

## **Dormiveglia, that precious space**

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# **Dormiveglia, that precious space**

by [CorvusRex](#)

## Summary

Dormiveglia - the space between sleeping and waking

Lance hated being an Omega. He'd always hated his secondary sex status. It followed him everywhere, up to and including the Garrison. Now he was in space, and it had followed him there as well. It seemed that Alteans, Galra, and most other races also had the Alpha-Omega traits and that it wasn't limited to humans. And so, Lance's Omega status had followed him into space, and there was nothing he could do about it. It also didn't help that he'd fallen hard for a certain Alpha.

He didn't know that that certain Alpha was falling for him too.

Or that he may never live to see those feelings realized.

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Set during s.2, shortly after ep.8 The Blade of Marmora.

INDEFINITE HIATUS - not abandoned, just sleeping for now

# I Want to Tell You

## Chapter Notes

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

Lance hated being an Omega. He'd always hated his secondary sex status. It followed him everywhere, up to and including the Garrison. Now he was in space, and it had followed him there as well. It seemed that Alteans, Galra, and most other races also had the Alpha-Omega traits and that it wasn't limited to humans. And so, Lance's Omega status had followed him into space, and there was nothing he could do about it. It also didn't help that he'd fallen hard for a certain Alpha. He may have tried to hide his attraction behind the guise of a rivalry, but he had the distinct impression that Keith had seen right through it. Not that said Alpha had said or done anything about it. But either way, it was distracting him from the task at hand.

"I know it's unlikely that we'll be without our bayards in battle, but we should be prepared either way," Keith said, resetting his stance.

He'd begun training the others - Shiro and Coran excepted - in the basics of martial arts. Keith had insisted after a conversation with Shiro and having the Black Paladin's backing. Hunk had complained, feeling that he wasn't coordinated enough, Allura had wholeheartedly volunteered, despite Coran's attempts at talking her down, and Pidge was oddly excited at the idea. Lance, however, had approached the training session with dread and anxiety wrapping itself in a choke hold around his gut.

"Pidge, I'm going to walk you through this next one and then I want the rest of you to start practicing."

Pidge scrambled up from her spot on the floor of the training deck and over to where Keith was waiting. His movements were easy to track, not only because he kept them slow, but because he'd also insisted that they all wear the tight body glove that went along with their Paladin armor, Allura wearing something similar. Pidge, so far, had been a quick study and picked up the new motion easily. Once Keith was satisfied that she'd gotten it, he turned his attention to his three remaining students.

Hunk wasn't nearly as bad as he thought he would be. He wasn't as flexible as the others, but he could still learn the movements without too much trouble. Allura was as graceful as Keith thought she would be, learning quickly. He only hoped that she would be able to follow through when he had them begin using those techniques on each other in practice. Keith worried with Pidge. He was afraid her enthusiasm could get the better of her and that she may not think to hold back while sparring with her teammates. But he also knew that she was smarter than that and wouldn't hurt anyone intentionally.

The one Keith was most concerned with was Lance. He could feel the unease rolling off in waves. Although there was no discernible reason for it, he knew Lance was thoroughly uncomfortable with the entire idea of this training session. It wasn't that he wasn't learning, he was, and well. Keith entertained the idea that it had something to do with the so-called rivalry that Lance had invented when they were still at the Garrison, but dismissed it. That

wasn't the feeling he was getting, and he didn't know what it was, but he wanted to figure it out.

Keith moved between the four of them, adjusting their position or assisting where necessary. They were all progressing well, better than he had expected for a first session. Hunk still needed to learn to trust his center of gravity, but was doing well despite it. Pidge and Allura's form was good, but he still worried about Allura holding back and the extent of Pidge's reach. When he came around to Lance, he noticed, not for the first time, that Lance stiffened when he approached. As long as Keith was focused elsewhere or away from him, Lance was more relaxed. But as soon as Keith was within arm's reach, Lance became stiff and awkward. Keith didn't want to interrupt the training session, so he let it go.

"You're doing really well," Keith said quietly, "You're trusting your balance. Maybe you could give Hunk a hand with that?"

"Really? I, um, sure," Lance said, caught off guard by Keith's encouragement. It was unexpected, not at all the backhanded compliment or snide remark he thought was coming.

"Mm, yeah. You've got this down, and he needs a little help. Pidge needs to adjust for her height, and this way they can both get help at the same time. Off topic, but are you ok? We can talk after we're done if you don't want to now."

"Why are you so worried about me all of a sudden?" he asked, suspicious.

"Because you lock up whenever I get close. If it's something I'm doing, I want to know. I don't hate you, y'know. I don't even dislike you. And even if it's not that, the last thing I want is for our secondary sex status to get in the way of *anything*."

Lance sighed. "It – it's not that. I don't know. Maybe we can talk later. But it's more me than anything. I'm gonna go give Hunk a hand."

Keith watched him walk away, more confused than ever as to what could be the source of Lance's problem.

By the end of the session, Pidge was well on her way to being able to adjust for her height when up against a much taller race like the Galra, Hunk had a better handle on his center of gravity and trusting his body, Allura was still holding back, but it had occurred to Keith that it may have had something to do with the fact that Alteans were abnormally strong, and running through what Keith had taught so many times with Hunk made Lance's movements more fluid. Keith sent everyone off, hanging back. Lance stayed as well, earning them both a questioning look from Shiro as he followed the others out of the training deck.

Keith dropped onto the bench beside Lance. "You really meant that. About me and helping Hunk." Lance's tone didn't imply a question.

"I did. Really the only thing you need to work on is relaxing. Pidge's picking it up quick, but she's small. I think Allura's overcompensating for her natural strength. Hunk has potential, he just needs to trust that he can do it. I was a little afraid that you'd feel awkward,

but you didn't. But I couldn't not notice how you'd lock up every time I got close. It has to be something I'm doing. There's no way it isn't."

Lance leaned back on his hands, staring at the ceiling. "It's not. You're not doing anything. And it's not just you. I've been kinda jumpy lately. The last time I went into heat was before we left Earth. I'm past due for it, so it's probably just that. You're not actively doing anything. And there's nothing you can do about being an Alpha. So, don't worry about it being something you're doing wrong. You're fine. It's all me."

"Wait, your heat's late? Why didn't you say something?" Keith asked sharply, spinning around to face Lance.

*Of course that's the part he hears*, Lance thought. He waved Keith off. "It's happened before. When I get really stressed. And suddenly being out here in space in the middle of a war is pretty friggin stressful. It's only a couple days late. I'll be fine."

"How many is a couple?"

"Like, three?"

"Lance, that's not ok. We're going to the med bay and you're getting checked over." Keith clamped a hand around Lance's wrist and stood, dragging him along.

"Keith! Come on! It's only three days, it's not like I'm dying!" he yelled as he stumbled along.

They stopped by the door, where there was a contact point for the castle's communication system. "Coran," Keith said, punching the intercom, "Can you meet us in the med bay, please?"

Keith didn't let go until they reached the elevator. He hit the button for the med bay's level and stood back with his arms folded.

"The fuck was that? Seriously, I'm fine. This is nothing I haven't dealt with before. What are—" Lance cut himself off as Keith's scent filled the small space. Smoke, cinnamon, and sandalwood crashed into him, nearly overwhelming his senses. "Whoa, Keith, you ok, dude?"

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes briefly while his scent abated, still present, but muted. "I'm fine. Hearing you say that your heat's late scared me. I know it can get dangerous if it goes on too long without an existing reason."

"Yeah, there are a few medical conditions that can do that, but I don't have any of them. And I'm sure as fuck not pregnant. I think I'd know if I'd hooked up with anyone. It's just how my body reacts to stress. I'll get checked out because it will make you feel better, but I've been dealing with this since middle school. I'm ok, really."

The elevator door opened to Coran waiting for them. "Is everything ok? What's going on?" he asked.

Lance answered before Keith had the chance to get himself worked up again. “My heat’s three days late.”

“Oh, well, we better get that looked at, then. Can’t be too careful,” Coran said, leading them both to the med bay.

Lance sat himself on one of the beds, Keith hopping up on the next one over to wait. Coran looked around for a few seconds before righting himself quickly.

“Ah! I remember where it is! Hang tight a tick, I’ll be right back,” he said, disappearing around the corner.

The second Coran was out of view, Lance started picking at the sheets and Keith could smell the tang of stress coming off the Omega in front of him. He already knew how Lance felt about his secondary sex, and got the impression that he’d been dismissive about his heat being late because he didn’t want to draw attention to it or make anyone feel obligated to take care of him in any way. Which was exactly what Keith had done. Well, fuck.

Coran returned a minute later with one of the bioscanners. After fiddling with it, he turned it to Lance, running the scanner over the waiting paladin.

“Well, there doesn’t appear to be anything wrong. Maybe just rest up a bit.”

“I’ve been through this before. It’s just how I react to stress. Thanks, Coran,” Lance said, sliding off the bed.

“Anytime! Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be on the bridge.” Coran walked out of the med bay, leaving Lance and Keith alone.

“I get that you’re worried, but I’m ok. Really,” Lance said softly.

Keith sighed, pushing himself off the bed. He knew he’d fucked up and wanted to at least apologize for it. “Yeah. I’m sorry I overreacted like that. I don’t even know why I did.”

“Hey, no harm done. We’re good.”

Keith followed Lance out and back to the elevator, tilting his head back and groaning to the ceiling. “I don’t know what the fuck’s wrong with me lately.”

“We’re all on edge,” Lance said, hitting the button for the level containing their rooms, but more importantly, the kitchen and dining room.

“Yeah, maybe. I don’t know.”

They had expected to be able to shower and change before meeting up again for the walk to the kitchen, but Shiro was waiting for them when they got off the elevator. He pushed off the wall and intercepted the two before they could escape.

“What’s going on?” he asked with genuine concern.

“It’s nothing,” Keith said. He tried to walk past, but Shiro stopped him.

“It’s not nothing. What is it?”

“Really, Shiro, it’s fine,” Lance answered, “My heat’s late. That’s all. Coran checked me over, and there’s nothing wrong. This is nothing I haven’t done before. We figured out years ago that this is just how I react to stress. It’ll fix itself.”

“You’ll let me know if it doesn’t?” He knew Lance was downplaying things, but Shiro wasn’t going to push it.

“Yeah, of course. Give it another day or two and it’ll hit me like a freight train. Like always. Don’t worry about it. But I really need a shower. Catch ya later, Space Dad.” He patted Shiro’s shoulder on his way by and disappeared down the next corridor toward his room.

“What aren’t you telling me?” Shiro asked as soon as he knew Lance was out of earshot.

“Nothing! He was kinda twitchy during training, so I wanted to know if it was something I did, and he told me about his heat being late. That’s all.”

“Keith, I could smell you before the elevator door opened. What’s going on?”

“Can we at least not do this here?” Keith slipped out from beneath the hand on his shoulder and headed in the direction of his room, Shiro close behind.

“Now will you tell me what the problem is?” Shiro asked when they were safely in Keith’s room.

“The problem is that I don’t know what the problem is.”

“And what the fuck does that mean?”

Keith sighed heavily, dropping onto his bed. He flopped backward, arms splayed. “I don’t even know. When Lance told me that his heat was late, I freaked out. I didn’t even realize how badly I was overreacting. The fuck’s wrong with me?”

Shiro sat beside him. “You’re certainly not the only Alpha here, but you are the only one reacting like this to Lance’s heat. Or lack thereof. There something there I should know?”

