back on its feet, we're trying to bring back some of the old traditions from before the Siege. Things like religious holidays, the anniversary of the end of World War Three, and a whole slew of events honoring historically marginalized groups, the most pertinent of which right now is Pride. And I know that you and Major Wasti are publicly engaged--and by the way, congratulations! The images on your Mobius account are absolutely adorable--so when we were looking for guests, we

started wondering, would you and your fiancé be willing to be part of the big parade in Armstrong?”

Shiro knew his answer before she even started the question but considers for a moment. He catches sight of Pidge waving her arms around in the living room while Lance rolls his eyes and passes her the controller. “What if I could get you one better?”

Dilya blinks at him in confusion. “What do you mean?”

He grins and steps into the doorway as he flips his phone camera around. “Hey, guys, what would you say to being part of a pride parade?”

Lance whips around so fast Shiro’s half-certain he’s going to break his neck. “Pride parade? Oh *hell* yes!”

Hunk starts bouncing in his seat, and Pidge stands up and whoops. Keith, strangely practical, shrugs and says, “Barring any emergency call outs, I think we’d be happy to.”

Dilya looks a bit like her brain is frozen. “I--wow. Okay. Wow. *Every* Paladin?”

Lance grins and drags himself off the couch to get closer to the microphone. “One big queer family. When do you want us, because we’ll be decked out in flag capes and everything. Oooh, can we bring the Lions?”

“Kuro calls lead,” Keith shouts over his shoulder, grabbing Veronica’s controller.

“Well, we all knew *that*. We can have Kuro on the ground like a float and the rest of them flying overhead like one big rainbow.”

“No, Lance, we’re not spending the entire parade in a full meld just to have a rainbow glow.”

“Who said anything about melds!”

Lance turns back to bickering with Keith and trying to make him lose his lead in the game, so Shiro flips his camera back around and retreats to the kitchen. Dilya looks slack-jawed still.

“That enough esteemed guests for you?”

Dilya laughs, slightly hysterically. “We’re going to need so much security.”

“We’re our own security. And, if we are allowed to bring the Lions, we could probably provide more than just for us.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. I can’t imagine you not being able to bring the Lions, but I’ll talk to my supervisor. Thank you very, *very* much, Shiro. I’ll be in contact with further details later.”

“You’re very welcome. Have a nice day!”

Dilya signs off with a “You too!” and Shiro slips his phone back into his pocket. It’s been too long since he got to see anything even close to a pride parade, and an opportunity to use their

newfound celebrity status for some good that doesn't have to do with the aftermath of the war will be good for all of them.

As long as Keith or Pidge don't try to knife-fight a homophobe, it'll be perfect.

They're all in the Castle, peering up at Kuro as he, Shiro, and Keith try to figure out just where, exactly, they could hang flags on him. Dilya is talking with Allura and Lance somewhere behind them, something about the statistics of the parade and how excited she is that they'll be able to be there, and oh, how many flags do they think they could fit on Kuro?

"Kashi, Keith, come here a sec," Adam calls as he enters the hangar. He's got a backpack slung over his shoulder that he sets down in front of him as the two Black Paladins walk up expectantly. Shiro presses a kiss to his cheek in greeting, and Keith doesn't manage to hide the fond smile.

"What's in the bag?"

Adam flips the clasp open; Shiro hears the rustle of cloth and tries to peer in, but Adam bats him away. "Uh-uh, not yet. Explanation first." Shiro pouts, to which Adam just rolls his eyes. "Promise it's worth it. You know how, after the *Genesis* disappeared, Keith and I both got some of your stuff? Well, after Keith got kicked out, he apparently didn't take much more than the clothes on his back, so I took everything he left for safe-keeping. It's been sitting in the basement for a while, forgotten, but when I heard we were decorating the Lions, I remembered something particular I had from that stash."

He finally reaches in and pulls out a set of stripes. Black, white, grey, and purple, still as bright as the day they got it, and familiar scrawled handwriting on one side of the white. Shiro gently, reverently, takes it from Adam, Keith holding the other side, and reads the faded note: *For my flying aces, with love, Mom.*

They're silent for long moments. Shiro's fingers tighten in the fabric when he hears Keith suck in a shaky breath. "Thanks, Adam," he manages.

Adam presses a kiss to his cheek and ruffles Keith's hair in a way Keith would never let him get away with in other circumstances. "I'll leave you two to decide where that goes."

The flag from Akane gets a place of honor on Kuro's nose. It's a nice reminder that she would be right next to them if she were still alive, hair dyed a neon rainbow and aro flag cape swinging behind her as she pelted candy at the token protesters along the route. The rest of the Black Lion is covered in as many different flags as they could find, hanging in streams off his sides and wrapped around his legs. Dilya makes sure to stop by and compliment them on the array of flags before she hurries off to check on some of the other high-profile guests.

She does, however, leave them with half a dozen bags of candy. Pidge immediately grabs one. "I am going to *enjoy* pelting bigots," she says, flicking her aroace flag cape with a trans chevron over her shoulder with a flourish.

“I don’t think that’s *quite* what Dilya left them for,” Hunk says as he picks up his own. He’s got a pan flag cape with a demi chevron, bright and colorful and almost the same color as his armor. “I do admit these gobstoppers look like they could do some damage in the right place, though.”

Lance grins wickedly, sorting his bag into two different sides. “What Dilya doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”

Veronica snorts from where she’s flipping Lance’s bi-grey-ace cape out to full length. She isn’t with their part of the parade officially, but the Garrison’s contingent didn’t even try to stop her from wandering over to them. Her own lesbian flag is perfectly ironed and flowing behind her. “She’ll find out.”

“I’m turning a blind eye to this conversation,” Shiro sighs, but there’s an amused grin on his face. “If there are news reports tomorrow about the Paladins throwing candy at people, I had nothing to do with it.”

“Traitor. I thought we were cape buddies,” Lance pouts and throws a tootsie roll at him. Shiro grins and hides behind Adam, who just rolls his eyes and brings his gay flag cape up to block it.

“Well, aren’t we *supposed* to be giving people candy? We’re technically superhuman; who’s to say we didn’t just forget how hard we can throw?”

Everyone turns to Keith, who is wearing a grin Shiro recognizes from too many Paladin prank wars and daring simulator runs. He’s got an agender cape slung over one shoulder, and his armor is displaying ace colors instead of his usual colors. The fact that they happen to be tinted more in the direction of the Black Paladin’s colors is neither here nor there. “I like the way you think, kaalvi” Lance grins back, pressing a kiss to Keith’s cheek.

Keith rolls his eyes. “I’m just used to breaking the rules, Lance.”

Allura considers them all for a moment, looking between her own lack of cape and her bag of candy. “I’m not sure I look festive enough.”

“Do you want a flag cape?” Shiro asks, “I’m sure we could go find you one or grab one off Kuro.”

“Thank you for the offer, but I’m not even sure what I would ask for.”

Lance looks at her, at Keith, then at her again. “I mean, I know Altea doesn’t really have an analogue to a lot of this, so I guess you could always make your armor a rainbow or something. We use a lot of rainbows here. Like a *lot*.”

Allura tilts her head, also looking at Keith’s new color scheme. She grins, taps in a few lines on her gauntlet, and then her armor bursts into multicolor. Her shoulder guards are bright red, her arms orange, helmet and gloves yellow, cuisses green, boots blue, and chest plate purple. As they watch, each color slowly shifts down the rainbow, turning her into a kaleidoscope-like rainbow.

“Okay,” Pidge says once they’ve all picked their jaws off the ground, “that’s fucking cool.”

“Thank you,” Allura preens. “Would you lik--”

“Yes.”

Allura laughs and pushes the program to all their armors. They stand around admiring the kaleidoscope for a bit before Keith edits his back to ace colors. Shiro, Hunk, Lance, and Pidge all end up picking a flag of their own, which causes a minor war between Shiro and Lance to see who can choose the gaudiest version of the bi flag to set themselves as. Dilya comes back to Shiro attempting to noogie Lance with his prosthetic from behind Hunk, who he’s using as a shield.

“I’m very sorry for them,” Adam tells her with a sigh.

Veronica snorts next to him. “No, you’re not.”

“Yeah, okay, I’m not.”

For once in their life, the party doesn’t get crashed.

Well, at least not crashed by people with weapons. There are a few people wearing Industry League hats and wielding signs of hateful words at a corner near the end of the parade route, which the Paladins are made aware of before they get there by the four Lions flying overhead. Shiro knows for a fact that Keith’s flag-cape is artfully hiding his blade strapped to his waist and that everyone has their bayards, but Keith doesn’t have the opportunity to draw either before Lance hits the hat right off one of the people’s heads with a well-aimed tootsie roll.

“Oops! Sorry!” he calls, throwing another and hitting the man next to the first one in the nose. “I seem to have forgotten my own strength! Very sorry, enjoy the tootsie rolls!” The pelting continues as they keep walking, every tootsie roll from Lance hitting somewhere sure to annoy, but not quite hard enough to bruise or break, while the various candies from the rest of them get close enough. The one asshole angry enough to try and break into the parade column to get at them is quickly sent back, tail between his legs, by a seething, yellow-eyed glare from Keith.

“So why tootsie rolls?” Shiro asks once they’ve passed and Lance is looking far too smug.

“I *hate* tootsie rolls. Too chewy for the amount of chocolate they promise. Plus, they’re a good weight for smacking people.”

“Fair enough.”

They take an innumerable amount of pictures at the end of the parade, everything from their backs to the camera, flag-capes on display, to one where Shiro’s standing on Keith’s shoulders while Allura and Hunk hold Lance and Pidge up in a hilarious parody of Voltron.

