

Going Home? Question Mark?

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by [ForensicSpider98](#)

Summary

Lance, Keith, and their 'associates' give their farewells and prepare to leave.

Notes

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

Keith sits across from his mother, sipping some tea. Krolia watches him. He's very still, waiting patiently for her to speak. He's put his circlet back on, though not his Altean clothes, as they no longer fit. A part of her wonders if he has what it takes to be a leader. He always seems so gentle outside of combat.

Perhaps a little too gentle.

"Are you going to tell me, or are you two keeping it to yourselves for now?"

"Putting it like that sort of backs me into a corner," Keith observes. He worries his lip. "We're very excited, but I don't feel ready to celebrate yet."

"Because you don't want to feel sad if you miscarry," Krolia concludes.

Keith nods. Guilt stings at his hearts. "Lance is so happy. I don't know what I'll do if--"

"You're allowed to be happy, kitten." Krolia pushes some hair out of her son's face. "Thace's equipment only goes so far. A few movements ago, we weren't certain you could get pregnant. Now, you know you can, and you will have every possible chance of bringing this kit into the world."

"Right..." Gazing around his freshly cleaned den, Keith's visibly saddened. The windchimes are gone from outside; BleepBloop's climbing towers missing; the fireplace has been cleaned and scrubbed of soot. The den is empty, like it's never been lived in. It feels wrong.

"Keith? What--"

"I don't want to go," he whispers, throat tight and ready to choke him. "I want to stay here with all of you. I want to see Lance be happy and feel like himself."

"Feel like himself?" Krolia's ear cocks, trying to understand.

"When we return, Lance will become busy again, with no more excuses to delegate so much of his work. He'll sort through it, and give me the easy tasks so that he finds time to eat and sleep, and we'll be together, but apart all over again. He'll be distant, and coy, and never touch me unless we're alone and I'll hate it!" The young man sighs, tugs on a lock of his hair. "I know he's trying, but I don't know how to help him break out of these habits. I don't think he can do it alone, either. I don't want him to."

Krolia fixates on her son, watching his frustration over the rim of her cup. "This is my fault. No one ever told you what being a bearer means on Altea, did they?"

"Obviously I know what it means--"

"No, you don't." Krolia's stare is *searing*. "Pregnancy is *power*, Keith. A good man or not, the crown prince is no different than any other Altean sire. You carry his progeny, and he will worship at your feet. He will give you anything you ask for. If you want to be his fawned-over, spoiled pet, tell him. If you want power, tell him. If you want luxury, tell him. If you

want to share in his duties, tell him. If you want him to hold you, keep you close all the days of his life, tell him. Whatever you want, he *will* give it to you.”

“Momma. That’s...”

“That’s survival, kitten. You have power over him. He’s desperate for heirs. After your first kit, hold out on him. You’ll have whatever you want.”

“Momma, what I *want* is my mate. By my side. Sharing my life.” Keith sips his tea. “I understand what you’re saying. And I understand that you still have concerns about me mated to an Altean, and living on Altea. But I *promise*, Momma. I *promise* I don’t have to manipulate Lance into giving me things that I need. I can just ask.”

He waits until his mother meets his gaze. When she does, her eyes are so very sad. Sad for everything they’re still struggling to build between them. He taps his fingers against the clay of his cup, tries to find a way to explain why he’s not worried about having to ask for things.

“You know, when I first arrived, I spent the first movement avoiding everyone, including Lance. I didn’t realize it at the time, but he was watching me. Asking the guards about me. He must have asked the gardeners, or was approached, because it’s the only way he found out about this flower I stole from a greenhouse.” Keith laughs. “The next thing I know this garden he built for me is full of orchids. I kept finding new blankets and pillows, uh. Puzzles. Random trinkets. Raw crystals. Snacks.

“We’re addressing his control issues, obviously, but... He was so desperate to make me comfortable, to make it easier. He cared about me even then. I don’t need to manipulate or use him to get what I need or want. Chances are he’ll give it to me before I even ask.”

“I hope you’re right. I *do* think better of him. But he wears the face of the species that slaughtered your father. My mate.”

“Are you sure we shouldn’t be blaming my uncle for that?” Keith asks, steady, completely serious.

“An excellent question, kitten. One I ask more every quintant.” The soldier woman gets to her feet. “We should go and meet your mate and your friends. It’s about time for you to leave and we need to stop by my den on our way to the Compound.”

Keith nods, reluctantly following his mother to her own den. BleepBloop is already on their ship, ready for Altea. It’s on the edge of the community. No one *owns* dens, or even has an ancestral den anymore. Too many people have left, or died. A den becomes empty, and whoever’s lived on the fringes the longest gets to move inward if they like.