“No? I don’t know.” Now that he was thinking about it – the way he overreacted, how he let himself get worked up to the point of his Alpha pheromones flaring in the elevator, how *protective* he’d felt over Lance, the way he’d felt the need to apologize and explain himself after Coran gave Lance the all clear – it occurred to him that maybe there was something his Alpha was trying to tell him.

Shiro sat and watched the gears turning in Keith’s head. He’d suspected for a while that Keith felt something beyond rivalry for Lance, but also suspected that Keith wasn’t prepared to confront it. He knew how Keith was with relating to people, and if he was right, and Keith

did have an attraction to Lance, that it would build until it threatened to explode, and that only then would he be ready to admit it.

“Well,” Shiro said after a minute, “Just let me know when you figure it out.” He stood, turning back to Keith before leaving.

“Yeah,” Keith responded, not moving.

Shiro knew that was the best he was going to get, and left.

Lance sat curled up on his bed after his shower, thinking. Yet again, he’d let his Omega status get in the way of things. He wasn’t worried about his heat being late, but now that he wasn’t the only one who knew about it, it made him upset. He didn’t want anyone worrying about him as an Omega. Coran didn’t seem concerned by it. Shiro was, but only if it got worse. But the way that Keith responded – that was what upset Lance the most. He didn’t want anyone worrying about him like that. Especially not the Alpha he’d been in love with for years.

If Lance was being honest, really honest, with himself, he’d realize that that was what was at the core of his problem. He still didn’t want anyone fussing over him as an Omega. He didn’t like being reminded of his status, even if they meant well. But it would be different if it was his mate worrying about him. It would be about them being two halves of the same whole. Having his mate worry about him and his heats would be the most natural thing. But Keith wasn’t Lance’s mate. And Lance couldn’t understand what had prompted that severe of a reaction. He was afraid to venture into that territory. The thought that maybe Keith felt something for him.

Lance was abruptly shaken from his downward spiral by a knock at his door. He sat up from the corner he’d curled into, running his hands over his face as if that could rid him of his negative thoughts. It couldn’t, he knew that, but as long as no one else picked up on his self-destructive patterns, that was all that mattered.

“Uh, yeah?” he called.

The door opened to Hunk in the corridor. The one person he couldn’t hide from. Hunk would know that he’d been letting his self-doubt take over again. Hunk would also know that Lance didn’t want to talk about it, and would let it go until he did.

“Hey, man. Shiro sent me to get you. We’re meeting on the bridge. You ok?” Hunk tilted his head slightly, thick brows furrowed in concern.

Lance waved him off, getting up to join his best friend. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just kinda tired. Heat’s late again. It’ll hit soon enough.”

“Oh, man. Not again. Just let me know when you want to start nesting, ok?” Hunk commiserated as they headed toward the elevator.

Hearing his best friend’s reaction made Lance feel better. He knew Hunk wouldn’t get upset. They’d been friends far too long for that. Hunk just rolled with it, taking care of



Lance as much as he could when his heat inevitably hit.

“Yeah, of course. Shouldn’t be more than a couple days. What’s going on?”

Hunk shrugged. “Dunno, man. I was in the lab with Pidge. I’m guessing Shiro knows about your heat problem?”

Lance sighed. “Yeah. He’s being all Space Dad about it. Y’know, ‘let me know if it gets worse’ while trying to act like he’s not being a Concerned Alpha. But it’s Shiro. He’ll leave me alone for now.”

The elevator doors closed, and they were on the way to the bridge. “Anyone else know about it?”

“Coran,” Lance admitted, “And Keith.”

“Repeat that? *Keith* knows? How? Why?” Hunk was staring in disbelief.

Lance cringed. “Yeah. We talked after training. He picked up on me being kinda twitchy and asked if it was something he’d done. So, I told him about my heat being late. He kinda freaked and made me let Coran check me out in the med bay. No offense, dude, but Alphas just don’t get it. I mean, I know it’s in your nature as Alphas to be all protective with us Omegas, but we’re not gonna break at the slightest touch.”

“No, I get it. And by that, I mean that I get that I don’t get it. I’m never gonna know what it’s like to go through a heat, or anything else that goes with it. Just like you’re never gonna know what a rut feels like first hand. It sucks, by the way,” Hunk agreed.

“Yeah, but you’re Pan-Ace. Just because your Alpha wants it, that doesn’t mean that you do. And, yeah, I’ll never know what it’s like to deal with a rut first hand, but I’m totally ok with experiencing it second-hand.”

“Oh, my fucking god, Lance. I did *not* need to hear that,” Hunk said, laughing, as they walked out onto the bridge.

Lance stifled his giggles when he realized everyone was staring at them. Allura raised a delicate eyebrow at them before turning back to the display screen.

“We’ve received a distress call from the planet Avhen in the Tir’Na system. The planet hasn’t been attacked directly, but there is a recent Galra presence in system. It seems that the Galra may be after the Synelite crystals Avhen is known for. We will be clearing the Tir’Na system of the Galra presence and assisting planetside afterward. We’re not far, and should be there within the varga,” she announced, turning to Shiro at the end.

“All right guys, suit up and meet in the hangar,” he said.

Keith caught up with Lance before he could get to the passage to Blue. “Hey, you ok? Sorry I freaked out at you earlier.”

“Really, it’s ok,” Lance said, “If you want, we can talk more after this mission. I didn’t think about it because I’ve been dealing with it for so long. Hunk knows all about it, and I just didn’t think about how it might look to everyone else. We’ll – we’ll talk later, ok?”

“Yeah, ok. I’m holding you to that,” Keith answered as he walked backward to Red’s door.

As the door slid closed and the floor gave way, Keith caught sight of the confused expression flitting across Lance’s face. But he meant what he said. He would absolutely be holding Lance to talking later. Not that Keith had any idea what he would say. He still wasn’t sure how he felt about Lance. He was fairly certain he knew how his Alpha felt, but that was something entirely separate from how he, Keith, felt about Lance and not just his Omega. And he didn’t really know what that was. But he did want Lance to know that what had happened earlier wouldn’t happen again.

The Galra ships sitting in the Tir’Na system hadn’t been expecting an appearance by the Castle of Lions or the Paladins of Voltron, and were woefully unprepared. As was the Galra way, they gave it their all in their Victory or Death mindset. But the presence was small, only a trio of cruisers, and not much of a real threat. The castle sat just out of system while the paladins took care of the fleet.

Sentry-piloted fighters were treated like toys, latched onto by metal jaws and tossed around. Shiro, Hunk, and Pidge went to take care of the cruisers, but Lance and Keith found themselves surrounded by more fighters. Lance flew Blue in a tight circle, freezing the fighters in place. The motion had taken Keith by surprise, but he quickly realized what was happening. After Lance had frozen the fighters, he popped up in Red, making short work of them with a searing line of fire. They caught up with the others, helping to finish off the cruisers and any remaining fighters.

The other three lions were weaving through the scattered fighters and heavy fire from the cruisers. Lance barely dodged out of the way of another round of cannon fire, immediately utilizing his own cannon to take down the three fighters in front of him before diving into the fight. Blue’s ice effectively cut off several of the smaller guns on the cruiser firing on him and he surged forward, switching to her standard cannon to finish the guns off.

Hunk used a fighter as a launch point, hurling himself at a cruiser’s main ion cannon. Digging Yellow’s heavy claws into the ship’s hull, he used the lion’s bulk to crush the base of the cannon, rendering it inoperable. He continued on, using both cannon and tail laser along the side opposite Pidge.

Pidge used her size to her advantage, deftly avoiding attacks. She used Green’s jaw blade to cut a line along the cruiser, explosions following in her wake as the ship crumbled. She then turned her attention to the fighters, slicing through a line of the smaller ships.

While Pidge and Hunk took care of the first cruiser, Keith focused on the second. Lance had given him an opening by taking out the starboard side guns, allowing Red to run a line of fire from the base of the cruiser’s ion cannon, through the bridge, and all the way to the aft of the ship. Small explosions piled onto one another until the Galra cruiser blew itself apart.

Shiro was carving a path through the fighters with Black's double-ended jaw blade and on to the last cruiser. He severed the connection between the main cannon and ship and moved on to the rest of the ship, slicing lines along the hull. Lance flew in, Blue's main cannon aiding in the cruiser's destruction.

Once the team had finished off the rest of the fighters, they headed back to the castle to shower again and rest up after the battle and before heading down to planet Avhen. Keith hung back, waiting for Lance to emerge from Blue.

"Oh, hey, Keith," Lance said, "Great work out there, man."

"Yeah, you too. Especially with those fighters."

Lance laughed. "I was so hoping you'd get what I was doing."

"Not gonna lie, it did take me a second. But I got there," Keith paused, casting a glance at the boy beside him, "So, about earlier..."

Lance stopped and turned to Keith. "Hey, don't worry about it. You've already apologized twice. We're good."

"No. It's not that. I thought about it, and you're absolutely right. I just wanted you to know that I trust you to tell me – us – if something's wrong. I overreacted, and that's on me. But I know that you're not the helpless Omega that so many of us Alphas think. I won't let it happen again."

Lance stood stunned. For once he was at a loss for words. His immediate reaction was to dismiss it, say that it was fine and that Keith didn't need to worry about it. But Keith wasn't the most verbal of people, and for him to say all of that was unlike him. Lance knew that he really meant it, and he didn't know how to respond.

"Lance?" Keith asked, brows creased in concern.

"Yeah – I – um – I don't what to say to that. That's – thanks, Keith. That actually means more than you think."

The crease remained, but the look in his eyes shifted to one of concerned shock. "Are we really that bad? Other Alphas?"

"Sometimes worse," Lance admitted quietly, "Being treated like a porcelain doll is a good day."

"What the actual fuck is wrong with us?" Keith asked no one in particular, vibrating with rage. "Why can't Alphas just accept that Omegas are human first and not just some fucking sex object?"

Lance took a step back in surprise and to distance himself from Keith's scent, which had exploded from him again. Sensing the movement, Keith calmed himself, reeling his scent back in.

“Sorry. I’m sorry about that. I didn’t mean to – that wasn’t –” he stuttered.

Lance closed the distance between them, gently placing his hands on Keith’s shoulders. “Hey, it’s ok. On your part. I just wish there were more Alphas like you. Most of them catch a whiff of me and turn into assholes. You, Shiro, Hunk – you guys have never done that. I trust you,” he said softly.

Keith snapped up to meet Lance. “You do?”

Lance nodded. “Yeah, of course I do. I mean, you’re kind of an ass sometimes, but I trust you.”

Keith snorted. “Thanks for that. But seriously, *that* means a lot to *me*.”

“Oh, that’s where you two went,” Shiro said as he came around the corner. He fully took in the scene in front of him and the two boys’ body language. “Everything ok?”

“Yeah. All good,” Lance said, almost artificially bright, and stepped back from Keith, letting his arms drop.

“Ok. Well, we’ve got about an hour until we land on Avhen. Do whatever you’re gonna do, just don’t be late.” Shiro turned and disappeared back around the corner.

“Ok, that was weird.”

“Nah, not really,” Keith answered as they headed for their rooms, “Just means he’ll interrogate me later when there are no witnesses.”

“Seriously?” Lance laughed, “Oh my god, he is such a *Dad*.”

“Yeah, tell me about it.”