His favorite, though, becomes his Mobius account image. It's a simple candid against the fountain in the middle of Landing Park, just him and Adam, flag-capes flowing around them as they kiss. The photographer had winked and sent it only to him, saying they weren't going to put that one in the event pictures they'd been tasked with taking.

Shiro wakes up to a little 99+ notification on his phone over Mobius's blue and purple icon and stares at it for a long moment. Unless Pidge really fucked up a prank or something, he can't figure out what would cause him to get that many notifications overnight. With a sigh, he rolls onto his back and taps the app open.

And he gapes.

He has literally *hundreds* of messages, most of them from people he's never even heard of before. The ones he can see are heartfelt messages of appreciation and stories of how he inspired people to come out to their families.

The Voltron groupchat blinks a message at him: *Pidgeon: guys there's like a hundred trans girls in my DMs saying my cape encouraged them to come out please help how do I respond.* Shiro pulls it open and discovers that every single one of them received the same type of messages. "Holy shit," he mumbles out loud, the words unable to stay in his brain.

Adam twists his head over to look at Shiro's phone. He reads the first message visible, one from a teen that lost a leg during the Siege, gushing about how thankful he is that Shiro is out there, being proud and queer and disabled for all to see. Adam smiles softly, leaning his head against Shiro's. "Representation still matters."

Shiro thinks of his mother, unapologetically in everyone's faces about her queer status as a single mother raising two kids while running Earth's first beacon of hope. He thinks of Pidge shuffling into the house in a dress for the first time, he thinks of Hunk's relief at not having to explain his sexuality for the umpteenth time, he thinks of Lance's joy at finding out they use the same words, he thinks of Keith's slow road to that agender cape over his shoulder.

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

Shiro manages to choke out, "It really does."

The Paladins respond to each and every message over the next couple of days, expressing support and admiration and sharing their own stories.

(Shiro calls Matt, who's still off with the Rebels-turned-official-Coalition Fleet, and then they both call Coran about another aspect of representation. Soon enough, Matt and Coran have working prototypes based on Matt's legs and Shiro's arm, and Earth's prosthetic technology leaps forward thousands of years in the blink of an eye. Matt and Shiro end up the poster-boys, enjoying the ability to spread just a little more happiness in the universe.)

To the Morning Light

Chapter Notes

Okay so I freely admit the reason this took me a month was Mass Effect (I've been wanting to play it since N7 day and the announcement and after finals, I jumped immediately to doing that) but also: this chapter is aro problems in a nutshell.

I am *way* too aro to know how to write a wedding, and every site (yeah I ended up on *wedding sites* trying to write this it was *horrendous are straight people okay*) was....

Straight:TM: enough that I couldn't bear it for long. Ended up asking some lovely friends on the FYA discord how the fuck to write a wedding and just sat down and banged it out. I tried to incorporate some traditions from Adam's heritage in this series as well! That's about the only thing I knew how to do with the wedding before that conversation.

God. I'm never writing another wedding again. This is why klance have a kinda ambiguous and lowkey QPR here.

But, to wrap it back around to Mass Effect, playing through ME3 I was struck with sudden inspiration by some of the aftermath of one of the missions (more in end note) that got me back on track to write the last few bits of this. So you can thank ME3 for your Krolia content instead of me just giving up and cutting it lmao.

This has a companion in [Wedding Crashers](#)

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

Shiro isn't jittery, per se, but the energy running under his skin makes it impossible for him to sit still. Keith is valiantly trying not to laugh from his spot on one of the few chairs in the room, already wide grin growing wider as he watches Shiro pace back and forth. "You're going to wear your shoes out."

"These things don't wear out," Shiro grumbles at him.

Keith raises an eyebrow. "Are you willing to test that? Our marthuzitok stores still aren't very high."

Shiro sighs but stops pacing. Keith stands and reaches up to readjust Shiro's jacket. He tugs the shoulder back over the cap on his arm and gently, but with clear meaning, pushes down on both his shoulders. Shiro takes the hint and relaxes his shoulders. "I guess I'm just nervous."

Keith looks him in the eye, something Shiro can't quite place in his gaze. "I know why you want to do it this way, but it's also very, *very* understandable that you're nervous. So, here's the only advice I have: stop hiking your shoulders to your ears, think about who else is going to be up there with you, and for the love of god, *take a deep fucking breath.*"

Shiro huffs a laugh. “Fine, *parent*. ”

They both pause for a moment, Akane’s absence hanging between them. Keith pulls him into a hug at almost the same time Shiro wraps his arms around him, settling into each other. “Okasan would be proud. I’m proud.”

“Think that’s supposed to be my line.”

Keith snorts. “Who’s getting married today?”

“Well, you *deprived me* of the opportunity.”

“Yeah well, I still remember the teenager who couldn’t talk to a love interest to save his life. I’m proud of that person for managing it, for landing himself a damn good guy, for surviving through hell still a good person and making it to this day. Okasan isn’t here to say it, so I’ll say it for her: we’re proud of you, and we love you.”

Shiro closes his eyes against the tears threatening to fall and hugs Keith closer. “Thanks, Keith. I know I’d have never made it here without you. Not just through the war, but through life. Having you at my back, challenging my thoughts and plans with all the bluntness you can muster, has made me a better leader and a better person. You helped make me someone worthy of someone like Adam. It’s not the words I’m looking for, but they’ll have to do: thank you.”

Keith is silent for a long moment before croaking out, “Aren’t you supposed to be saving the sappy speech for Adam?”

“Oh, I have a speech for him, too. But I’m serious when I say I wouldn’t be here without my little sib, Keith.”

Keith squeezes an oof out of him and mumbles “You’re welcome,” into his shoulder before pulling back. “We should probably get going.”

“Yeah, probably. And, Keithva?”

Keith turns and looks back up at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I love you too.”

Shiro feels like he’s going to vibrate out of his skin. Keith left him by the treeline outside of the central gazebo in Bastion’s central park, heading to his spot on the small set of stairs leading up to where Sam is standing.

The park is covered in people, from Ryner to Romelle, Bandor, and Tarinya all the way to the Whispers and Lotor and the rest of Sinkline. Even Hedström and Torrent are sitting in the audience. The most important people, though, are at the front. He can see Kolivan and Krolia talking with Xandria and Tiana, towering over both of them even while sitting down. Marco and Rachel are attempting to wrangle Nadia and Sylvio, who are both excitedly chattering because they’ve never been to a wedding and somehow talked their way into being allowed

to throw flower petals down the small aisle. Luis, Colleen, Tiamo, and Adelita sit by the side of the gazebo, string instruments in hand, as they prepare to lead the accompaniment not provided by the birds. Even Matt managed to be on-planet, standing with Allura, Lance, and Coran as they discuss something in quiet whispers. Veronica, standing on the stairs across from Keith, glances at her watch and says something to Keith, whose eyes unfocus for a moment before responding.

“Hey,” comes a soft voice from behind him.

Shiro turns and finds he can't breathe in the best way. Adam's in full dress uniform, the special version all the Paladins' families have with marthuzitok weave and the glint of a Voltron symbol stitched in silver along the cuffs. Mehndi swirls are just peeking out from under his collar, leading Shiro's gaze up to the smile Adam's giving him. He returns it, reaching out and tracing his flesh fingers over the letters he knows are worked into the pattern right over Adam's heart. “Hey yourself.”

“You ready?” Adam asks, twinning his fingers through Shiro's and holding them against his chest.

“For you? Always.”

Adam's grin grows wider. “Alright. Let's get this show on the road.”

Shiro takes a deep breath and turns towards the gazebo. Adam squeezes his hand and does the same, and they take the first step towards their future as the music begins. Nadia and Sylvio run ahead, scattering purple and blue petals that crunch slightly under their feet, before stopping next to Veronica. She and Keith are both grinning at them, and Shiro would swear that Veronica has tears in her eyes (but knows if he ever pointed that out, she would eviscerate him).

Sam's got a similarly wide smile as they stop just in front of him, a step below. “When Akane told me eleven years ago you'd gotten engaged, I never expected it to take this long.” Someone laughs behind them, covered quickly by a cough. Shiro catches Adam's eye and joins him in rolling them. “I'm glad those of us that made it this far are here. I'm glad both of you are here, together once again. Some people sadly are only here in spirit. Family members that should be standing with you, painting henna on your hands and crying tears of joy. Let us take a moment to honor them, to look to their place in our hearts, and know that even if they are not with us physically, their influence will always be with us. For Akane Shirogane. For Rahima and Haris Wasti.”

Shiro watches Adam as he closes his eyes, squeezing his hand when he hears the almost imperceptible hitch in his breath. Akane's death will forever be a pain in the back of his mind, he will always hate the fact that she isn't standing next to Keith right now, but he's had ten years to come to terms with it. Adam's pain is fresher, two years not enough to hide the tears pooling in the corners of his eyes. Adam takes a deep breath and squeezes his hand back before opening his eyes again. Sam gives them both a watery smile and continues at Adam's nod.

“But I know Akane wouldn’t want us to spend today thinking about what we’re missing, and I’m sure Rahima and Haris wouldn’t either. Today is a day for celebrating what we have, for love and family and those who might as well be. Today, we’re here to recognize two of the bravest people I have ever met coming together to finally affirm to each other what they decided ten years ago. Today we’re celebrating two of Earth’s greatest heroes as they celebrate their love. We’re celebrating a love story thirteen years in the making, even with the minor interruption we’ve come to call the Quintessence War. Even through arguments and long involuntary separation, they still found their way back to each other and still complete each other in a way no one else can.

“I’ve known Shiro since he was in diapers, making the same big motions with his arms Akane did when explaining something, following her through martial arts forms as best he could with legs the size of a water bottle. I haven’t known Adam for *quite* as long, but I do remember the snarky eighteen-year-old who could spin circles around me with calculus. I met him a few weeks after Shiro started gushing to anyone who would listen about the cute boy in his cryptography class who started off their friendship by sending memes about the simulators in code and actually laughed at his physics jokes. Trust me when I say these two nerds are a match made in heaven.