“I have something for you,” Krolia tells him. “I suppose, in a way, you have your mate to thank for this. Perhaps you can educate him about it.”

“Okay?”

“Wait here.” Krolia ducks inside her den, coming back out seconds later with a very small wolf cub. “So your mate decided to save an orphaned wolf cub, which was incredibly honorable and respectful of him, but his mother’s companion could not find a surrogate for him, and now he needs a home. The hunter decided that since your mate saved him, you two might like to have him.”

“I-” Keith gulps. Being offered a cub is an extreme honor, especially as an outsider. And the cub is *cute*. He takes the animal from his mother, rubbing his ears, looking him over. “I love him already. So much.”

Not that he could turn down a wolf cub even if he wanted to. Especially not this one, the one that carries not only a piece of his mother's life force, but Lance's as well. He strokes the wolf’s midnight fur, working a tangle out of the pale blue ruff circling around the animal’s neck and down his back. The cub stares up at him with brilliant, golden eyes.

“I knew you two didn’t have the time for him, so I told Lance I’d keep him here. It was his idea to give him to you today. I guess he thought it might make going home easier.”

“It doesn’t,” Keith whispers. “But it’s still something. Stupid idiot, he’s really toeing that line between secret and surprise.” He holds the cub up to his face, smiling. “You had a rough start, huh?” The cub licks his nose. “Me too. Don’t worry. It gets so much better.” Keith smirks. “Finally someone to take BleepBloop down a peg. He’s gonna be so jealous-”

Keith’s comms unit buzzes in his pocket, a message from Adam: *It’s time to go*. He takes a deep breath. “Well, little one. Wanna come with me to Altea?”

The animal licks at his face again, tail wagging. Keith grins, cuddles the cub close. Yeah, he’s keeping this little guy.

Keith stalls on his way to the compound, stopping to talk to people, ask a few carefully worded questions about the political climate and what the villagers think of Lance, ask if those thoughts have spread. It’s good news. It means their kit will be a little safer.

“So... Lunch last quintant was a thing, huh?” Lance nibbles at his breakfast. He’s in Allura’s sitting room, one of the few rooms she and Lotor have deemed safe from prying eyes and ears. Meaning Lotor and Pidge searched the room from top to bottom.

Allura nods, eating as quickly and as much as her manners will allow. “It really was quite something.”

“What do you think?”

“I think...” Allura wipes her mouth with her napkin. “I think I should stay closer to Lotor and keep a closer eye on Romelle. I think you should keep an eye on yourself and keep closer to Keith.” She gives her brother a meaningful look.

“Was it that obvious?”

“No. The others wouldn’t have caught it. But I know you, and I know Keith. I could tell... Are you trying to keep it quiet?”

“For now. Keith may very well miscarry and feels too uncertain to make an announcement.” Lance sips his tea.

“And?” Allura gives her brother a pointed look. Lance sighs.

“And the longer we can hide this, the longer our child will be safe. The moment Alfor and Zarkon know, our baby’s future will be dictated to us.” Lance leans forward in his seat, expression tense. “Remember our cousin, Griffin? His son is four years old and rumor is Alfor’s already made an arrangement. Keeping it quiet means I have time to come up with something myself, or pass some legislation under the table to protect the rights of our children. We only have a few movements until the thaw, and I’ve just got ideas, nothing written.”

“Do you plan on including Nibling in that?” Allura asks, gesturing to her belly with her spoon. “Because frankly I don’t like the way Honerva’s been looking at me lately. Lotor doesn’t like it either.”

“Of course. Anyone possessing Altean blood, or under Altean rule.” Lance frowns. “How long do you have?”

It’s a more difficult question than it seems. Galra gestation is only five phoebs, their children born small-bodied, vulnerable and useless with eyes and ears still shut. Altean infants gestate for a decaphoeb and a half- three times as long. They’re born hearing and seeing, ready to learn how to walk and talk.

“Well, I’m about six phoebs along... We’re guessing six more, judging by their development.”

Lance nods. “I don’t know how long we have. I just- I want us to be safe and happy.”

“Lance...” Allura taps her finger on the table. “You don’t remember what Mother was like. She wasn’t at all how she’s described. I mean, she was kind and all that, but she was also wild and very strong. A powerful leader and presence. She didn’t die by accident, Lance. Her death was on purpose. When she was assassinated, they chose her for a reason.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Safe and happy are not available to us. Be respected instead. Be the type of leader that people will kill on purpose, because of *who* you are, not *what* you are. That’s how you can best protect our children. Be feared and respected.”

Lance nods, licks his lips. “I should visit Romelle before I go.”

Allura sighs. “I’d appreciate it if you would... I know father was lying about looking for more possible solutions. It was unusually kind of him.”