The boys separated when they reached their doors, but Lance stopped halfway through. “Hey, Keith?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks. Really.”

Keith leaned a shoulder into the doorframe. “Anytime.”

Lance let his door slide closed behind him and fell back against the wall. He thought he couldn’t have fallen any harder for Keith, but he was apparently wrong about that. He had never thought that he would feel the theoretical need to be “owned” by an Alpha, and he never would. Because Keith would never be that Alpha. And Lance now knew that there was no other Alpha he wanted. But he also refused to be that Omega and just throw himself at the Alpha that didn’t treat him like an object. Keith wouldn’t respond well to that anyway. And in any case, he didn’t think Keith saw him as a potential mate. Lance wanted to know for certain, he just wasn’t sure how to go about it. This was going to be hard.

He sighed and pushed himself off the wall. After showering, Lance changed into the extra body glove and put the armor pieces back on, then headed out to the lounge to wait for everyone else to be ready.

After watching Lance walk into his room, Keith followed suit. He collapsed onto his bed, pulling armor and gloves off, and sat in his body glove, his head in his hands. What the fuck had just happened? Lance said that he trusted him. And he had meant it. He needed to cool off. He needed to think. Detangle his own thoughts and feelings from his Alpha's. Keith took a deep breath, letting it out all at once. He knew that his Alpha was definitely interested, but Keith was never one for just listening to whatever his Alpha wanted. Putting that part of him aside, he thought about how he felt. The realization hit him like a runaway train. He had fallen for Lance at some point. When did that happen? How had he never realized this? And how was he going to approach this with Lance without undoing everything he had said about not being *that* kind of Alpha? This was going to be hard.

Keith got up, peeling his body glove off, and got in the shower. The entire time his Alpha was ecstatic that Keith had finally figured it out, and Keith told it to kindly fuck off. He had enough to deal with. After redressing in his paladin armor, he headed for the lounge until it was time to head down to Avhen.

Fortunately, Lance wasn't alone when Keith walked in. Hunk and Pidge were with him, the three of them scattered across the sunken sofas. They were all curled in on themselves in uncontrollable laughter. Lance was closest to the door and calmed himself, mostly, wiping tears away.

"Hey, Keith! You just missed *the best fucking impression* of Iverson I have ever heard. Hunk, Hunk. You gotta do it again, man."

Hunk waved ineffectually at him, still laughing too hard to answer.

Keith found a giggle bubbling up despite himself. "Oh, this I need to see."

Shiro came in from the other end of the lounge by the display screen. "Ok, guys. Time to go. What did I miss?"

Lance had collapsed into a fit of giggles again. "Hunk – Iverson – Holy shit –" he gasped.

Shiro raised a questioning eyebrow at Keith.

"I dunno. I walked in to this."

Pidge yelped through her laughter as she rolled off the sofa and hit the floor. Lance and Hunk only laughed harder. Pidge rolled across the floor to Hunk, dragging herself up. Hunk took a second to catch his breath and got up, Pidge following. They almost made it to Shiro before cracking up again.

Keith found himself joining in. He had always found Lance's laugh infectious, and now that he knew how he felt, he couldn't hold it in anymore. He jumped down to the sofa and then the floor, extending a hand for Lance, who took it and allowed himself to be pulled up.

Lance tried to stem the tide of his giggle fit, throwing his arms around Keith's shoulders and dropping his head into the other boy's neck. He snorted again, finally calming down, and promptly realized what he was doing. And that Keith's hands were on his lower back. It was startling how natural it felt. Lance took a quick step back, breaking them apart.

"Sorry, I – I didn't..." Lance started.

"No, I mean – it's fine. I, um..." Keith stuttered, overlapping Lance. He knew he was most likely bright red, and definitely reeling from being so close to Lance's scent. The only other time he'd been that close was when he carried Lance to the healing pods after Sendak's attack, and there had been far too much going on at the time and too many other scents from the explosion for Keith to focus on things like that. But now there was nothing stopping him and he could smell everything. Lance smelled like a warm summer night. Soft and tropical. Night-blooming jasmine, warm, rich spice, and something herbal and slightly sweet that Keith couldn't place.

"That herbal scent. What is that? I can't place it." Keith said before he could stop himself.

Lance was staring, and he knew it. He may have apologized for their unintentional proximity, but he certainly wasn't sorry. He realized that he was biting his lip. It was an old habit, one that he often used as a child to calm himself. He released it to answer.

"My Papá always said it reminded him of my Abuelo's pipe smoke," he said quietly, afraid to speak any louder, "He quit before I was born."

"Ah! There you are!" Coran exclaimed, breaking the spell.

Both boys started, spinning to face their Altean companion.

"We landed ten doboshes ago! Everyone's waiting. And you know how our princess can be if we're late," he added, leaning in conspiratorially.

"Uh, yeah," Lance said.

"We'll be right there." Keith headed in the opposite direction, toward where Shiro had gone. Lance followed, unashamedly wanting as much time alone with Keith as he could get, even if he was a bit embarrassed by their last interaction.

Keith shared that sentiment, and they made their way to the castle's ground entrance in silence. But neither of them could stop thinking about each other's scent, and how close they'd been. It was something they both wanted, but still weren't sure how to go about achieving. Keith had gotten himself wrapped up in how to broach the subject with Lance without sounding possessive, and Lance was getting stuck in his usual loop of self-doubt and insecurity, convincing himself that Keith wasn't interested.

Allura was waiting, dressed in her floor-length gown and her silver curls flowing down her back, with arms folded and foot tapping, a displeased expression on her face. Coran had managed to get there before Keith and Lance, and was waiting with the other paladins, none of them wanting to cross Allura. Keith had the decency to look apologetic, and Lance was

still so wrapped up in his internal issues that his downcast gaze and lip-chewing could easily be interpreted the same way. Allura couldn't stay upset with any of them, and her arms dropped, face becoming neutral.

"Before we go, I wanted to warn all of you," Allura said.

"Warn us? Of what?" Shiro asked.

"The people of Avhen have an – uncommon – societal structure. While they respect other cultures and species, they have a hierarchy run by Omegas. They consider Omegas almost sacred. I only wish to warn you all of this because of my, and Shiro's, status as Alphas. They can be a little more formal when addressing Alphas, and Lance, Pidge, they may find themselves deferring to you more. It's not to disrespect me or Shiro, it's simply what they're accustomed to. I wanted you all to be aware before meeting with them."

"Yeah, that's good to know," Lance said, Pidge nodding her agreement.

"Well," Shiro said, "Let's meet them."

Allura led the way, Shiro a step behind. Hunk and Keith waited, allowing Lance and Pidge to go ahead of them. Once Lance and Pidge had passed, Keith and Hunk looked at each other in surprise, both chuckling softly.

"Looks like we had the same idea," Hunk said.

"Yeah, I guess," Keith answered with a snort.

The planet of Avhen was a temperate paradise, bathed in soft coral and gold. Far hillsides were carpeted in wildflowers, and the trees in the valley below were in full bloom. The castle had landed at the end of a gold-hued stone bridge, a many-spired castle of the same stone on the other side. Fluffy clouds sparsely dotted the petal pink and lavender sky. The planet's soft sun appeared salmon pink in the sky, but just as bright as the paladins' home star Sol. The entire effect was that of a fairy tale.

The people of Avhen fit in with their surroundings seamlessly. It was difficult to tell from a distance whether or not the coral tinge to their milk-pale skin was their own or simply from their surroundings. As princess and paladins approached, it became clear that the color was natural. Pale silver-brown hair hung freely, tucked behind ears no bigger than a human's, but delicately pointed. The two women waiting for them wore sleeveless tunics fitted to the waist, then flaring out softly over ankle-length skirts, both in washed-out natural earth tones.

The woman in front approached. She folded her hands in front of her waist, bowing slightly, and then stood, addressing the party. "Many greetings, Princess Allura and Paladins of Voltron. I am Idwen, Priestess and Queen of Avhen," she turned slightly, her hands opening to gesture gently to the woman behind her, "And this is Annon, my mate."

Annon stepped forward, echoing the same bowed greeting as Idwen. "My queen and Omega welcomes you to our capital city Aerel."

“Please, join us in the palace so we may talk,” Idwen said, “We have much to discuss.”

“Yes, of course, Priestess Idwen,” Allura answered, bowing politely.

Annon led the way back, Idwen between her mate and Allura, the paladins following. The bridge looked as though it was carved of a single stone, intricate vine patterns decorating almost every available surface. The castle was the same vine-carved solid stone, spires and towers rising from nothing and connected by covered bridges to the central keep. The spell had yet to be broken, the architecture and people of Aerel as ethereally beautiful as their queen and her mate.

They were led to a large round room decorated by low couches and cushions, wrought metal and crystal-paned windows opened to the warm air outside. The colors of the room echoed the Avhenals’ dress. Soft natural colors dominated the room, from the oversized cushions to the wood of the couches and tables. Idwen had seated herself on one of the couches, taking her mate’s hand.

“Annon, my love, if you would see to light refreshments for our guests, please.”

Annon kissed Idwen’s hand, a soft smile on her lips. “Yes, of course,” she said, leaving the room soundlessly.

All five paladins stood in a semi-circle around Allura, and now that they were spread out more, Idwen looked them all over. She had started with Hunk and then Keith, but stopped when she got to Lance and Pidge.

“How wonderful,” she said, “I was not aware that two of the Paladins of Voltron were fellow Omegas.”

Even with warning, having his Omega status treated so very differently from what he was used to took Lance by surprise. He found it jarring to be in a place where he didn’t have to worry about being accosted by Alphas just for existing. He wanted desperately to relax, but a lifetime of the same experiences over and over left him waiting for the other shoe to drop. The logical side of him knew that he was safe, but his Omega just couldn’t relax. He knew Pidge didn’t have the same problem, but that was really because she just didn’t care what other people, and more importantly, Alphas, thought of her. She always safely knew she was smarter than at least most, if not all, of the people around her. Lance simply wasn’t that self-assured, no matter how he played himself to others.

Pidge caught the scent of Lance’s discomfort, stepping forward to address the queen. Lance found himself unable to focus on the conversation, zoning out until he felt a gentle nudge at his elbow.

“Hey, you ok?” Keith whispered.

Lance snapped to look at him. “Um, yeah...I think so?” he whispered back, “This is just kinda weirding me out. I’m fine.”



Annon had returned while Pidge was speaking with Idwen and Lance and Keith were whispering. Allura and Shiro sat with the queen, the discussion turning to the possibility of Avhen joining the Voltron Coalition. Annon turned her attention to the other four paladins.

“While our guests, you are free to see the castle and city. Please, feel free to explore our beautiful home,” she said, addressing Lance directly.

“Thank you. We will,” he replied even as he could feel Keith shift beside him, his scent becoming defensive. *The fuck’s that about?* Lance thought.

“Oh. I apologize,” Annon was saying, “I had no intention of offense. Your scent is stronger than your companions’. Are you not the lead Omega, Blue Paladin?”

“Just Lance is fine. No, we don’t have the same structure. We work together as a whole.”

“I think you have what it takes for leadership,” Keith said softly.

“Oh, I apologize again. I seem to be stepping on toes today. But please, take this time to see our city and meet our people, Paladins,” Annon said, her face flushing a deeper coral. She stepped away to seat herself beside her mate, leaving the paladins alone.

“What was all that about?” Pidge asked as they left the room back the way they came.

“No idea,” Keith answered.