“I’ve been ordered to keep this short,” someone (Matt) laughs at that, and Shiro finds himself grinning (because he’s all too aware that Sam *will* ramble if they let him), “so, without further ado, I invite the grooms to read their vows.”

Shiro turns, knowing they agreed Adam would go first. Adam’s got tears in his eyes again, but a smile on his face as he slips a piece of paper out of a pocket. “Takashi, I had a horrible time trying to figure out where to start this. Where do I even start, given everything that we’ve gone through? So I eventually started at the beginning, because all good stories begin with the protagonist making a stupid decision.

“I don’t think I ever told you that sending you that first meme about how freaking hard the Operation Snowstorm sim is was actually a misclick. I’d totally forgotten you were at the top of my contacts list because of the crypto project, but once I’d sent the first one and you actually laughed at it, I figured what the hell, I’ll send another. That turned into two, turned into ten, turned into us sitting on your mother’s couch discussing the similarities between early-internet meme-influenced lingo and image steganography, and then a date. Your face when Keith walked in and yelled, “finally” is still one of my favorite mental images of you.

“We’ve been through a lot since then. Kerberos almost tore us apart, and then you disappeared to fight a war. I spent at least four years thinking you were dead; it was the worst feeling I’ve ever experienced. When Sam arrived at the Garrison and Veronica and I finally were able to watch all the videos you recorded up there, it was like the sun was suddenly able to shine again.

“We were thrown directly into the war you were desperately trying to keep away from us, but I knew that as long as you were alive, things would be okay. The thought that even though you hadn’t seen me in years, you were still fighting for me, me *specifically*, kept me going. Giving you something to come back to kept me fighting while our resources slowly dwindled under Haggar’s attrition. And in those final weeks, I knew that I had to get us all back to you.

Seeing you step into that cell, weapon in hand and Lion at your back, was like the final piece of the Rings clicking into place. Everything made sense again because I had you at my side, living and breathing and grinning as you led us out.

“I want things to keep making sense. I want you at my side, through better and worse, through peace and, god forbid, war. To cycle this back around: I-N-Q-J-V-B-W-H, ‘Kashi.”

Shiro laughs, squeezing Adam’s hands. “I love you too, you nerd. I know that the thought of coming back to you kept me going, even through the parts I don’t remember. You kept me going through the arena, through battle after battle, through failure after failure, through direct contact with the Thuraníal. I want to keep coming back to you. I want to keep standing at your side, through the silly innuendos, through Mario Kart tournaments, through extended discussions of odd cryptography problems. I want to rebuild our home with you at my side through it all. I want to help you keep our planet safe from threats within it and without. I want to build our family together on the soil we helped clean. I want to stand in Landing Park with you at every pride parade; I want to watch with you from Bastion’s launchpad as the Lions swoop down. I want vacations on Ambar with you, I want to sit through Coalition banquets with you, I want to just live with you at my side.

“I want to build a life with you, through whatever the universe decides to throw at us next. Whether it be a plague, further famine, the very fabric of spacetime tearing apart, or, the Lions forbid, another war, I will never leave your side again.”

The tears in Adam’s eyes are mirrored by the ones in Shiro’s own. Sam has been crying since Adam started, which no one is surprised by. He clears his throat and wipes tears off his glasses so he can read his next part. “And now: Adam Wasti, do you take Takashi Shirogane to be your partner in life and to share a path of life with; equal in love, embraced as a mirror for your true self, promising to honor and cherish him, through good times and bad, until death do you part?”

Adam’s smile looks like it’s about to break his face. “I do.”

“And you, Takashi Shirogane, do you take Adam Wasti to be your partner in life and to share a path of life with; equal in love, embraced as a mirror for your true self, promising to honor and cherish him, through good times and bad, until death do you part?”

Shiro nods, his own smile almost painful. “I do.”

“The rings?”

Keith elbows him lightly, handing Shiro the elegant cobalt ring with a smile and a wink. Veronica gives Adam the other, eyebrows waggling and making Adam snort. They slip the rings onto each other and don’t let go of their hands, content to stand there for a moment and enjoy the feeling. Adam’s ring clinks against Shiro’s prosthetic as he twines their fingers together.

“And now, by the power vested in me by the Sol Federation, I pronounce you husband and husband! You may now kiss.”

Shiro isn't capable of stopping smiling, and neither is Adam, which turns the kiss into something more akin to pressing their faces against each other, but neither would trade it for the world. There's one simple fact that makes it perfect.

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?

To go home.)

It's home.

"Ladies, gentlemen, and variations thereof, I present to you, for the very first time: Shiro and Adam Wasti-Shirogane!"

The reception goes into full swing shortly after they walk back down the aisle. They take an innumerable number of pictures, so it must be at least half an hour before Shiro and Adam make an appearance, but the Lemaotas have everything well in hand. The food is buffet style because of the vast array of species attending, and the sight of it has his mouth watering. He and Adam thank everyone, and then Veronica stands up and gives a toast. "To Shiro and Adam," she ends her speech, "Two of the biggest nerds that ever helped defend our universe. May you have a lifetime of happiness and love in front of you."

The cheers are deafening. The rest of the Paladins, already clustered around them, wrap them up in a group hug that threatens to send Shiro's arm flying somewhere he can't see, but he really can't complain. All his favorite people in the universe are with him, celebrating life and love in the best way they can. There are laughter and food and dancing and general cheer that's infectious and, most of all, Adam right next to him. Shiro doesn't remember much of the first dance because he spent most of it reveling in the fact that he gets to call Adam his *husband* now.

"Have you two even managed to tear your eyes away from each other all day?" Keith asks, materializing from the crowd a few minutes after they exit the dance floor in search of food.

Shiro, very pointedly, looks Keith in the eyes.

Keith rolls his eyes. "Very funny."

Shiro looks at him again, then *looks* at him. He knows Keith doesn't really enjoy big parties like this, but there's something about the set of his shoulders that seems too tight. His grin is a little forced, eyes glancing around like he's tracking flow patterns and exit routes. Shiro sympathizes with that, he's been doing it himself, but this seems just a bit more than usual like Keith expects to be attacked at any moment. "You okay? You know you don't actually have to stay the entire party."

"I'm *fine*. I'm not over here to say goodbye for the day. *I* am a person on a mission."

Adam raises an eyebrow. "I feel like I should be concerned."

Keith's grin is wicked. "Not at all, my dear brother-in-law."

"That isn't encouraging."

"Well," Keith starts, leaning his weight back slightly. "I was talking to Sasa about Marmorait rituals again, and she reminded me of a few old Pakistani and Japanese traditions I'd heard about while we were getting this together."

"Oh that bodes well."

"Hey! I'm trying to give you some of those traditions you wanted to work in. So. Pick up a foot."

Adam narrows his eyes but picks up a foot. Shiro follows suit, holding it out like a cat stance. Keith prowls around them in a circle twice, muttering something neither can make out under his breath, before stopping in front of them and squatting down. "Am I allowed to know *which* tradition you're doing?"

Keith looks up, looking like a cat about to get the cream. "Well," he drawls, "I remembered this one tradition involving shoes--"

Adam yanks his foot back, but not before Keith's managed to somehow get his boot off. He overbalances, and Shiro flails for a moment before managing to right them both. Keith cackles, gives them a salute *with Adam's shoe*, and then *teleports away*, leaving them gaping at the place he was.

"Takashi, I don't care if he's one-fifth of god, I'm going to *kill* your sibling."

The two newlyweds quickly give up on finding Keith and Adam's shoe as he could have ended up pretty much anywhere in the *system*, much less in the party, and Kuro refuses to help. Adam grumbles, but Shiro can tell he's badly suppressing a smile as he takes his other shoe off and leaves it with some of their other stuff.

"You know, usually the groom would have gotten his shoe back by now."

Shiro raises an amused eyebrow. "Don't you usually have to bribe the kid?"

Adam harrumphs, but he's still half-smiling. "Yes, but that's a little impossible to do when you can't *find* him."

Shiro shakes his head in fond exasperation, although he's not sure if it's directed at Adam or Keith. Keith *has* been gone a while, almost like he's explicitly avoiding them. It's a little odd, but by no means the most concerning thing Keith has ever done, so Shiro's quite content to let him draw out the prank for the day. "If you really want your shoe back, I can ask Kuro again."

"No, it's fine. The grass is actually kinda nice. We should come out here again and enjoy it when it's not getting trampled by several hundred people."

“We can make it a date, my lovely husband.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

“Mm, you can hold me to anything.”

Adam laughs and leans in to kiss him, still unable to wipe the grin off his face. “Sap.”

“*Your* sap.”

“*My* sap,” Adam agrees, then glances over Shiro’s shoulder. “Oh hey, maybe Coran knows where Keith went.”

Shiro turns and spots the Altean standing by a few trees, looking at his arm computer for something he can’t quite see. Before they can take another step, though, another voice calls their attention. “Shiro! Adam!”

“Matt!”

Matt grins and folds them both in a hug. “I haven’t gotten to see you for longer than a few seconds since I landed. First off: congrats again, you two have always been stupidly in love. Second of all, I have a pressing question.”

“Which is?”

“Did you choose the date on purpose?”

Adam and Shiro look at each other. “What date? You mean today?”

Matt does a double-take, blinking at them with his mouth wide open. “Oh my god. Oh my *god*, neither of you remember?” he starts laughing, bent over and guffawing so loud it draws the attention of the people around them.

“Remember what?”

“Sh--Shiro. *Shiro*. How do *I* remember, and you don’t?”

Shiro crosses his arms and glares down at his oldest friend. “Seriously, Matt?”