Lance hung back, letting Pidge catch up with Hunk. He fell into step with Keith, matching his stride. “Seriously, though. What *was* that?”

“How should I know? Allura said that Omegas have higher social standing here, Annon probably just forgot.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it. I knew she forgot, but she asked me a direct question, and you got all defensive. And don’t try to say you didn’t, you reeked of defensive Alpha.”

Keith sighed. “I know I did, but I don’t know. I’m still trying to figure it all out. What’s been going on with me. I know I can be closed off, but I do want to talk about it. Just not now. Maybe we can meet up later? Alone?”

It was impulsive, but that was just his nature. He wasn’t regretting it, however. He wanted to tell Lance how he felt. That he *had* figured it out. That there was no one else he wanted. That his Alpha had figured it out a long time ago, and it had taken this long for *him* to figure it out.

“Yeah, ok. After Allura and Shiro are done talking with Idwen?” Lance suggested.

“Maybe after dinner? I want to make sure I don’t get this wrong.”

“We’ll probably still be here then. Find somewhere quiet, talk about this whatever it is?”

“Yeah, sounds like a plan.”

While Allura and Shiro discussed the Coalition with Idwen and Annon, the four paladins explored the city of Arel. Hunk almost immediately fell in love with their simple, but rich cuisine. He and Pidge discovered that while Avhen may look like an Earth fairy tale, they actually had advanced technology that blended in seamlessly with their surroundings. Keith picked up another blade to add to his growing collection, instantly taken with its elegant lines and impeccable balance. In keeping with their seamless technology, Lance discovered that the Avhenals used a ranged weapon not at all unlike an Earth longbow. This one, however, was energy-based, firing a silver bolt generated from just above the grip with the draw and release of the bowstring. After trying it out, Keith convinced him to get one.

Hunk and Keith were treated politely, but Lance and Pidge were practically treated like royalty. Looking around, they noticed that that was the norm. Eventually, the four tired and began the return to the palace. At about the halfway mark, Lance stumbled, shaking his head.

“Lance?” Pidge questioned.

“Careful. Alright there?” Hunk stepped forward in case Lance needed it.

Keith was faster, placing himself in front and catching Lance by the elbows. “Are you ok?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m ok. Just got dizzy for a second. I’m fine. Really.”

“You’re sure?” Keith stepped forward, allowing Lance to steady himself, and let go. He froze, getting hit with Lance’s scent. The wall of jasmine, spices, and pipe smoke had an undercurrent of wild honey that Keith knew meant that Lance would be going into his heat sooner rather than later. “We need to get you back to the castle. I know what they think of Omegas here, but I don’t feel comfortable hanging around for a week.”

“Keith, I feel fine. There’s no rush to get back to the castle. We can go back to the palace. Meet up with Allura and Shiro. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“You can’t smell yourself, can you? Your scent is nearly overpowering. And you have that sweetness that only happens during a heat. We need to go back to the castle.”

Hunk came up beside Pidge. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, dude. I can’t smell that at all. You sure about all that, Keith?”

“You seriously can’t smell that? Omegas are more in tune with each other. You smell it, right, Pidge?” Keith asked.

“No. It’s just you. But I’ll check. Lance, come here.” Pidge motioned for Lance to get closer. He leaned in close enough for her to get her nose near his scent gland without it being awkward. “You do smell a little sweeter, but it’s not that strong. You’re due for your heat soon anyway, right?”

“Past due, by like three days, actually. But it’ll hit within the next couple days. It’s fine, you know that,” Lance said dismissively.

“Aw, you’re not doing *that* again?” Pidge said, her voice full of sympathy for her fellow Omega.

“Unfortunately, yes. But it’s fine. Never been a problem before, don’t think it will be now.” He set off again for the palace, noticing that Keith was keeping up beside him. “What’s up with you, dude? This is weird.”

“I don’t know. I feel like I’ve been more in tune with you lately. Might just be because we’re in such close quarters,” Keith offered by way of explanation.

“May be, but it’s just you. No one else is reacting like that. Are *you* feeling ok?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. We can talk about it later.”

Lance let it go, and the four of them made their way back to the palace in silence. Allura and Shiro were still talking with Idwen and Annon, but the conversation was social, relaxed. They looked up at the paladins’ entrance, inviting them to join in.

“Priestess Idwen has pledged to join the Coalition!” Allura said excitedly.

“Oh, that’s great!” Pidge said as she plopped herself into a large cushion.

Hunk took the one beside her. Keith moved to sit with them, but was across to the next low couch in a second. That was where Lance had dropped, another wave of dizziness overtaking him.

“I mean it, Lance, you need to go back to the castle,” he said quietly.

Lance attempted to wave him off, the motion of his own hand enough to make him sway. “No, I’m... Maybe I should...”

“Are you feeling unwell?” Idwen asked.

“I’m ok. It’s just my heat coming on.”

Lance pulled himself up, tripping over his own feet. He stumbled forward, unable to maintain his balance. Keith caught him, bracing to support Lance’s entire weight. Lance looked up, locking with Keith’s clear violet gaze. Neither of them moved, keenly aware of each other. Their pheromones collided, woodsmoke, cinnamon, and sandalwood wove together with jasmine, spices, and pipe smoke, creating an atmosphere for them alone. Keith’s worry over Lance’s heat and current condition and Lance’s panic from the dizziness and near fall threaded through their combined scents, bringing them back to the present and breaking the spell.

Lance took a step to steady himself. “Thanks. Again,” he said softly.

“Yeah. Anytime,” Keith whispered back.

Lance took a tentative step, testing his balance. When the floor didn’t threaten to meet him head on, he took another step, turning back to the low couch he had come from. He stopped,

shaking his head again, then tried another step. Or he thought he had. He hadn't, instead dropping toward the floor, his fall broken by Keith diving to catch him. Lance was unconscious before landing in Keith's arms.

The first thing Keith was aware of was the heat radiating off Lance. He knew Omegas in heat would, naturally, run warmer than normal, but this was something else. This was like the height of heat combined with an abnormally high fever. But at least Lance's breathing was steady. It marginally calmed his fraying nerves. He adjusted his grip and stood. Feeling all eyes in the room on him, Keith turned, Lance unconscious in his arms.

Idwen stood in a rush. "Quickly, we must bring him to our healers. Follow me."

Keith held on tighter, following Idwen out of the room and deeper into the palace. Annon rushed to accompany them, Allura and the rest of the paladins running to catch up. Idwen led them down corridors and up stairwells, finally crossing a bridge to one of the larger spires. A staircase wrapped around the inside wall of the spire to each floor. Once inside, Idwen led them up one more flight. Here there were several beds along the wall pointed inward like sun rays. She brought them over to one by a tall window.

Keith gently put Lance down, a clear dome shimmering into existence above him. A clear, silvery liquid filled the space, tendrils of color swirling through the silver shimmer. It continued, filling the dome completely, leaving Lance suspended in it.

No one had noticed that Annon disappeared until she came back with two healers. They immediately went to the unconscious paladin, their fingers flying over previously unseen screens built into the dome. The princess and paladins watched as the bands of color swirled around Lance with purpose, wrapping his unresponsive form. The petite female healer looked up at her male counterpart, who shook his head sharply. They continued their work, the colors twisting together in different configurations until one gave the healers a definitive result. Both pairs of hands froze over their screens and they looked at each other, fear passing through their eyes. They ran the same colors again, confirming their previous findings.

"Priestess," the male healer spoke, "I am sorry."

"What is it, Ril?" Idwen asked.

"He has Alefan. His mate must stay."

"Lance isn't bonded," Allura said.

Idwen's face fell. "I am so sorry. There is nothing we can do."

"Wait, what?" Keith demanded, "What do you mean there's nothing you can do? What would his being bonded have anything to do with it?"

"Peace, paladin," Idwen soothed, "Were he bonded, having his mate by his side would allow his body to heal and recover. But unbonded, Alefan is fatal. It is a condition only afflicting Omegas. He will go into heat, but it will not abate. It will become worse. The heat will rise

until his body shuts down. He will not wake at all during this time. Having a connection to a bonded mate allows the heat to come down enough for his body to heal, but you said that he is unbonded. Without that connection, he will not survive.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do? What about our healing pods?” Pidge asked, fear in her voice.

“I don’t think our pods could help in this case,” Allura said sadly.

“There has to be something,” Keith said, agitated, “There has to be.”

“The healing pods can treat anything. They have to be able to treat this,” Hunk pleaded with no one in particular.

“Allura?” Shiro asked, “Is it possible? Is there a chance the healing pods could treat this?”

“I – I don’t know. I will speak with Coran and return,” she answered, determination flashing.

“I will show you to our communications room,” Annon said, leading Allura from the room.

“I will leave you for now. Please, send for me when you have an answer,” Idwen said softly, excusing herself.

Hunk and Pidge fought tears at their best friend’s prognosis. Neither of them could handle the idea of losing Lance. Keith threw himself onto the deep windowsill, dropping his head in his hands. Shiro came up quietly, placing a hand on Keith’s shoulder.

“He can’t be dying. I can’t lose someone else,” Keith said, only loud enough for Shiro to hear, “Not him.”

Beside them, the two healers got to work, draining the diagnostic fluid from the dome and then dismissing the shield. They dried his exposed skin and began removing his armor when Pidge and Hunk joined Keith and Shiro by the window. Hunk slid to the floor while Pidge settled on to the windowsill beside Keith, leaning into him. No one spoke.

When Allura returned a half hour later, Lance had been changed into a loose-fitting long-sleeved linen tunic and loose pants, the diagnostic table dressed as a more typical bed. Lance was covered in light linen coverings and appeared to be sleeping peacefully. Closer inspection would reveal the faint sheen of sweat across his face and dampening his hair.

She looked over the paladins, her heart breaking at the news she had to share. “Coran and I have gone over the healing pods and their capabilities. There are many ailments the pods can treat affecting Omegas, but this is not one of them. There is nothing we can do on the castle.”

Shiro closed his eyes and sighed, attempting to keep his face neutral. Hunk froze, shock and denial fighting for dominance. Pidge slid off the windowsill, falling on Hunk as she burst into tears. Keith exploded. He launched himself off the windowsill, pacing the center of the room.

“No. I refuse. I refuse to accept this. There has to be something. Something we can do.” He stopped, turning to the healer who had remained. “Wait. I’ve never heard of anything like this. Is this something that only affects your people? Have you ever heard of it affecting someone of another species?”

The healer, Niha, looked up in surprise. “No,” she said, “I haven’t. But the paladin, he is human, yes?”

“Yes,” Allura said, “He is.”

Keith pointed at Allura. “That. Then how does Lance have it?”

“I don’t know,” Niha answered, her mind spinning with possibilities, “Is it conceivable that he has Avhenal blood?”

“I have no idea. Can you find out?”

“Of course,” she nodded, “It would be a simple test. Mere ticks.”

Niha rose, crossing to Lance’s bedside. She pressed open a drawer and retrieved a small pen-like object. Niha pressed one end to the heel of Lance’s hand, a drop of blood pulled into the body of the object. She brushed a gold liquid across the circular wound, which healed it instantly, the liquid absorbed into his skin. A small screen projected from the tool. With quick fingers, she directed the scans to break down the structure and origins of Lance’s DNA. As promised, the answer came within seconds. She looked from her display to Keith, and then to the rest of the assembled party.

“What? What is it?” Keith asked.

“Your friend. The Blue Paladin. Fifty percent of his DNA is Avhenal.”

“What?!”

Pidge picked herself up from her spot by Hunk. “Lance is half alien?”

Niha thought quickly. “We must send for Priestess Idwen.” She rushed down the stairs, shouting for someone to retrieve the queen, then ran back up the stairs to retake her position by Lance’s bedside.

“So,” Hunk asked slowly, “Does this change anything for Lance?”

“Sadly not. We can attempt to make him more comfortable, but without a bonded mate, Alefan is fatal. But his being half Avhenal does raise questions.”

Idwen returned a few minutes later. “You have your answer, Princess Allura?”

“I do. Unfortunately, there appears to be nothing our healing pods can do for something like this. But we have made an interesting discovery with the assistance of your capable healer,” Allura said, indicating Niha.

“Niha?” Idwen questioned.

“Yes, Priestess. The question was raised by the Red Paladin initially. The question of if Alefan affects other species. I have checked, and the Blue Paladin is half Avhenal.” She brought the test results back up, presenting the device to Idwen.

The priestess looked over the scan thoroughly, confirming for herself that it was correct. She dismissed the projected screen and returned the diagnostic tool to Niha. Idwen then retrieved a larger tablet, setting it on a table near the center of the room. It looked the same as the crystal windows, edged in black. She placed her hand on its surface and a large screen projected from the device. She navigated through the database, finding the historical records she was looking for.

“Here,” she said, indicating the reports and ship schematics on the projection, “We had sent three ships to explore the galaxies about five hundred decaphoebs ago. Two returned, having forged new alliances with other races. One never did. It was considered lost after discovering a more – primitive – planet. One that had not yet learned to travel the stars. We lost contact shortly after, never hearing from them again. It is certainly possible that this is your home planet, paladins.”

“Do you know where in the galaxies they were?” Pidge asked.

Idwen scanned through the report, finding the lost ship’s last known position. She brought it up on a new screen, showing the star system the ship disappeared from. All four paladins stood shocked. The system on the screen was their own Sol System.

“That – that’s Earth,” Hunk managed.

Idwen turned around. “This is your home system, then?”

“It is,” Shiro confirmed.

“But how – I mean, humans would have noticed. There’s no way –” Pidge stumbled.

“No, Lance is Cuban,” Hunk replied to Pidge, “I remember going to visit his family. I don’t think anyone *would* have noticed if that’s where they ended up. Just curious, how long do your people live?” He directed his last question to Idwen.

“I remember the ship being lost. I was a young girl then. But to answer your question more directly, we live for a thousand decaphoebs. Sometimes longer.”

Pidge let out a low whistle. “But that makes more sense. For Lance to be half Avhenal, that is.”

“But this still does nothing for him!” Keith interjected.

“No, I’m afraid it doesn’t. Even if it does solve a mystery for us. The sun will set soon. Please, stay as my guests. It is the least I can do for all of you,” Idwen said.

“Thank you, Priestess. We will take you up on that offer,” Allura answered, casting a long look over Lance, “Paladins, we should let Lance rest.”

“I’m not leaving,” Keith said quietly.

Shiro closed the distance between them, both hands settling on Keith’s shoulders. “There’s nothing we can do for him. And there’s no point in staying here like this. You *know* he wouldn’t want that.” He spoke softly, keeping the conversation between the two of them.

“I know. But I can’t. I can’t leave him. Shiro, don’t make me go.”

Shiro saw the bright sheen of tears in Keith’s violet eyes. He sighed, knowing he couldn’t make Keith go. “Alright. But at least change and eat first. Lance isn’t going anywhere just yet.”

Keith nodded, fighting his tears. “Yeah. Ok.”

“We should all change into something more comfortable,” Allura said. She was closer than either Keith or Shiro thought, and her sharp Altean hearing caught their conversation. She reached out, gently placing a hand on Keith’s forearm. “I don’t want to leave, either. But we must take care of ourselves.”

Keith nodded again, roughly wiping away an escaped tear. He allowed Shiro to lead him down to the next floor and across the bridge to the keep. Shiro kept them to the back of the group, one arm wrapped around Keith’s shoulders.

“You really do love him, don’t you?”

Keith’s head snapped up, startled by Shiro’s question. “How – how did you know that?”

“I’ve suspected for a while now,” Shiro admitted, “But that conversation we had earlier confirmed it for me. I also know you. And I know that you had to come to the conscious conclusion on your own. And with the way you’ve been acting around him all day? Well, you’re not exactly subtle, Keith.”

“Yeah. Maybe. But I was right. His heat *was* something to worry about,” he said with a bitter laugh, “And now I’ll never be able to tell him. I was thinking about it. I wanted to talk to him tonight. Not – not that I was trying to get him to let me take care of him when his heat hit. I wasn’t. Not at all. I just didn’t want to wait anymore. I finally figured it out, and now I’m losing him. And there’s nothing I can do about it. I’m not his mate. We’re not bonded. I can’t help him. The only thing I can do now is just be there with him. Why does this have to hurt so much?” Keith’s voice broke on his question as he continued to fight his tears.

“Too many reasons to count,” Shiro answered.

Keith leaned into Shiro’s shoulder, the adoptive siblings walking through the palace together.

Idwen gave them a cluster of rooms, six in total, as Allura confirmed that Coran would be joining them as well. They were given instructions to stand in front of the mirror fronted wardrobes. The computer system would scan them for their measurements and construct



outfits for them to their specifications. Pidge went starry-eyed at the tech, and had both an outfit similar to Idwen and Annon's, as Allura did, and also one with pants. Allura, allowing her grieving process to begin, chose a tunic in pink, her skirt a soft periwinkle. Pidge ended up wearing the pale taupe pants after all, her own tunic a vibrant sage. Hunk, Shiro, and Keith all had the same pants as Pidge, their shirts more in the style of what they had seen earlier on Ril, long-sleeved with cording for ties at the neckline, which sat at the collarbone. Hunk tied the cord on his deep gold shirt, Shiro left his black shirt open, as did Keith in blood red. When Coran joined them, he chose to remain in his Altean advisor uniform. None of the rest of them could deny that the Avhenal fashion sense was very comfortable in both cut and in the fabric itself.

They met in the smaller, more private dining room. Their dinner was somber, no one able to break the silence that hung over them. All six ate slowly, not having an appropriate appetite after the afternoon's events. Except for Keith, who picked at his plate and excused himself not long after. The rest watched him go, Shiro giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze as he passed.

Keith navigated through the palace alone, finding his way back to the bridge and tower without difficulty. He sighed as he dropped into the chair now beside Lance's bed. He looked over at the other paladin. His Alpha had wanted to claim the Omega as its own, and Keith wanted Lance to know how much he was loved. But neither were possible. He found himself lacing their fingers together, Keith's pale, cool hands threading through Lance's burning touch. Keith could feel the heat rising, both Lance's overdue heat, and the heat of his body. The dam broke, the floodgates opened, and Keith's top half collapsed onto the bed beside Lance, his carefully held back tears soaking the bedlinens.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, voice rough, after the tears finally stopped, "I can't fix this. But I'm not ready to let you go yet. And I don't even know if you can hear me at all. But I won't leave you. Right now, I wanted to be telling you that I'd finally figured it out. I finally got my idiotic Alpha to shut up long enough to realize that I fell in love with you somewhere along the line. I don't even know when it happened, but it doesn't matter now. Nothing does. And I know everyone else is hurting because of this, but they don't love you like I do. I don't even know how long you have left, but I'm not leaving. I'll be here until it's over."

He got up, squeezing himself in beside Lance's still form. That was where Shiro found him, passed out from exhaustion, their hands still intertwined. The other Alpha couldn't bring himself to wake Keith, and he draped a spare blanket over his adoptive brother, and left him to rest.

The next morning, the rest of the team noticed Keith's absence when they gathered for breakfast. Shiro kept quiet. Keith's reasons weren't his to tell, but he did feel the need to step in when Allura's stubborn determination appeared.

"Allura, no. I know where Keith is, but we need to give him time. Trying to make him leave right now will only end badly. For everyone. It's not for me to say why, but he needs this. We all do. We all need time to process," he stopped, finding what he had to say next difficult, "Lance is dying. And we need to come to terms with that."

The table was silent. None of them had said it out loud yet. No one had been able to admit to themselves that it really was happening. It had been only a couple months since they had first formed Voltron, and although the bonds with their lions weren't fully cemented, the bonds the seven of them together had forged were stronger. They were losing a part of their family, and no one knew how to cope.

Hunk couldn't meet anyone's eyes. He had admitted freely that he wanted to go back home to Earth, that he missed his family. The only consolation he had was that he already considered Lance family since they'd been so close for so long. His last existing bond with his home was being broken, even if he had accepted the team as his new family. Lance could be irresponsible sometimes, and seemed to believe that filters were for making coffee and not a mental tool to keep him from speaking without thinking, but this was his best friend. Hunk was struck by just how unprepared he was to say goodbye as soon as the words left Shiro's mouth.

Pidge's glasses hit the floor, and she dropped to the table, burying her face in her arms as a new round of tears silently racked her body. She had already lost her father and brother, but she promised herself that she wasn't going to stop until she found them. She had said goodbye to them when they left for Kerberos, but it wasn't forever. Saying goodbye to Lance was forever, and it was breaking her. No one could replace Matt, but she had adopted Lance as another brother, one that could always make her laugh when her search for her family seemed to go nowhere or she was battle-weary. She had learned quickly that family wasn't limited to blood, but could be one that she made for herself. She had made a new family, and now she was losing a part of it.

Coran couldn't help but think of Altea's destruction. How, except for Allura, he had already lost everyone he loved. How he'd learned that he'd been in stasis for 10,000 years and that Zarkon, a man he once trusted, was still ruling the known universe with the cruelty whose birth he had witnessed. Despite all of that, he had charged ahead, knowing that Voltron still existed and that he and Allura could stop Zarkon. He found that he had become attached to the new paladins, and that as much as he missed Altea, they were a new family to protect. Losing one of them could have felt like it was just one more to add to the scores, but it wasn't. He could only stare at the table as he realized the pain of losing someone else.

Like Coran, Allura had also lost everyone and everything with Altea. She had been horrified to learn of the passage of time and Zarkon's continued war. But she quickly realized that she could continue where her father hadn't. That with new paladins, Voltron could be reformed, and that the universe had a chance. There was a lot about the paladins she didn't understand, but she loved them. They frustrated her on occasion, since they were still learning just how bad things were in space, but she thought of them as a new family, one that she would fight to protect. As much as she was a princess and, mostly, behaved like one, losing anyone else tore at her. She felt hollow and like the slightest push could break her. She balled her hands and closed her eyes, no longer able to meet Shiro's.

Shiro knew no one would believe it, but he saw so much of his younger self in Lance. Family was everything, but so were his dreams. They had both joined the Galaxy Garrison with the dream of going into space. With his chronic illness, Shiro knew how it felt to be told that he couldn't do something, but he also knew how it felt to prove those people wrong.

Lance was certainly proving the instructors who told him that he couldn't measure up wrong. Even before leaving for the Kerberos mission, he saw how the instructors would constantly compare him to Keith. He hadn't though it was fair then, and he still didn't. He swore that he would never do that. Not out there, not ever. He was team leader, Black Paladin, but he'd accepted being Space Dad. Lance was the one to start that one, but the rest of them had continued it, and Shiro had just sighed and accepted it. They were a family, and he couldn't lose another one. He knew how much this was affecting Keith, but he was only just realizing how much it was affecting himself. His gaze dropped to the table, knowing he had no idea how to help any of them, let alone himself.