“*You don’t remember!*” he’s practically shouting with glee, “*You don’t remember!* Shiro, I spent *three hours* listening to you pine. *Three! Not-so-straight! Hours!* And you *don’t remember!* Oh my god, this is even *better* than when I thought you planned this on purpose.”

Shiro continues glaring down at Matt until Adam says, “Wait... wait, are you talking about that cadet pride party?”

“Yes! Adam, I spent *three hours* on June 30th, 2216, listening to Shiro wax poetic about the cute guy halfway across the room and how “his eyes were the perfect shade of brown to get lost in” or some other such bullshit. *Three hours*, Adam, until I finally literally kicked him in the ass and threatened to call Katie and Keith to help me, and he walked over and said hi. So

when I got the invitation, and it said June 30th, I thought you'd *planned* for your wedding to be on the anniversary of the first time you met. Oh my *god*. I'm telling Keith and Pidge."

"You are *not*!"

"Perfect shade of brown to get lost in,' huh?"

Shiro turns beet red, and Adam starts cackling. "Shut up."

"Aw, I love you too, Takashi."

He punctuates it with a kiss to his cheek, and Shiro huffs. "Yeah okay."

Matt's quieted only slightly, still snickering into his arm. "Seriously, I'm telling them. Where did you last see Keith?"

"Teleporting away with my shoe."

Matt finally looks down at Adam's socked feet. "Huh. How did I miss that? Well, I'll let you know when I find him. See you around! Congrats again, even if you both have a horrible head for dates!"

Shiro watches him saunter into the crowd, shaking his head. "Holts."

"Where the hell did Coran *go*?" Adam grumbles, "There's only so many ways out of this set of trees."

"Maybe he just left while we were talking to Matt? Although I don't think he could have gotten far..."

"We could ask around, I suppose."

Shiro glances around where they'd last seen the Altean advisor, judging the most likely direction for him to have wandered off in. Only one person is really close by, an Altean with blue markings and long brown hair that looks vaguely familiar, but Shiro can't place him. He must be part of the Coalition's side of the security forces. The Altean is holding something electronic in his hands, peering at it with single-minded focus and muttering in Altean that Kuro doesn't translate and Shiro can't be bothered to ask for. "Excuse me," he starts.

The Altean jumps. "Ah! S-Paladin Shiro! What can I do for you?"

"Have you seen Coran around?"

The other shakes his head. "I'm afraid not. Perhaps check over by the food tables? I've heard a rumor that he is very partial to the agranape topped with agriord slices."

Shiro frowns in disappointment. "Well, thanks anyway. Enjoy yourself!"

Shiro turns and heads back to Adam before the other can respond, but he thinks he hears a sighed, “I’m certainly trying.”

The fact that the Altean looked *so* familiar doesn’t leave his head.

“Coran! There you are!”

Coran jumps up from where he was peering under a table (why was he peering under a table?) and spins to face them. “Shiro! Adam! How wonderful to see you. The ceremony was quite different from Altean ceremonies.”

Adam and Shiro share a glance. “Do I want to know what Altean marriage ceremonies entail?”

“Well, the short version most often revolves around a sabhtzum tournament, rigged so that the guests of honor end up facing each other at the end. It’s not *explicitly* rigged, but the tradition dates back to when arranged marriages were more common, and if you desired a specific partner, you had to get to the end with them. Nowadays, usually close friends will volunteer to the parents to be the ones to throw a match. But you still have to put up a fight! The guests of honor are the only ones you’re throwing; everyone else will still have live steel and motivation.”

Adam’s grinning and glancing around. “Wait, your marriage ceremonies involve *sword fights*? Man, we gotta tell Keith.”

“Ah, not quite a sword. A zum is more like what you would call a bō staff? Most have blunted caps, but some styles have blades on the ends. Ah, I still remember Alfor and Melenor’s ceremony; they went for a full Zúmfév style tournament. Even without the rigging, they would have won. Both masters of the weapon, truly living up to the ‘dancing’ aspect of Zúmfév. The judge had to call a draw on their battle, or we would have never left! I suppose that’s to be expected from the Queen and the foremost Knight of Zhayl.”

“That sounds like it’d be amazing to watch.”

“Yes. Perhaps now that things have settled down, we’ll start seeing full tournaments again. Still! Earth ceremonies have their own charms. I quite like the focus on family.”

“Yeah,” Adam says, leaning into Shiro a little more with a small smile. “A lot of that was our own interjection in place of other traditions since our parents aren’t around anymore. A reminder that they’re still with us, even if they aren’t physically.”

Shiro nods in agreement and adds: “But we’ve picked up other parental figures over the years. They’ll never replace them, but they’re pretty damn good in their own ways. We made a point to have all of them here. Sam and Colleen, Krolia, even Kolivan occasionally, and you.”

Coran blinks at them. “Me?” he says, dumbfounded, pointing to himself with two fingers.

Shiro laughs. “Coran, you’re somewhere between the crazy old uncle and a father figure, always there with advice when we need it and a comforting arm and encouraging prank wars. So yeah, I know at least I’d count you in that set.”

Coran blinks at them for another moment before wrapping both of them up in a hug. He’s sniffing in a vain attempt to not let tears out. “I’ll happily be your crazy uncle.”

It’s well after they drift away from Coran to talk to some friends from the Garrison that Adam snaps his fingers and says, “Damnit, we didn’t ask Coran where my shoe was.”

Shiro just shrugs. “It’ll turn up when it turns up.”

Adam leans against him as the party starts winding down, and Shiro wraps an arm around him, pressing their heads together with a soft smile. “Hey.”

Adam snorts. “You literally haven’t left my side all day. I don’t think you need to say ‘hey.’”

“Yeah, but I want to. You look tired.”

“As good as today has been, yeah, I’m tired.”

“If you want, I think it’s an acceptable time to say our goodbyes and head back home.”

“Hm. One more slice of cake.”

Shiro grins. “Alright. More cake.”

Two more slices of cake later, their wandering towards the rest of the Paladins is interrupted by Krolia sliding into view. “There you are.”

Adam frowns. “What’s up?”

“Nothing explosive, I promise.” She’s wearing the tiniest of smirks that has Shiro and Adam looking at each other with twin frowns for a moment before leaning around her to look for Keith or other wayward Paladins. Krolia puts her hands on her hips and leans to block their view. “I’m serious!”

Shiro raises an eyebrow. “I’m not entirely sure I believe you.”

Krolia huffs. “Believe me or don’t, what I’ve been looking for you two to do is not related in any way. I’ve meant to do it for a while, but Keith convinced me to wait for today, and I think I see why now. Adam, give me your hands.”

Adam hesitates only a moment before lifting his hands and putting them in her waiting ones. Krolia closes her eyes and bows her head, letting a moment of silence hang over them before she starts speaking. Shiro’s eyes widen as he recognizes the first words and the reverent tone Krolia reserves only for the few traditions she has left. This is something he’s only heard once before, that time about himself.

“Marmorareluv, ruazthaamuslrelkun melethir paatil dodusgal künvansaaled, dubak dodusgal moraed, thunduaníl dodusgal zaanzizyümed tidaed. Ruazthaamuslrelkun melethir aazdubakl martok gal, raasakelakun künuduke gal, thunezbazílakun künmar gal zethed. Marmorareluv, volrel tidaed tal melit kinaet kemaa al kaet kinaet.”

Guide this one, Marmora, to where the warrior never tires, the lovers never leave, the hungry never starve. Guide him to where all stardust returns, where all winds still, where all stars shine. Love this one, Marmora, and he will be a child to you as he is to me.

Adam stares up at her with wide eyes as she quiets, eyes still closed and hands still gripping his. Shiro steps forward slightly and rests a hand on his shoulder, a grounding presence as her words sink in. “Thank you,” Adam finally manages to whisper.

Krolia opens her eyes, something soft and sad haunting them before she pulls Adam into a hug. “I owe you more than I can express. The least I can do is invite you into my House formally when in truth, you have been a part of it since before we even met. Know that just as Marmora watches over their House, so do I watch over mine. If you need anything, kitokva, all you have to do is ask.” Krolia pulls back after Adam nods and takes a deep breath. “Alright. Thank y--wait, why are you not wearing any shoes?”

Adam starts laughing, both he and Shiro a little amazed it took the Blade’s legendary general that long to notice. “Long story short, there’s an old Pakistani tradition involving stealing the groom’s shoe, Kuro is an enabler, and Keith is a little shit.”

Krolia grumbles something that sounds suspiciously like it would translate as “Dear Stars, Keith,” and gestures behind her. “I don’t know where he is, but most everyone else is by the pond.”

Shiro nods. “We were headed that way, spotted Hunk earlier--”

“Hey! Keith! Give me back my *shoe!*”

There’s a long beat of silence where Adam stares faux-angry at a surprised Keith, who is standing in the middle of the rest of the Paladins mid-sentence. The rest of them are *clearly* trying not to laugh, which at this point includes Krolia and is quickly going to involve Shiro because it’s *also* very obvious that he has no idea where said shoe is right now, and *seriously*, *Keith?* Pidge nudges him and whispers something. Keith disappears for two blinks and reappears with a shoe from behind his back; Shiro only spots the tell-tale signs of teleportation because he’s done so often himself. “What’ll you give me if I give it back?” he grins, holding it up.

“I’ll settle for just kicking your ass into next week in Mario Kart tomorrow, instead of next month.”

“You talk like you could even attempt to do that.”

“Is that a challenge I hear, Shirogane?”

Keith grins and throws the shoe to him. “You’re fucking on, *Wasti-Shirogane.*”

Shiro crosses his arms and shakes his head, but he's wearing a smile that he doesn't bother to try and stop. He loves his family.

(They're *ridiculous*, but he loves them.)

The party isn't even crashed.