Hunk did what he could to comfort Pidge, at least until her latest bout of crying stopped. Shiro and Allura sat back down, shaking Coran out of his daze. Breakfast proceeded the same as dinner had the night before. Everyone was silent, the quiet feeling even heavier without Lance's constantly cracking jokes and playfully flirting with Allura. They had talked before, and she knew then that it was just something he did, and that he considered her a friend. She realized then that it was yet another thing she would miss about him.

After breakfast, Shiro left with a steaming wood and crystal cup of what he'd learned was called elhin, and wasn't unlike earth teas, only slightly thicker and creamier. He knew that trying to get Keith to eat would be a losing battle, and hoped he would at least compromise with this.

He found the younger Alpha exactly where he'd left him the night before, still curled around Lance, but awake. Keith's free hand was resting lightly on Lance's chest, and he lay there, watching the rise and fall of steady breathing.

Shiro sat in the abandoned chair and set the cup on the windowsill. "How long have you been up?"

Keith gave no indication that he'd heard until he answered without moving, "I don't know. Sometime around dawn maybe?" His voice was quiet, rough with sleep and tears.

"I brought you breakfast."

"I don't want it."

Shiro sighed and decided to change tactics. "You remember just before I left for Kerberos? That fight I had with Adam? I didn't think he'd do it. No matter how many times we argued about that mission, I didn't think he'd ever really leave me. But, he did, and --"

"That is nowhere near the same thing! You'll go back to Earth. You'll find him again, and you'll have a screaming match that can be heard a mile away, and you'll get back together. I know you will. He never stopped, y'know. He still loves you. He just didn't want to see you kill yourself by going to Kerberos. I'll never have that with Lance. This is all the time I have left with him, and he doesn't even know it."

"I know it isn't the same. And I know how Adam felt about me going on the mission. We fought about it daily. But I knew that there was a small chance something could happen to me out there and I went anyway. I guess what I'm trying to say is that having to leave

someone you love is never easy, especially not like this. And I'm not going to make you leave, but you can't just stop taking care of yourself. You know Lance would never let you do that."

"I know. I know he wouldn't. But I can't leave him. It felt like he got calmer when I climbed in last night." Keith still hadn't moved, not even when he snapped at Shiro.

"Keith, don't do this. You heard yesterday. The only way he could recover is with a bonded mate. And as much as you might have wanted it, that's not you. You have to let him go. I don't want it either, but there's nothing we can do." Shiro's heart broke hearing Keith desperately holding onto whatever shred of hope he could. Lance's condition was terminal without a mate, and no amount of hope could change that.

Ril came trotting up the stairs then, coming up to Lance's bedside. He took in the scene in front of him, confused. "Was I mistaken in hearing that the blue paladin is unmated?" he asked.

"No," Shiro answered, knowing Keith would either stay silent or explode at the perceived intrusion, "It's – it's a bit more complicated than that."

Ril gestured to the far side of the room. Shiro nodded, leading the way. "I apologize. The red paladin seems very attached."

"He is," Shiro agreed, "But Keith realizing his feelings for Lance is a more recent development. Recent enough that he hadn't gotten to tell Lance yet. They aren't bonded, but I feel like Keith is mourning as though they were. He tried to tell me that Lance was 'calmer' after he got into bed with him last night."

Ril's surprise was written across his face. "Paladin Keith has been here since last night?"

Shiro nodded in confirmation. "He came up here after leaving dinner and hasn't left."

"For me to monitor Paladin Lance, I will need him to move. While Alefan is fatal without a mate, we need to continuously monitor the illness' progress to best keep him comfortable."

"Leave that to me. Keith has a temper at the best of times, but right now. . ."

"I understand," the healer said, allowing Shiro to go before him.

"Keith," Shiro said softly when he returned, "We need to keep track of how Lance is doing, and to do that, you need to get up. Please. I don't want to have to force this."

"I'm not leaving. You said you wouldn't make me," Keith answered.

"And you don't have to. But we need you out of the bed. Come on."

Keith allowed himself to be pulled away and settled into the chair. He found something warm in his hands as he watched Ril, and reluctantly sipped at the drink, not realizing until Shiro took the cup that he'd finished it. He sat there, desperately wanting to reach out.

Ril summoned the dome back into existence, but without the silvery fluid. He activated the screen, running through various scans, and then rerunning a few of them. He pulled up a second screen, comparing the readings from one screen against the other. After a careful study, he looked up.

“This does not make sense,” he said, “After a quintant, Paladin Lance’s condition should be worse, but it is not. It has not changed at all. Excuse me, I must confer with Healer Orri.”

The dome went down, and Ril ran down the stairs. Keith seized the opportunity, promptly crawling back in beside Lance.

“He’s an Omega, just like the other one,” Keith said to himself.

“What other one?” Shiro asked.

“The other healer from yesterday. The girl. I want to know what this means. What’s happening to Lance?” His voice was small, childlike. He had curled in on himself emotionally and was well on his way to shutting down completely.

“I don’t know. I just hope they do.”

Keith snuggled in more, his free hand returning to Lance’s chest to watch him breathe. Shiro sank into the chair to wait. Hunk and Pidge came in before Ril returned, looking for an update.

“Any news?” Pidge asked quietly.

“We don’t know yet. Ril said something about Lance’s condition not changing and then he left to talk to another healer about it,” Shiro answered.

Hunk pointed to where Keith was curled up with Lance, ignoring everything else in the room. Shiro followed his finger and sighed, shaking his head.

“Come with me,” he said, leading Hunk and Pidge to the other side of the round room.

“Don’t say anything to Keith about this, because he’s not taking any of this as well as you or I are. He’d only just realized that he’s in love with Lance and that his Alpha wants to claim Lance’s Omega. Lance didn’t know. So, even though they weren’t even dating or courting, Keith is mourning as though they were bonded. This is going to be particularly hard on him, so, please, be gentle with him.”

Pidge nodded, holding back new tears. She went to lean on Hunk, but he took a step back, an odd choked sound escaping him. Shiro just nodded, his normally perfect posture slipping. As an Omega, Pidge didn’t quite understand, but Hunk and Shiro did. They knew what it meant for Keith. His Alpha had locked on to Lance’s Omega. It had determined them perfectly compatible. Rejection would have been hard enough. Keith would be physically sick for about a week, but he would be fine. The emotional toll would take longer, but he would recover. But they had all seen what happened moments before Lance collapsed. None of them had quite known what it meant at the time, but they had a much better idea now. Keith’s Alpha had made the call to Lance’s Omega. It was a subconscious thing, Keith still

needed to ask Lance's permission to court him, but it had been done. Keith was in no state to answer as to whether or not Lance's Omega had responded, but it didn't matter. Alpha had called to Omega, and now Omega lay dying. There was a chance Keith might not survive for much longer after Lance succumbed.

Pidge understood Alpha/Omega mate calls from the Omega side of things. She knew what would happen if the roles were reversed. If Keith was dying from an Alpha-only terminal condition. She knew that it was certainly possible for Lance to recover from losing an Alpha his Omega had called to. But she also knew that the Omega's heartbreak could kill Lance, and that if it didn't, many committed suicide, unable to live with the pain. While she was hoping that it wasn't the case, she had a feeling it might be.

Ril returned soon after with another healer. She seemed both ancient and timeless, her hair appearing either ash blond or nearly white depending on how she turned. Fine lines of age appeared or disappeared the same way. The paladins were stunned, finding her age impossible to determine.

She swept in to the room ahead of Ril, moving quickly to Lance's bedside. Pulling up the screen panel, she looked over Ril's readings. He pointed things out to her and she either nodded or shook her head. She had completely ignored Keith's presence. There was no way of knowing what she thought until she spoke, and when she did, it was to Keith directly.

Sitting in the chair beside him, she leaned over, gently placing a hand on his arm. "Peace, paladin. I am Orri, head of the Order of Healers. I have a question that I must have the answer to. But first, Healer Ril tells me that you and the Blue Paladin are not mated. There is no bond between your Alpha and his Omega?"

Keith shook his head almost imperceptibly. "No." His voice was a rough whisper. "My Alpha called to his Omega. His Omega started to respond, but he passed out before it could finish."

"I am sorry, but I need to know what that answer was. However much of it you heard," Orri said, her voice soft.

Keith took a shaky breath. "I think – I think my Alpha knew there was something wrong. When it called, Lance's Omega tried to answer. I heard – felt – its pain, regret, and its longing for my Alpha. But Lance collapsed before his Omega could accept. My Alpha hasn't stopped howling."

Orri nodded, thinking. "And you said that he felt calmer after you lay beside him last night. What happened to make you feel this?"

"Nothing really. He felt upset when I came in. Scared. After I got in with him, it was still there, but quieter. What does it mean?"

"I am unsure. I have never seen anything like this in my eight hundred decaphoebs. But it is clear that your presence has a beneficial effect, and I will not discourage that. I must study this further. I will tell you myself when I learn anything."

Keith nodded slightly, not wanting to miss a breath. Rising, Orri gently placed her hand on his forearm as she had done before, and left taking a copy of the readings with her. Shiro came back, without Hunk or Pidge. He dropped into the chair, leaning in close.

“We’re going to head back to Allura and Coran. We still need to make sure the system is safe from Galra threat and iron out the details of Avhen joining the Coalition. I’ll come by later to keep you updated. No one is going to make you leave him. I’ve thought it over, and I think he needs you. I don’t want to give you, or any of us, false hope, but I think he needs you. Stay here. Be with him. I’ll be by later.”

Hunk and Pidge both came back after Shiro had indicated that it was ok. They were torn between wanting to stay and needing to go. Even with Keith staying, they didn’t want to leave Lance, even if they found it difficult to look at him directly. But they were still Paladins of Voltron and they had a job to do. It was why they’d come to the Tir’Na system to begin with. Pidge hugged Keith as best she could, Hunk giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze before they left with Shiro. After Ril finally left and Keith was alone with Lance, he curled in closer, held on tighter, and willed his tears to remain unshed. His Alpha’s howling had died down into a heartbroken cry, just as unwilling to accept the loss of its Omega as Keith was unwilling to accept losing Lance. After a while of watching Lance’s soft, regular breathing, he realized that the low, keening cry was coming from him and not just his Alpha. He knew immediately what that meant. Both he and his Alpha were too far gone and wouldn’t survive Lance’s death.

## Chapter End Notes

Greetings, my supernatural creatures! Another first chapter from my dusty archive, but a long one. If any of you are following either *Our Life in Pictures* and/or *All I Need*, I haven't given up on those! I am still working on them and will (hopefully) be updating them soon. But until then, have 14k words of angst, I'm so sorry. I love my blue and red boys and don't like being so awful to them, but it will all work out.

# How Much You Are Loved

## Chapter Notes

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

The remaining three Paladins, Allura, Coran, Idwen, and Annon gathered in a light-filled meeting room in the palace to discuss the Coalition and Galra threat. But Lance was still at the forefront, everyone wanting an update on his condition and how Keith was holding up.

“Keith’s doing about as well as we can expect,” Shiro said, but then realized that only Hunk and Pidge knew about Keith’s newly realized feelings. He hesitated, debating whether he should tell them, but decided that they should know. “I’m not sure at this point how he’ll feel about me telling you this, but Keith realized recently that he’d fallen in love with Lance and that his Alpha wanted to claim Lance’s Omega. It’s why he won’t leave. He’s mourning as though they were bonded, and I don’t know if he’ll be strong enough to make it through.”

They all understood. They would most likely be losing two Paladins before long. Hunk and Pidge had understood before, but hearing it spelled out like that wasn’t any easier the second time around. Allura closed her eyes, steadying herself, Coran placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. Hunk led Pidge to an open seat, taking the one beside her. Idwen waited until everyone was settled before starting. Changing the subject so abruptly was harsh, she knew that, but the Galra threat still loomed, and she still needed to protect her planet and people.

“Princess Allura, there were many things we discussed yesterday about our pledge to join the Voltron Coalition. One thing you should know about Avhen is that this planet is a sentient organism. A cousin, of sorts, to the Balmeras.”

“And the the crystals, the Synelite, are what the planet produces, like the Balmeras?” Hunk asked, excited by the new information.

“Yes, although Avhen has two types of crystal. Rianine powers our technology. But Synelite is a quintessence amplifier and is used to boost the Rianine. We only use small amounts of each crystal to minimize the ecological impact to the surface and also to protect the organism. I am certain that our Synelite’s quintessence-related properties are why the Galra empire is so interested.”

“And, of course, as a part of the Coalition, you and your people can expect protection from our other planets and systems, the rebel forces when they’re able, and naturally, Voltron itself,” Allura said.

Everyone was all too aware of what she didn’t say – that they would be needing to find two new Paladins in the not-too-distant future. The unspoken words hung heavy in the air. None of them had thought that discussing the Coalition would bring them right back around to their impending loss. But without Voltron, the Coalition would never have existed in the first place. Neither Idwen nor Annon were immune, despite only having just met Team Voltron. And while Idwen didn’t want to add to the grief felt by the Paladins along with Allura and Coran, she needed answers.



Avhen's queen tapped the surface of her tablet, retrieving her research while allowing her guests to compose themselves as best they could. When she found the files she was looking for, Idwen projected them to the space above the middle of the table. The first of the records was the personnel files of the lost crew. The rest of the team looked up with interest, but Hunk choked when he saw the grid of nine names and faces.

"You recognize one of them?" Idwen asked.

"I – yeah. Top row. The middle one."

She tapped the tablet again, expanding the file. The face in the picture was kind, gentle, and intelligent. There was a softness to its lines and curves that implied warmth and caring. Hunk was well aware that all of that was true, along with a fierce protective streak that dared anyone to cross it. The only real differences he could see were the more coral skin tone and delicately pointed ears of her race.

"Her name is Nera. She was one of two mission commanders. I remember all of the crews that went, but I remember her in particular. She had this ability to command while still being gentle and caring. May I ask how you know her?"

Hunk stared at the face on the projected screen as though he was willing her to be there in the room with them. "I know her as Elena. She, um, she's Lance's mother. And she's still like that. I always thought that skill came with raising five kids, but I guess she already knew how."

"I heard you and Paladin Pidge talking yesterday. I still don't quite understand how she and her crew have managed to blend in for so long. I apologize for the way this sounds, but you humans are very different from us. They must have found it rather difficult being the only non-humans on the planet."

The entire assembled Team Voltron shared a look between themselves, knowing more about extragalactic races on Earth than almost anyone else.

"That's not exactly accurate," Allura began carefully, "I do have to admit that we haven't mentioned it before, not out of any intention to hide, but because we no longer think much on it. Especially after yesterday's – events – it didn't seem the time to bring it up." She took a breath, knowing how what she had to say would sound. "Keith is at least partly Galra, born on Earth and raised human. He had no knowledge of his heritage until we encountered a Galra rebel faction known as the Blade of Marmora."

Idwen was stunned by the news. She would never have known of Keith's non-human lineage if they hadn't told her. And hearing of a rebel faction within the Galra was another surprise. "I was unaware that there were Galra fighting against their own people."

"And so were we," Shiro said, "Until we met one of them. Keith has joined their ranks while continuing to be a Paladin of Voltron. They mostly work in information gathering and espionage – they're a stealth-based organization. Their only real requirement to join them is Galra blood, along with a test of sorts. But the genetic proof comes from being able to interact with a particular type of metal. Keith has a blade that was passed down by the

mother he never met, one that came from the Blade of Marmora. We don't hold it against him. We can't. Especially not now."

"I will admit, it was a shock when I first heard it, and a part of me wanted to hate him for it." The three Paladins and Coran all snapped to look at Allura as she spoke but allowed her to continue. "The Galra destroyed my home and family and continue on their path of destruction throughout the universe. But none of that is Keith's fault, and I can't blame him for what Zarkon and those who follow him have done. He wants Zarkon gone as much as anyone."

Annon slipped her hand into her mate's, the queen at a loss for words. "This is a surprise. But you are more than correct, Princess Allura. A person's origins do not dictate their actions or behavior."

"Thank you, my love, for finding the words when I could not." Idwen turned to the table. "Was I correct in hearing that Paladin Lance's condition has not changed at all?"

"Yes, but we currently have no idea why," Shiro answered, "Keith said something about Lance 'calming' when he went back last night. I didn't know what to make of it, and neither did your healer Ril. He brought in another healer, Orri. She looked over the scans Ril did and spoke with Keith briefly, but I don't know any more than that."

"Orri is the head of the Order of Healers. If anyone on Avhen can figure it out, it's her –" Idwen was interrupted by someone quickly entering the meeting room carrying one of the Avhenal tablets. She bore a striking resemblance to both Idwen and Annon, her long, silky hair a few shades darker. "Riana, love, what is it?"

"Excuse me, Mother, but Healer Orri wanted you to see this immediately." Riana handed the tablet to Idwen and then seated herself near the head of the table.

With the projected screen still up, Lance's mother staring into the room from 700 years earlier, Idwen activated the new tablet, a smaller screen for personal view projected. She immediately recognized the images of the scans, both timestamped. One was from the day before, when Lance had first been brought to the healing tower, and the other from that morning, showing the same readings. When she finished, Riana reached over.

"There's more," she said, activating another screen from the tablet.

The second screen contained a report from Orri. In it, she says that there may be a potential solution. One that utilizes Synelite in an experimental treatment. Idwen continued reading, fully invested in the hypothesis.

*"...Having gone over the readings from yesterday and this morning, and after speaking with Paladin Keith and conducting my own research, I believe there may be an option for treatment..."*

*"...Paladin Keith told me of the call his Alpha made to Paladin Lance's Omega shortly before his collapse. He said that his Alpha made the call, and that he could feel the desire to accept from Paladin Lance's Omega, but that he fell unconscious before it could respond..."*

*“...I believe that this tenuous bond could possibly be amplified by an experimental use of Synelite. The bond itself is only the barest thread, but I believe that it may be enough. The Synelite’s unique properties should act as a boost for the bond...”*

*“...Paladin Keith **must** be made aware of the possibility of success and failure and the repercussions of both. There is by no means any way to know if my theory is correct, and he must be prepared for that...”*

Idwen sat back in her chair, processing the information. When she felt she could explain, she began. “Healer Orri may have discovered a potential treatment for Paladin Lance,” she said carefully, “However, it is something that has never been attempted before. Or even thought of. We have no idea what may happen.” She turned to her daughter. “Riana, send for Healer Orri.”

Riana left the room briefly, returning to her mother’s side. Idwen closed the tablets’ screens, fully realizing her daughter’s presence.

“Forgive me,” she said to her guests, “Our daughter Riana. Riana, Princess Allura of Altea, her Royal Advisor Coran, and the Paladins of Voltron – Black Paladin Shiro, Green Paladin Pidge, and Yellow Paladin Hunk.”

The princess rose, repeating the greeting of her parents the day before, then seated herself. “I am honored to meet you, although I wish it were under different circumstances.”

“And we as well,” Allura agreed. “May I ask, are you a healer as well?”

“I have only just passed my two-hundredth decaphoeb and am nearing the end of my studies under Lady Orri, but yes, I will be a full-fledged healer soon.”

“Congratulations,” Allura replied just as Orri walked in.

“Orri. I was hoping you could explain the theory and concept behind the treatment you propose. I’m not sure I quite understand it,” Idwen said, inviting the elder healer to seat herself.

Orri looked the table over before beginning. “Well, as we all know, Synelite is a quintessence booster. While matebonds aren’t directly related to quintessence, it’s still something everyone has. My theory is that with the use of Synelite, we may be able to strengthen the weak connection the Blue and Red Paladins have. Hopefully, it will be enough to simulate something close enough to a matebond, and, if successful, will allow Paladin Lance to recover. I also believe that two pieces of the same crystal will better facilitate that bond. Understand that this is completely uncharted territory, and the chance of success is a small one.”

The Paladins’ and Alteans’ eyes met, and they knew they were all thinking the same thing. *Should we try this, knowing that it may fail anyway? We all want what’s best for both Lance **and** Keith. Will an attempt and failure push Keith over the edge completely? But then, there is still the chance of success. Shouldn’t we give Lance that shot at survival? It’s what he*

*would want. He's too much of a fighter to give up. But it isn't only our decision to make. Keith loves Lance in a way that we don't, and his voice needs to be heard.*

Shiro was the first to break the silence and looked up to meet Orri's gaze. "Is there anything else we should know about the potential treatment?"

"No," she said, "Either I am correct, and the Synelite will bolster their bond and allow Paladin Lance to recover, or it will not."

"I think I speak for all of us here when I say that it's a risk we're willing to take. But I would like to speak to Keith privately first. He was defensive this morning and I'm worried he may become aggressive because of his mourning. I know how to handle him, and I don't want the chance of anyone getting hurt by his lashing out."

"Understandable, Paladin Shiro," Idwen said, "Please, let us know what Paladin Keith has to say."

Shiro nodded once, rising from the table. He knew it would be a difficult conversation to have, especially given the state Keith was in when they left him. But it was one that needed to happen. They wanted to give Lance whatever way they could to survive but getting through to Keith might prove difficult. He thought these things over on his way to the healing tower but froze when he reached to the top of the stairs for the floor Lance was on.

Keith was keening.

Shiro felt his heart seize with fear. The fear that they were too late. That Lance was gone. Either way, he needed to know, and forced himself to continue into the room. Keith was still where Shiro had left him, curled around Lance with a gentle hand on his chest, watching the regular breathing. Shiro felt himself breathe again when he realized that Lance was still with them. But then his breath caught, realizing what the keening meant. The mourning cry that meant that Keith would not survive Lance's death. Shiro steeled himself for the coming conversation, knowing how difficult it would be, but also reaffirmed his resolution to give Lance his best shot at survival.

He settled into the chair at Lance's bedside facing Keith's back. It broke his heart to hear that cry. No one Keith's age should ever make that sound, and no one that age should be in the condition that causes it. But Shiro reminded himself that it was why he was there. He knew better than to use physical touch, and gently projected his petrichor and ginger scent, lacing it with a soft reassurance. Keith neither responded nor stopped his keen, but it was the best Shiro could do.

"Keith," he said softly.

Nothing.

"Keith. I need to talk to you. It's important."

Silence but for the keening.

“Please. At least let me know you hear me.”

Still no answer.

After several minutes of trying everything and nothing, talking and silence, Shiro played his last card.