(He finds out a week later when he walks in on Keith and Lance joking about *bombs*, of all things, that that isn't entirely true. He's a little pissed that no one bothered to *tell him and Adam*, but he supposes he understands the reasoning that Lance finally manages to flounder out. Keith sitting behind Lance and laughing into his hands at Lance's increasingly horrible attempts to say "no, not *your* wedding" certainly doesn't hurt.)

Chapter End Notes

If you've played Mass Effect, Krolia's prayer probably sounds kinda familiar. It's a modified for Galran culture version of Kolyat and Thane's prayer for Shepard after Priority: Citadel II. When I played through it again the cadence just sort of... hit me? I've been thinking of things like Galran (specifically Marmorait) adoption rituals since I first started this fic and it was this moment of *that's what I'm missing*

Adam and Shiro's little cipher is based off the Bee Movie ;)

Two more chapters, and I think they'll be way easier than this one, but I'm about get dragged into Winter Festivities :/

Before You Wave Me Goodbye

Chapter Notes

Step 1: get stuck here, go write 25k words of Mass Effect fanfic, get stuck there, come back here

Step 2: ????

Step 3: profit (write an entire chapter in less than 24 hours)

This one is a little more... slice of life-y? I wanted to show how the Garrison is getting on, but the parenthesis about going home is way *way* earlier than it usually is in this chapter. This one ended up reflecting back on the other Paladins' character development since season 1, in addition to the scene that sort of... it doesn't exactly close Shiro's arc, but it's the big climax to a point Kuro mentioned way back in Consequences and is a pretty big culmination for Keith too (I think his side is showing up somewhere else eventually)

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

Shiro hasn't been on a Voltron mission for seven months.

The fact hits him first thing in the morning, sitting with a glass of water, an apple, and a sleepy Adam at the kitchen table. He's got the second-ever full report from Project Necromancer's new incarnation to give that day, and the only thing he can think is *huh*. It wasn't really a conscious choice, at least on his part, but at some point, he just... stopped heading up to the Castle with the rest of them. It's not, actually, the longest he's gone without being on a mission, but that time he was in Haggard's tender hospitality, so it *feels* like the longest he's gone.

Is *Keith* aware of this fact?

They sort of lost track of their haphazard plan for this transition barely a month into it, working off intuition and who had the most prior experience working with whatever species they were dealing with at the moment. Shiro had elected to stay Earth-side while they tried to figure out how to open the rifts on purpose without being on death's doorstep because the one time they'd managed it, before whatever the hell they'd done during that last battle, it had been with Allura and Keith in the cockpit. He figured they'd have a better chance with Allura's quintessence manipulation abilities combined with Keith's ability to sense the one type of quintessence none of the rest of them could. He'd been right, so as Voltron went on more and more missions through the rifts to try and figure out why their fabric of spacetime seemed to be getting more and more threadbare, he spent more and more time on Earth.

So. Seven months. He hasn't even been on a diplomatic Voltron mission, much less the rift-missions or the thankfully few battles against the last remaining holdouts. Keith *has* to be

aware of that fact.

Right?

Shiro considers the possibility that between the wedding, fending off terrorists from said wedding, various Voltron missions, and whatever he's doing to help Kolivan shift the Blade away from superspies to humanitarian support, Keith might not actually not. When Keith finally wanders his way down the stairs, Yorak at his heels and beelining for the bagel drawer, Shiro asks him. "Do you know when the last time I was on a Voltron mission was?"

Keith pauses and blinks at him, bagel sticking out of his mouth in a way that Shiro has to try very hard not to laugh at. He eventually takes it out and says, "Dawhara, part five? Shit, how long ago was that?"

"Seven months ago."

Keith blinks at him again, then looks down at his bagel. "I totally thought it was like a month and a half ago. Are you, uh. Are you saying you want to come today?"

"No."

"So, what are you saying?"

"I think it's time you officially took the mantle."

Keith pauses, staring down at his bagel. Yorak grumbles at the lack of pets and walks over to nuzzle Adam's legs. Adam reaches down to pet him while glancing between Keith and Shiro like he's not quite sure if he should leave for this conversation or not. Shiro reaches out and grabs his hand.

"Are you sure?" Keith eventually says.

"Yes. I've got responsibilities here, and you've already been handling it yourself for a while." Keith hesitates again, staring down at the bagel like it holds the secrets of the universe. Shiro sighs internally and leans forward over the table, trying to get Keith to at least look at his face. "Keith. You're a natural leader, an amazing fighter, and a surprising diplomat, but above all, you *care* about what happens in the universe. You are *exactly* what the Black Lion needs."

"I'm not sixteen anymore, Shiro," Keith says, finally looking up at him, "although I won't deny it's nice to hear from other people." He takes a deep breath and straightens, putting his bagel down and extending a hand. "Alright. If you're ready, then I'm ready."

Shiro takes it. Both Paladins close their eyes, reaching for the presence in the back of their minds. **Kuro.**

Takashi, comes the Black Lion's reply. **If you are ready, then I am as well.**

(So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?)

To go home.)

I'm ready.

He gets the sense of a nod, a solemn agreement from a being as old as time. There's something else behind it, a sort of relief like the Black Lion is glad to see him cutting the last of the puppet strings he's been tangled in since the *Genesis* launched, choosing himself over playing the part of a good soldier once again. **Very well.**

Goodbye, Kuro.

Goodbye, cub.

The feeling in the back of his mind fades as the Spirit of the Air withdraws until it is barely a tingle. It's not entirely gone, it never will be, but it's the least amount of attention he's had since they first formed the Paladin bond. Shiro opens his eyes as Keith does, catching the flash of glowing purple as it fades from the other's eyes. "Well, Black Paladin?"

Keith gives him a smile and a nod. "We're good. Doesn't feel much different on my end, but then again, I've had a weird road."

"That you have."

"Uh, how are we telling everyone else?"

Shiro leans back in his chair with a grin. "Who's 'we' here? *You're* the Black Paladin."

Keith groans. "*Shiro.*"

"Alright, fine," he laughs, "I'll help."

Adam poses the question Shiro knows has been hovering in his mind since breakfast over dinner. The two of them managed to wriggle out of a Federation dinner with the excuse that they still had things to do before the Garrison's first semester since the Siege started up, so they're leisurely eating dumplings in their own kitchen, simply enjoying being together. "So, do you still have any connection to the Black Lion?"

Shiro waves his hand in a so-so motion while he finishes his dumpling. "My position is a lot like Krolia's now. Technically, if I put the effort in, I can talk to Kuro and pilot and form Voltron in a pinch, but I'm not the primary anchor for the Paladin bond. I can't do stuff that requires the Navarea active like teleport, but I don't lose the universal translator or supersoldier-like characteristics." He pauses for a moment, remembers Krolia's more unique capabilities, and continues: "Well, at least I don't think I do. Krolia didn't lose any of that, but she's got other influences from the Thuranial. I suppose I should ask Allura."

"So, what were you doing with Keith earlier?"

He studies a dumpling, trying to figure out how to put things he just *knows* due to the bond into words. "The bond doesn't go away once it's created; that's why Zarkon could still

contact the Black Lion even when he was a zombie. But it can--it's not like Keith's abilities would be less powerful if Kuro still had attention on me; that's just not how the Spirits work. It just makes it a little more streamlined to do stuff like the Navarea. It's like... closing a door to shut out distractions. For both me and them."

Adam nods. He still looks a bit confused, but Shiro's not sure he could ever fully explain the Paladin bond to someone who hasn't been part of it. "Do you think you'll ever have reason to pilot again?"

"I'm not going to tempt fate by responding to that."

Adam snorts. "Fair enough."

"Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of Admiral Torrent and Prime Minister Hedström, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to the Galaxy Garrison..."

"I almost miss Sanda's speeches," Adam sighs under his breath.

"We're not even a paragraph in," Shiro mutters back. As teaching staff and officers, they're both obligated to be here at the welcome ceremony for the next generation of pilots, engineers, and other professions the Galaxy Garrison trains. Technically they're not even supposed to be sitting next to each other, considering Adam's class is in the computer science department and Shiro's is piloting, but apparently, one perk of former Paladin status is no one questions when you shift your seat around. Iverson's speech isn't necessarily *bad*, but sitting side by side certainly makes it more entertaining. Still, the kids seem enraptured.

Or maybe that's just because he's talking about Voltron.

"...You will be following in the footsteps of many of the greats. The greats of the past: Sami Chakana Pinchi, Carden Tindall, Carrie Rischer, Tui'uli Savali, Hamid Nazeri. But also the greats of the present, those who we would not be standing here today were it not for their efforts and sacrifices to bring peace to the universe and free our planet, for all of them are former Galaxy Garrison pilots: our Paladins of Voltron. Takashi Wasti-Shirogane. Keith Shirogane, Kikrolia Marmorait. Katie Holt. Lance Suarez-Espinosa. Hunk Lemaota..."

"What, not counting Allura?"

"Well, she isn't a Garrison pilot..."

"Technically, *you* are the only Paladin that learned to fly here. Hunk and Pidge weren't even pilots."

Shiro shrugs one shoulder. "As long as it isn't me writing the speech, I'll deal with the posturing."

"...But this city isn't called Bastion for nothing. Here, we held out against Imperial forces. Here, we sheltered and taught while war ravaged the land around us. Here we built the next generation of spacecraft, the first *Titan*-class dreadnought, the *Goddess*-class starfighters.

And here we will *continue*, just as we always have. Here, *you* will build our new starfighters, *you* will fly with our new allies in the Voltron Coalition, *you* will help rebuild our ravaged planet. *You* are the bastion of the future...”

Shiro glances up at the horizon, a familiar sound just on the edge of hearing and the feeling of a smirk hovering in the back of his head. Adam raises an eyebrow, and Shiro whispers, “Wait for it.”

“...All of you aren’t just a new generation of warriors and peacekeepers. You are the first bastion of a new generation of leaders who will change our system, even our very universe, for the better. So it is with great pride that I welcome you, on behalf of all our officers and SFC, to the Galaxy Garrison.”

Just as Iverson finishes, the sound grows into a familiar roar, and the five Voltron Lions race overhead. The new cadets gasp, even some of the officers, as the Lions circle the grounds before settling on the landing strip covering the *Atlas’s* bay. Down on the podium, Iverson catches Shiro’s eye with an exasperated frown. Shiro grins and shrugs. Sure, Voltron wasn’t supposed to be back until tomorrow, but it’s not like having a glimpse of the legend that often lands in Bastion *hurts*.

“You timed that on purpose,” Shiro accuses once he’s managed to peel himself away from the ceremony.

Keith grins and pulls his hood down to shake out his hair. “We got back earlier than predicted. Someone,” he gestures at Lance, joining the other Paladins in walking over, “suggested we indulge our flair for the dramatic for once.”

“‘For once?’ Keith, our entire *lives* are run by the rule of drama.”

“Maybe, but this is *fun* drama.”

“By the way, how did your last invocation of the rule of drama go?”

Keith glances down at the black accents on his armor. He’s still got some red in the Voltron and Blade symbols on the front of his naazonsik, but everything else is the Black Paladin’s colors. “Surprisingly well.”

Pidge arrives in time to hear the last of the exchange and grins. “Lance tripped over a chair.”

“I did *not*!”

Hunk snickers. “You totally did.”

Lance huffs, crossing arms now bearing red on the gauntlets. “I just misjudged its location.”

Allura raises an eyebrow as she pulls her now-blue helmet off. “Is that what you call not watching where you’re going so badly you miss the chair that *hasn’t moved in ten thousand decaphoeb*s and go flailing to the floor?”

“Well, *excuse me* if Keith in new colors is a *little distracting!*”

Keith turns as red as the Red Lion, while Hunk, Pidge, and Allura start guffawing, and Lance hides his face in Keith’s hair, muttering something too quiet for Shiro to make out. Shiro shakes his head with a fond smile and turns back to Keith. “I think you owe Adam ten gak.”

Shiro’s first class isn’t for two days after that. It’s nerve-wracking, but an encouraging smile and kiss from Adam get him into the room, and with that hurdle behind him, everything seems so much easier. The cadets are the equivalent of second years, their scores on theory and aptitude tests placing them with him. All of them have seen more war, have far more experience than he did at that age, but he still sees part of his feelings in them. The awkwardness around peers, the hesitancy, the desperate search for a place in life, for some even a home.

(There’s no small amount of hero worship going on, but there’s only so much he can do to curb that, and at least it means they’re listening to him.)

So Shiro thinks about what he would have wanted to hear at that age, thinks about what helped him during his time at the Garrison, thinks about what they all needed to make Voltron work. It’s in the middle of the second theory class (he let them spend the first asking him questions, because otherwise they’d never stop) that he remembers what he told the Paladins so long ago when they were first trying to form Voltron on command. “There are three Ts that, if you remember them, will guide you through more than just piloting. Anyone want to take a guess at one?”

“Tactics?”

“Related to one of the words I was thinking about. Knowing basic tactics will help you greatly as a squadron leader.”

“Training.”

“Yes! Number two,” he gives the student a thumbs up and writes the word on the board. “Training encompasses more than just what you’re doing right now. Training means learning the theory, learning the sims, and learning in an actual craft. *Experience* is the only thing that will truly teach you to fly. So use the theory, spend all the time you can in the sims, so that when you get your hands on a real stick, you’re ready. Voltron wouldn’t be what it is today without years of experience behind it. How about another one?”

“Theory.”

He grins and writes it down in the spot before training. “I gave y’all that one didn’t I. Theory means propulsion theory, orbital mechanics, all the physics behind space flight. If you don’t know that, you’re not going to be able to compensate if you get a technical failure or are cut off from mission control. That’s why a good chunk of our pilots have physics degrees. Anyone got the third?”

“Tinker?”

“Not what I was thinking, but useful. You need to know your ship as a pilot, especially if you’re in a starfighter. We don’t have R2-D2 to fix our ships on the fly.” He pauses, images of Pidge confronted with that idea and the subsequent mania in his head. “Well, not yet.” That gets a laugh out of most of them, which he’ll count as a win. “To go along with that: technobabble. You need to know that technobabble if you’re in a pinch. Remind me to tell you about the time I had to fix the Black Lion’s shield generator while under fire, and my only guidance was Coran’s instructions. You’re not like us; you’ll have engineers with you if you’re in anything bigger than a starfighter, but knowing what’s going on will allow you to compensate. We’ve got one more T.”

Shiro barely prevents himself from reacting when the door in the back of the classroom opens to silently admit a very familiar figure. One of the students in the back’s eyes widen, but the figure holds a finger to his lips with a secret smile. Someone throws out trust, which he seriously considers adding as a fourth, but it’s not quite what he’s looking for. He gets two more words out of them before they all fall silent. He knows some of them must be thinking of his last word but don’t want to draw attention to themselves.

Well, at least *one* person is doing that. Lucky for him, it’s the one person in the room he has free reign to put on the spot. “No one else?” He raises a pointed eyebrow at the silent guest, a clear indication for the other to talk.

Said silent guest sends Shiro a death glare but answers. “Teamwork.”

The students whip around with a collective gasp at the voice. Shiro grins and gestures. “Ladies, gentlemen, and variations thereof: Keith Shirogane, Kikrolia Marmorait, the Black Paladin of Voltron. And he’s correct: teamwork is the last T.”

Keith finally deigns to join him at the bottom of the lecture hall. “And possibly the most important one. None of us would be here without working together. Whether you’re in a starfighter squadron, a cargo ship, a dreadnought, or Voltron itself, accomplishing your mission is impossible without teamwork. You need to communicate effectively with squadmates, trust your engineers, work with your teammates no matter what situation comes your way. No one can fly by themselves, not even a Paladin. We constantly communicate with both the Lions and each other, even if it’s not obvious to outside forces. Without that teamwork, without that understanding of each other, we could never form Voltron.”

Shiro nods. “Think about how you apply that to even simple formations. If you didn’t have that teamwork, you’d end up running into each other. A freighter could never get off the ground if the pilot and engineer didn’t both know what they needed to do to help the other. Something as big as a dreadnought is impossible to fly solo. So, what are the three Ts?”

“Theory, Training, and Teamwork,” they chorus back.

“Good! Your homework is to memorize that and see where you can apply it. Dismissed for the day. Remember, class on Tuesday is a lab class, so I’ll see you at the sims!”

A few students who don’t immediately have to run to their next class come down to ask Keith some very excited questions, who graciously answers them as best he can. When the hall is finally empty except for them, Keith visibly deflates with a sigh. “Did you *have* to do that?”

“Older sibling prerogative.”

“Yeah yeah. I’m invoking my younger sibling prerogative then.”

“Your prerogative to be annoying?”

Keith smiles, sickly-sweet. “Oh, it’s not me that’s going to be annoying. Hedström wants you as an advisor at the Coalition meeting this weekend. I just volunteered to be the messenger.”

Shiro groans. “She couldn’t have waited for me to teach a full week of classes?”

“Nope. Want a ride up?”

“Fine. Let me tell Adam.”

“He’s invited too if he wants.”

“Sounds like exactly what I envisioned in a date night.”

“...That was sarcasm, right?”

Shiro gives him a Look. “Yes. Very, *very* heavy sarcasm. Come on, let’s get this over with.”

It’s a month later before Shiro gets another chance to pull a Paladin into his curriculum. They’d left on a peacekeeping mission in the Zitras Cluster shortly after that Coalition meeting, which from Keith’s increasingly dark eye-bags and one call that had been interrupted by a scramble alarm hadn’t gone all according to plan. They’re finally back, although he’s sure he’ll be hearing about whatever kept them on Olkarion for three days and then in Armstrong for two from both Voltron and Hedström once he’s done with this class.

For now, however, he has three Paladins not-so-secretly in the observation box above the sims and a set of cadets that need a little inspiration. He’s been switching teams around a little to get them into groups that they’re actually willing to do the required teamwork with, but sometimes it doesn’t work. This particular team shuffles out of the simulator with dejected faces, and the *simulation failed* screen blinking on the displays. Shiro holds back a sigh. “Alright, team. Can anyone point out the main mistake you made?” Silence greets him from three dejected faces. He turns to the rest of the cadets. “Anyone else?”

“The pilot crashed.”

“The crash was a symptom, not a cause.”

One of the cadets that were running the sim finally speaks up. “Teamwork, Sir.”

“Correct. For these sims to work, you have to be able to work *together*, and that, frankly, was dismal.”

“Sir,” another one of them says, standing tense in a way that reminds him of Keith’s younger years. “Teamwork doesn’t help when one of your ‘teammates’ refuses to--

“*Teamwork* isn’t an instant, painless thing, Cadet Velidimalla. Teamwork is just that, *work*. It requires an effort to understand your teammates, compromise, communication, and *time*.”

Velidimalla continues glaring at him, obviously not believing him, so Shiro taps his comm and plays his trump card. “Lance, Hunk, Pidge, you want to come down here and show some cadets how it’s done?”

“You sure you want *us* to do it?” Lance responds.

“Well,” Shiro says, adding faux-sweetness that he knows will get the Paladin down, “if you don’t want to, I could find Keith and Adam.”

He barely has the words out before Lance says, “Give us thirty seconds.”

Ten minutes later, the Red, Green, and Yellow Paladins stand next to him in the sim room, *mission complete* blinking behind them. “So, what did these three do?”