“We-we think we may have found something that could help Lance. Possibly give him a chance to recover.”

Keith still didn’t answer, but his cry softened, and Shiro noticed a small nudge of his familiar spiced smoke scent. The sandalwood note was dimmed, and Shiro knew that Keith wasn’t fully aware. He knew that Keith wouldn’t be able to understand what Shiro needed to tell him, but it was a start. He slid the chair closer, but Keith tensed and his scent retreated, so he stopped. Shiro continued, making small adjustments in his scent and proximity over the course of the next hour. He didn’t speak again until Keith’s cry faded into almost nothing and the sandalwood note had returned to his scent.

“Keith? You with me?”

“Yeah.” His voice was soft and rough, barely above a whisper.

“Did you understand what I said earlier? About there being a chance?”

“No.”

“The last healer who was here, Orri, she thinks she’s found a way that could possibly treat this. The Synelite crystals that the Galra were after work as a quintessence booster. She said that it could potentially strengthen your bond with Lance and allow him to recover. But I need you to understand that this has never been done before and we have no idea what might happen. It may well fail. But as small as it is, there is a chance, and I think we owe it to him to try. And even if it doesn’t work, we’ll know that we never gave up on him.”

Keith still didn’t move, but a small note of hope crept through his scent. Its brightness was dimmed by fear and his mourning, but it was there.

“My Alpha called to him,” he said after a minute.

“What?” Shiro asked, not entirely sure he heard what he thought he had.

“My Alpha called to his Omega, but it was right before he collapsed, and his Omega didn’t get to finish. But it wanted to. Lance’s Omega wanted my Alpha. I can’t give up on him. What do we have to do?”

This wasn’t entirely new information. Shiro heavily suspected that it had been what he saw moments before Lance fell unconscious. It was what he’d told Hunk and Pidge, and everyone else after that, although it had been an assumption based on what he could piece together from the little that Keith shared. But now it was confirmed, and it didn’t make him feel any better. If the treatment failed and Lance died, Keith wouldn’t be far behind. The mourning cry he’d walked into told him that it was inevitable, treatment or no.

“I’m not entirely certain. All I know is that is has something to do with using your natural quintessence to strengthen your tentative bond with Lance.” Shiro paused, thinking. “Did- did you talk to Orri about the mate call?”

“Mhm. She asked about it. Wanted to know if there was any kind of connection, so I told her. When are we starting?”

“As soon as I go back and tell them about our conversation. We all knew that we wanted to try, but we wanted your input as well. We all love Lance like family, but what you feel for him is different. More than family. I’ll be back soon. We’re not giving up, Keith. On either of you.”

Keith nodded slightly. It was the first movement Shiro had seen out of his adopted little brother since practically dragging him out of bed that morning. It was a step in the right direction.

Shiro made his way back to the meeting room and walked in on a conversation about the logistics surrounding the inevitable return of the Galra to Avhen. Tir’Na was close to the Seelic Sum system – allies of Avhen – and Idwen was fairly certain she could convince the planetary leaders to join the Coalition. Orri and Riana had gone, and the conversation was primarily between Idwen and Allura, the others joining in when they felt they had something to add. The seven still gathered collectively looked up when Shiro returned.

He sighed, leaning forward to rest his hands on the back of an empty chair. “I shouldn’t have said anything without confirmation, but I have it now. Keith and his Alpha *did* make the call to Lance and his Omega. Keith has fully agreed to the treatment, but...”

“But?” Pidge asked, worried.

“When I got to the tower...Keith was...well, he was keening. I was afraid that Lance had already passed, but he hasn’t. But we all know what this means. If this treatment fails, we’ll lose them both.”

Shiro couldn’t look at any of them. Losing Lance was hard enough, but the prospect of losing Keith hit him harder than he thought. This was the 12-year-old boy he’d met one day during a trip to a local middle school. The one who outflew all his classmates and more than a few established Garrison cadets on his first run in the simulator. The boy who got bored and hacked Shiro’s car, taking off in it when no one was looking. The boy he loved like a little brother and had practically raised since that day.

He was vaguely aware of the sound of wood scraping across smooth stone and was then far more aware of small arms wrapping around his waist, much larger arms enveloping the whole of his upper body. Shiro let go of the chair, wrapping an arm around Pidge’s petite form and hooking the other over Hunk’s shoulder, welcoming the support of his pack.

Shiro realized with a start that that was what they were. And they were whether they had realized it or not. It may have formed accidentally, but it was theirs. But things were starting to make sense on that front. The lounge had effectively become the pack nest. Pillows and blankets had migrated in, cluttering the space, but bringing a sense of communal comfort.

Articles of clothing tended to be left behind, saturating the area with their scents. There was no formal pack bond, but Shiro decided that it was something that needed to change.

“Thanks, guys,” he said quietly, “I think when all this is over, we need to make a formal pack bond. We are one already, we just need to make it official.”

Both Pidge and Hunk froze with surprise and realization.

“Holy shit we are,” Pidge breathed.

“We’ll do it for Lance and Keith. No matter what happens,” Hunk said, tightening his grip on Shiro and Pidge.

The three Paladins felt two more pairs of arms joining them. Allura and Coran had gotten up, adding to the physical and emotional support of one of their Alphas. He wasn’t sure if either of them understood packbonds but had his answer soon enough.

“I don’t know if there’s a human word for it, but on Altea we called it a valnos. A group of individuals with a bond like family,” Coran said.

“We call it a pack,” Pidge explained, “And yeah, that’s what we are. Don’t know how you did it on Altea, but we have certain things we do to formalize the bond. Maybe we can combine traditions?”

“I’d like that,” Allura answered, “Once our family is whole again.”

“We won’t give up on either of them,” Hunk asserted, a note of finality in his softened voice.

“Never,” Shiro agreed, “We should be with them for this.”

The newly realized pack murmured their concordance and reluctantly separated, finding that Idwen and Annon gave them as much privacy as possible while still in the room. They spoke quietly together about how best to approach the planetary leaders of the Seelic Sum system but looked up when the pack turned to them.

“I am certainly curious to see Orri’s treatment, but this is a private time for all of you. She and the healers will keep us informed. I wish you the grace of the gods and the best of luck,” Idwen said with a warm, serene smile.

“Thank you, Priestess,” Allura replied. Her words were polite, but her tone and shifts in her soft floral scent told of the weight of her emotions.

“Go in peace.”

Allura led the pack out and back to the healing tower. The room was quiet when they arrived, save for the soft conversation between Riana, Niha, Ril, and Orri at the other end of the floor’s space. Keith stayed curled around Lance, still watching the rise and fall of his breathing. Shiro retook the chair he’d settled into earlier while Hunk and Pidge perched on the wide, deep windowsill. Allura and Coran chose to remain standing, keeping a watchful eye on their valnos. The four healers noted their presence, coming over to join them. The

three Paladins noticed that Orri carried a simple, flat wooden box with her. She greeted the trio with a nod and a gentle smile but turned and addressed Keith directly.

She opened the box, presenting him with a pair of dusty-violet velvet chokers, connected by delicate chains to a 7-pointed silvery crystal. “Purple is associated with both healing and quintessence, and the seven points represent our seven mother gods, the original Omegas who gave life to Avhen. The crystals must stay in contact with your skin at all times. They must resonate with your quintessence in order to strengthen your bond.”

Keith shifted, letting go of Lance for the first time since that morning. After finishing with the nearly invisible clasp on his own choker, he took the other. His scent pulsed toward everyone around him, a coppery tang letting them know without words that he was protective of his Omega and to keep back. Keith slipped the choker on, letting his fingers brush against soft skin. As soon as he finished, he settled back down, curling around Lance and taking his hand.

“One last thing. Even if you were bonded, it would take a few quintants for him to wake, so do not be concerned if he doesn’t immediately.” Orri shifted her attention to the three other healers gathered. “Because of the experimental nature of this treatment, we will need constant monitoring of Paladin Lance’s condition. There will be a four-shift rotation.”

“I wish to volunteer,” Riana said.

“As do I,” Niha added.

“And I as well,” Ril joined in.

“Niha, please, ask your brother to join the rotation? I know how dedicated Mac’lir is to his research, but this does certainly lie within his specialty.” It was a request made by the senior healer, but there was also a fond exasperation in her voice toward Niha’s brother.

“Yes, of course,” she agreed, fully understanding the source of the good-natured annoyance.

“If I may, I would like to take the first watch,” Riana said.

“Yes, absolutely. We will coordinate a rotation schedule.” She leaned over and placed a hand on Keith’s forearm. “I wish you the grace of the gods and the best of luck.”

Orri, Niha, and Ril left, and a tension settled into the air. The copper in Keith’s scent was muted but still present, a gentle reminder not to get too close. The pack stayed there in silence for some time, waiting. Riana kept herself busy with her tablet from her seat on the other side of the bed. After connecting her device to the scanners built into Lance’s bed, her tablet chimed softly. A few seconds later she looked up.

“My mother wants for you to know that the training arena is available for your use. I, or any of us on watch, will let you know if anything changes.”

Shiro let out the breath he didn’t know he was holding. “Thank you. We will take you up on that.”



“Shiro’s right. We can’t do anything to help with the process. It needs time. Why don’t we, as you say, blow off steam?” Allura said.

“Yeah, I guess we should do *something*,” Pidge relented, hopping down from the windowsill, “You coming, Hunk?”

“Yeah. Right behind you,” he said, following her.

The five of them filed out of the room and down the stairs, leaving Keith effectively alone with Lance. Shiro noticed that Keith’s keening had stopped. It was a relief, and he was cautiously hopeful that even if the treatment failed, his stubborn, willful little brother would be able to pull through.

Back in the healing tower, Keith curled closer around Lance, his fingers brushing over the crystal at the Omega’s throat. He sighed, almost contentedly, feeling that Lance was calmer than he had been, even if he was still just as warm to the touch. Keith was just drifting off to sleep when he felt it. A new strand to the fine thread of their connection. Small and cautious and laced with hope. But it wasn’t coming from him. It was coming from Lance.

## Chapter End Notes

Greetings, my critters! So sorry for how long this has taken. I came down with a nasty case of writer's block. Not just for this, but for all of my projects I have going here. I do usually write chapters to be about 5k words just because I feel like not overwhelming that way. So technically, chapter 1 was three chapters all at once. Anywho, I am absolutely going to keep going with this. Can't leave you all hanging, can I? Also, starting with the next chapter, I will be removing this from the Excerpts from a Scattered Mind series since it's now multi-chaptered.

And as usual, let me know! Comments, kudos, faery circles...

~Corvus

\*extra\* For the really depressing part that I realized: Elena/Nera is on Earth with no idea that Lance is on her homeworld dying. That actually hurt me to think about.

\*extra extra\* since canonically 1 tick = 1.4 seconds, that's how I calculate time, so the 700 years isn't a typo. 500 decaphoebs x 1.4 = 700 Earth years

CorvusRexWordpainter.Tumblr.com

## Status Update

Greetings, my critters. I wanted to let you all know that I haven't forgotten about this, and that I am still working on it. However, my mental and physical health have taken a hit recently and I haven't been able to write the way I want to. I will be back. I'm not abandoning the story. But for now, I need to take a step back to recover. Just know that I'm still picking at it in the background and that I love you all for hanging in there with me. Until then. . .

~Corvus

(Also, yes, I am posting this on all my fics, so if you follow more than one, it's the same thing all over again)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!