“Communicated what they needed effectively. Even though Paladin Suarez-Espinosa called the lateral stabilizer a... something that wasn’t that.”

“It was the Altean word,” Lance explains with the long-suffering look of a polyglot. “But yes, communication is key.”

“Compromised on internal debates without compromising mission parameters.”

“Didn’t crash.”

Velidimalla frowns. “You can’t expect us to be able to do all that instantly, Sir.”

“I’m not. Any Paladin want to share what happened the *first* time you ran that sim?”

Hunk frowns at him. “How do you know that story? You weren’t even in Sol.”

Shiro just raises an eyebrow.

Hunk continues squinting at him; Pidge sighs and nudges him and Lance. “So, long story short, we *fucked up*. Didn’t even make it to the landing zone because Lance here wasn’t looking at the screen because he and I were too busy arguing. This was what, nine years ago? It was the first time we’d met each other, and we just kept getting on each other’s nerves, arguing and bossing each other about.”

“While Hunk was puking in the gearbox.” Lance jerks a thumb at the other Paladin.

Several cadets make faces at that image while Hunk nods. “Important fact for you all: vomit is not an approved lubricant.”

“So yeah. Iverson yelled at us, told us to shape up, that we had to at least be able to work together as a team. Honestly, in hindsight, we deserved it. It was *bad*.”

“The lesson here is that even we’re not perfect. It took us years and a whole buttload of work to get to the point where we barely have to talk to each other. It looks effortless, but it’s

not. We still have arguments that we have to figure out or effectiveness crashes. So don't give up on yourselves, okay? You're not going to be perfect immediately. Take a deep breath and think about what the other person needs to know and where they're coming from. It will help a lot."

Shiro glances up at the time. "Anyone that needs to go is dismissed. Velidimalla, Hansen, Apatu, you wanna go again?"

The three cadets nod, and end up just barely passing the sim this time, a vast improvement. They get high fives from each Paladin and run off in much higher spirits. "Okay," Lance says when they're gone, "It makes sense that you still have freaky Keith-locating senses, siblings and Black Lion and all, but how the *hell* did you know we were up there?"

Shiro shrugs. "Saw you go in earlier. You're not as sneaky as you think. That was brave of you, by the way; I know you haven't run the new simulators at all."

"Well, they certainly don't respond like a Lion, but they're not bad. If the current-gen MFEs handle like that, they're in for a treat."

"Speaking of Keith-locating senses," Hunk grins, "*really*, Lance?"

"What?"

"Keith is in *Kiher*, and you *still* let Shiro goad you into doing that by threatening to get Keith to do it."

"Wait, he's still on Olkarion?"

Pidge nods. "Unfortunately. It has to do with classified intel; he and Allura will probably be back tomorrow morning."

"You must've heard me getting back with Yorak last night. That wolf is loud enough for all three of us."

"And, further unfortunately," Hunk sighs, "there's no guarantee we're staying in Sol for any length of time given what we found."

Shiro frowns at them. "Let me know if you need anything, okay?"

Pidge punches his arm. "You, Colonel, get to relax and pass on what you've learned. Leave the adventuring to us youngins."

"Oh, so I'm no longer eight?"

"*Youngins, Shiro.*"

They send him long-suffering glares, but each Paladin repeatedly lets himself get dragged into his classes.

(Shiro (and occasionally Adam) ends up with a reputation for Paladin cameos in his classes and in his lab. He's just happy to keep bringing his family into the little world he's created at the Garrison, loaning their unique perspectives and abilities to his projects and cadets whenever they have the time. The fact that it lets him spend a little more time with them when their responsibilities just keep piling up is just a nice bonus.)

Chapter End Notes

Captain Rex voice: experience outranks everything

The only reason Akane isn't in that list of people Iverson says is she's technically a CIT graduate, not a Garrison graduate. (Although, if the Sol Federation didn't have free education, she'd have gone there on Garrison money)

Oh, Carry Me Home

Chapter Notes

I'm done just in time for the next semester! I've got three project-based classes this semester on top of TA stuff so uh, we'll see if I manage to write anything big this semester. But even when I'm not actively writing ideas are still banging around, so you might see stuff like playlist updates, dictionaries showing up (actually gave myself a bit of a mini-project to get the language page on my tumblr presentable and with all five uploaded) and occasional one-shots.

This took a little longer than I thought it would, so thank you everyone who's read along in any capacity. One last chapter of fluff for our favorite space dad :)

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

“So if you were to be the equivalent of an uncle-slash-aunt,” Shiro says once Keith appears on-screen, “what would you want to be called?”

Keith blinks at him. “I’m good, Shiro. How are you?”

Shiro gives his sibling a dry look over his shoulder as he turns back to cutting vegetables. “Hi, Keith, how are you?”

“Wondering why the hell that’s what you started a call off with.”

He shrugs. “We’ve been thinking. Nothing solid yet, but it’s floating around.”

“Nadia and Sylvio already call me tíe, but I’m guessing you’re not asking for the Spanish word.”

“I mean if that’s what you want?”

Keith makes a so-so motion with his hand, opens his mouth to say something, but pauses halfway to it before turning around and shouting over his shoulder. “Sasa, aid lethga alrel akerelim galraitim... uncle?”

Krolia shouts something back Shiro can’t quite make out, but Keith starts muttering it under his breath. He brightens slightly, nodding. “I like it. Alaemora.”

Krolia leans into view from behind the couch. “Something to tell us, Takashi?”

“It’s just a thought. For now.”

Krolia gives him a knowing smile. “Well, for if that thought ever comes to fruition, alaemora can be used for pretty much any older family member. Including grandparents.”

Keith groans. “Why.”

“Oh, come now, Keithva, imagine someone calling *Kolivan* that.”

“I’d pay to see that,” Shiro snickers.

Keith shoots him a glare through the screen. “Yeah yeah. Remember that when you’re the one arguing through the foster system again.”

The thought does get further along. Shiro finds himself doing his best to grade the written part of the pilot test quickly during the last few days of finals week to make time to join Adam (who did the smart thing and graded his final already) in visiting a group home a few hours north of Bastion. The woman who opens the door greets them with a warm smile.

“Major, Colonel, it’s so nice to finally meet you in person.”

“Please, just Adam and Shiro are fine.”

“Of course.” She gestures them into the house, barely avoiding tripping over a young boy who runs by. “Kasper!” she calls, “Please watch where you’re going!”

“Sorry, Cherry!”

Cherry sighs. “I’m sorry about all the ruckus. I used to run a foster home before everything, and it was hectic, but so many kids lost their parents or were separated from them in the Siege... It’s so much worse now. Even though Hedström’s made it a priority to help, we just don’t have enough trained parents. Oh, but enough bellyaching from me, you’re here for Zoé! She’s just through here.”

The three of them slip through the controlled chaos of the hallway and living room to a smaller room full of books and various scattered toys. In the middle is a star-map light, spreading constellations over the walls in dim pinpricks. Cherry gestures to the girl sitting by the light. “There she is. I do have some paperwork I need you to do to record the visit, but if one or both of you want to meet her first, we can save it for later.”

“How long would the paperwork take?”

Cherry shrugs. “Five minutes?”

“I’ll take it, then. Shiro, you go ahead.”

Shiro looks from Zoé to Adam. “You sure?”

Adam gently pushes his shoulder. “Go tell her what all those constellations are, you nerd. I’ll be right there.”

Shiro hesitates a moment more but acquiesces, walking slowly over to sit next to the little girl. She can't be older than four and looks similar to Adam, brown skin with brown hair cut just above her shoulders. She's clearly fascinated by the constellations, looking between a children's book lying next to her and the pinpricks on the walls. Shiro settles down next to her and looks up, searching for a set of five stars that have popped up in his life for years. "Do you know what those are?" he asks, pointing at them.

Zoé looks over at him, meeting his eyes almost on accident, and Shiro freezes for a long moment when he sees her eyes.

Oh.

"The Pleiades?" Zoé says, snapping him out of it.

"Yeah! You know a lot about stars, don't you."

Zoé nods enthusiastically. "Cherry doesn't know stars, but she got me a lot of books about them. Mommy said that Daddy used to travel the stars, but he's gone now."

"Sometimes, I travel the stars with my siblings."

Her eyes widen almost comically. "You *do*? Can I come?"

Shiro laughs. "Maybe; why don't you tell me your name first?"

"I'm Zoé!" She sticks a hand out with a wide smile. Shiro takes it and shakes it gently.

"I'm Shiro. Do you see that man over there with Cherry? That's Adam, my husband."

Zoé turns to look at them and waves. "Hi, Adam!"

Adam looks up from the datapad he's holding and waves with a big smile. "Hi!"

"Are you here because you want to be my new parents?"

"We're thinking about it. We wanted to meet you first."

Zoé nods, looking far older than four. "Can you tell me what the stars are like?"

"Adam," Shiro says once they're in the car.

Adam doesn't look over at him. "I know."

"She's--god, she must've been born during the Siege. Her poor mother."

Adam sighs and leans back in his chair. "Yeah."

"Is that why you were so insistent on visiting her?"

“I will admit that it caused me to take a second look. ‘Kashi, if she’s--we’re the *only* people with any sort of knowledge how to handle that. Her caseworker probably has no idea, and she deserves a home that knows how to help.”

“So that’s a yes?”

Adam finally looks over at him. “That’s a yes from me.”

Shiro leans over to kiss him. “I’ll finish my end of the paperwork in the morning.”

It takes another month and a few more visits before Zoé gets to come home with them. She stares wide-eyed at Ioke Flight as they speed overhead, the four veteran MFE pilots bringing their ships to a smooth landing on the Garrison grounds. “Is that what you fly?”

“Yep, I do,” Shiro hears Adam say as he starts inputting a new person in the home system, “They’re the fastest ships we have on Earth.”

“When’s Voltron coming back?”

“‘Kashi, when *are* they supposed to get back?’”

“I *think* Allura said next week? But there’s no guarantees with that. I’ll text Keith later. For now, Zoéva, welcome home.”

Shiro opens the door with a flourish and a grin, gesturing husband and daughter into the house. Zoé bounds in and immediately starts taking in everything, bouncing from the tv to the couch to the kitchen to the bathrooms to the bedrooms. As Adam predicted, she instantly falls in love with the constellation light by her bed, and the three of them sit in her room for a few minutes watching it. They point her to their bedroom next, which she peeks in before looking at the room down the hallway. “Whose room is that?”

“That’s Alaemora Keith and Uncle Lance’s room. You can take a peek inside if you want. They’re not always on Earth, but when--”

He’s cut off by wide, hopeful eyes. “They have a *dog*?”

Oh boy.

Shiro flails to find his comm when it starts beeping in the middle of dinner a few days later. If it were any other tone, he wouldn’t be bothering, but that’s the one he has set for the Paladins. “Hey, Shiro!” Lance says as the screen pops up. He looks tired, but not unreasonably so, sitting cross-legged on his bed in pajamas.

“Hey, Lance, what’s up?”

“Good news: we’re getting back tomorrow. Bad news: probably not until midnight. We’ve got something we need to talk to Tarinya and Lotor about, and we’ve gotta wait for Keith to get out of a healing pod.”

Shiro sighs. “Do I want to know what he did this time?”

“Brave but stupid, as usual. He’ll be fine in a few vargas, he just took a hit on the other side of a rift, and we didn’t have the time to get Azul’s pod running.”

“Alright. Tell him he’s an idiot for me.”

“Oh trust me, Ak--uh, someone in that alternate chewed him out already. And so did Pidge, and Allura, and Hunk, and Krolia, and Coran, and me. But I’ll tell him.” Lance yawns so wide he barely covers it with a hand. “Man, okay, I’m gonna sign off.”

“One thing really quick: can you make sure to bring Yorak?”

Lance raises an amused eyebrow. “What, is my new niece excited about a dog?”

“Oh, you have no idea. Every time Adam or I mention one of you, she asks if you’re bringing Yorak.”

He snorts. “I’ll tell Krolia we’re stealing the big oaf. Goodnight, Shiro.”

Lance flips the channel off, and Shiro slips back into the dining room. “Who was that?” Zoé asks.

“That was Uncle Lance. He and Alaemora Keith are getting back to Earth after bedtime tomorrow.”

“Are they bringing their dog?”

“Yes, they’re bringing the dog.”

Zoé whoops and shovels peas in her mouth like finishing dinner quicker will make the next day go faster.

Two days later, Shiro and Zoé come back from a doctor’s appointment to find Lance sitting at the kitchen table, swapping incredibly obscure historical anecdotes and memes with Adam. “Oh! Well, hello there!” Lance grins, slipping off the stool to sit on the floor next to where Zoé’s stopped. Shiro sidles around to kiss his husband, but not before hearing Adam mutter, “General Kenobi!” under his breath.

“Clean bill of health.”

“Good. Anything about the other thing?”

“Actually, I was thinking we should ask Coran about that.”

Adam considers for a moment. “Good point. Not right away, meeting everyone at once would be hectic, but soon.”

Shiro nods in agreement, and the two of them turn back to watch Lance introduce himself. The Red Paladin is nodding something in confirmation at something. “And Alaemora Keith is my partner.”

“Speaking of Keith,” Shiro interjects, “is he still asleep?”

“Nah, he took Yorak for a walk. Should be back soon.”

“He’s awake this early?”

Lance frowns up at him. “I’m uh. Not actually sure he slept.”

Any concerned response is cut off by the front door opening and a space wolf bounding into the living room. Keith comes in behind him, fiddling with his braid. “Hey, L--oh hey, you’re back.”

Zoé gasps and runs up to him, staring wide-eyed at the wolf. “He’s *big!*”

Keith looks like he’s trying to figure out how big the average Earth-born dog is. “Yes,” he gives up as he crouches down. “You must be Zoé. I’m your Alaemora Keith.”

Zoé turns slightly to look at him; Shiro sees when the realization hits his sibling. He freezes, eyes widening in surprise and recognition as he stares at her eyes. “Can I pet him?”

“Sure,” Keith manages after a moment, “Just be careful of the bright blue spots; sometimes he gets a lot of static electricity.”

Zoé reaches out and gently strokes a hand over Yorak’s fur. She can barely reach the top of his mane, the wolf taller than her. Yorak yips happily and nudges closer to her. Zoé giggles and reaches out with both hands to pet as much as she can. Keith stands and beelines for the kitchen, grabbing Shiro and Adam’s shoulders to pull them with him while Lance looks at him in confusion. “Shiro, Adam,” he hisses.

“We know.”

“Her *eyes*. ”

“We *know*. ”

“*They’re like mine*. ”

“We *know*, Keith. I’d be lying if I said that wasn’t part of the reason she’s here.”

“We aren’t actually certain on her ancestry,” Adam adds, “But either way, we’re the ones best equipped to help if she is a half-human künantok.”

Keith looks back at Zoé, giving Yorak the best belly rub of his life. “I’m certain.”

Zoé meets the rest of Team Voltron over the next month and a half, gaining a similar reaction as Keith's from Krolia. Even Kolivan manages to come with Krolia; he starts off looking bewildered, but by the time they have to leave, Zoé has him wrapped around her little finger. Everyone is introduced in time for Shiro's birthday ("You're still eight, we're just giving you another party"), which means that everyone from the Paladins to Kolivan to Nadia stuffs themselves into the house to shout surprise.

It's the best birthday he's had in years. There are copious amounts of cake and ice cream, a big family dinner, Mario Kart, and, most of all, a constant underlying feeling of happy contentment, like this is all he's ever wanted in life. Even when he has to retreat to the kitchen to get away from the noise of the Mario Kart tournament for a few minutes, it's still there.

Krolia walks up next to him once he's given his brain some time to cool down. She leans against the counter, gazing out over the collection of people stuffed into the living room. "Gak for your thoughts?"

Shiro glances over at her before looking back. He can tell she's speaking English instead of letting the translator do the work for her by the slight accent creeping into her drawling vowels. "Sometimes, I wonder what I did to deserve these people."

She smiles, something soft and a little sad. "Me too. I've got the best children a parent could ask for, all of them heroes in their own right, a partner who understands even a little of what I've done in the name of my home, and even," her smile turns brighter as she looks at Zoé, curled between Kolivan and Adam with Yorak's head in her lap, "a grandkid. But I still find myself wondering what I did to be here."

There's a beat of silence between them, interrupted only by Hunk cheering as he manages to pass Lance as Lance's character falls off Rainbow Road. "Sometimes I look back at my role in the start of all this and have to remind myself that I did my best, that none of us would be alive, much less standing here, if I didn't blast my way off Kulanmora that day. I *saved* the universe by alerting Alfor, by taking Vosa, by forcing my sibling to see the results of her actions, even if I didn't know it at the time. But I still... I still betrayed my home. So why am I here? I know that the answer is that I didn't. If Zarkon had still been in his right mind, if he'd still been *alive*, he would have begged me to do exactly what I did. The Marmorait followed me. The rest of the Galra, once they realized what was wrong, hid, and followed Karain. And then they died."

Krolia looks him in the eyes, lavender and yellow boring into his soul. "I do not take home for granted, kitok, not like I used to. I've lived the lesson the stories of Zaiduke Duvathungal and the Five Siblings were supposed to impart. We are *nothing* without our home. And you, Shiro? You've done a pretty damn good job of finding yours."

Shiro looks at her out of the corner of his eye. "I was sort of thinking of a different word."

"Which word?"

He looks out at the people sitting in his living room, throwing popcorn, elbowing each other, having three conversations at once in the way that only people who have seen the inside of

each other's heads can. "Family."

Krolia smiles and nudges him. "Even if you go so far back in the evolution of the Galran language we are still Kiaklül and Mükir, there are no separate words for home and family. Just mora, the idea that your home *is* your family. Not just the one as many in Sol would define it, or we did in older times, the one governed by DNA and the water of the womb, but the one we *choose*. My home is more than Daibazaal, more than Kunanmora, more than Earth. It is here, with my children, my grandchild, my partner. *You* are my House." She pauses a second, looking at one of the pictures on the wall on the other side of the counter. It shows a much younger Shiro, hair black and uniform pressed to perfection, one arm slung around a teenage Keith's shoulders and the other wrapped around Akane. All three's faces are about to split in half from the width of their smiles, simple joy radiating off them into the room. "House Shirogane, if you will."

Shiro nudges her back. "As long as you're not going to start calling me 'Takashi Wasti-Shirogane, Kiakane Shiroganeit' because that just sounds wrong at this point."

Krolia gives him a long look. "Don't tempt me."

He laughs. They settle into silence for a long moment, watching their family, their *home*, enjoying themselves in the living room. "Thank you, Sasa."

Krolia tilts her head, a distinctly Human body language. "For what?"

"For being part of my mora."

Krolia stares at him for a long, long moment before she wraps him in a hug. "Thank *you*, Takashiva, for being part of mine. Come on, let's join the rest of it."

"So, Takashi, if you've crossed seeing the universe off your bucket list, what do you want to do now?"

"To go home."

(He's home.)

Chapter End Notes

*Carry me home on the wings of the night
Carry me home, may our spirits unite
Carry me home on paper wings
Carry me home, like you did in my dreams
Oh, carry me home tonight
Carry me home, we've been waiting so long
Carry me home, for this moment to come*

*Oh, carry me home tonight
Carry me home to the morning light
Carry me home before you wave me goodbye
Oh, carry me home...*

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