“I... had a screaming fit with him before we left Altea. I think I got through to him. Somewhat. He’s still Alfor, but he’s a slightly less frustrating Alfor.”

Allura laughs through her nose. “We must take what we can get.” She meets her brother’s gaze. “I am going to miss you, brother.”

“I’ll miss you, too.” Lance rises to his feet, giving his sister a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll come visit again when I can.”

“So... When I make you an uncle?”

Lance grimaces. “Or when Keith makes you an aunt.”

The princess nods, tucking a loose curl behind her ear. They stay like that for a long moment, Lance standing, Allura sitting, missing each other, still in the same room. This woman, his sister, raised him, loved him, supported every one of his choices, even if she disagreed.

Sometimes, he still feels lost without her.

“I love you, Lance.”

“Love you too, ‘Lura.” Lance kisses her cheek again, slips his hand from hers as he heads for the door. “I’ll see you again soon.”

Across the hall, in another room, Lance finds an even sadder affair. Romelle is sitting by a sunny window in yet another red stone room, eyes staring into some unfathomable distance. Despite her vacant expression, she’s visibly well cared for. Her hair is groomed and braided how she always wore it before and she’s clean. Her clothes are fresh, fingernails files short and round so she can’t hurt herself.

He wonders if she still knows how loved she is.

“Hey, Romelle. I just thought I’d come say goodbye. We’re leaving today, so...”

Lance sits in the chair opposite the frail woman, disrupting his sister’s imprinted shadow. Before he knows it, Lance’s eyes are stinging, welling with tears. He grew up playing with this woman, watching her and Allura fall in love. She was so, so young when she went on that final voyage with Alfor, and she won’t ever get better. Not hoping for conversation, Lance elects to sit quietly and keep his friend company for a while-

“Are you afraid of the water?”

“I-” Lance blinks, unsure of the proper response. He takes a chance on the truth. “No, I’m not afraid of the water. I love the water.”

Romelle hums, skeptical, quizzical. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t be. You would not even be aware.”

“Beg pardon?”

“What has come to pass will pass again... the love story theirs and yours are so very fond of. Only neither of you knows it.”

“Romelle-”

“Generations of flesh give way to the rebirth of souls... The guardian waits for the descendants.”

“...I understand,” Lance lies. It’s easy, like lying to a small child, promising that there are no monsters outside their door. He stands, having had as much as he can bear. He gently squeezes the woman’s hand.

“Do not fear the water,” Romelle whispers. “Even submerged, you will still burn.”

“Good, uh.” Lance clears his throat. “Good to know.”

As Lance leaves to gather Pidge and Adam and say goodbye to Lotor, Shiro, Thace, Ulaz, and a few other Blades, he can’t quite shake the anxiety. He struggles to convince himself that Romelle is unwell, just spouting random nonsense from her collapsing mind.

He doesn’t quite succeed.

Sooner or later, Keith finds himself in the courtyard where they arrived, the ship open, revealing a number of packages- gifts and other items they’ve accumulated since their arrival. Lance is talking with Thace and Kolivan, hands animated, eyes shining. Whatever they’re discussing, Lance is excited for it.

“Keith.” Krolia turns him to face her, grips his shoulder tight. “Listen to me carefully. Are you listening?”

Keith turns to his mother, nods, holds the wolf cub closer between them, petting his head.

“You train this animal well. You keep him close. Do not trust anyone except the crown prince... There is something in the stars. I have seen it. All we can do is brace ourselves and wait.”

“What do you mean?” Keith whispers, fear trickling like ice down his spine.

“I *mean* that the sociopolitical strain on Daibazaal is reaching a breaking point, and none of us are prepared. There are enemies in every corner, and fools behind and beside them. You are carrying the hopes and dreams of an entire civilization in your womb. Know your place, even if it is to run.”

“I-” Keith gulps, nods. “I will... I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, kitten.” Krolia embraces her son, kisses his temple. “You tell that Altean of yours I’m allowed to visit, because I can and will.”

“Okay. Just let us know you’re coming. There’s an entry medical procedure.”

“Noted. I see your mate-”

“Ready to go, beloved?” Lance slips an arm around his waist.

“Not really,” Keith whispers.

The Altean’s smile is so, so sad and so very gentle. “Me neither. But we’ll come back soon; I promise.”

“I know.” Keith doesn’t want to ask for one more trip before their kit is born, but he imagines Lance is already trying to set up the same thing. Lifting his gaze, he spies Adam, holding both of Shiro’s hands. They’re talking quietly.

He’s not the only one breaking his heart today. As he watches, Pidge trots up to the Altean, tugs on his vest, gently whispers that it’s time to go. The look on Adam’s face is inscrutable as he nods, leans up, whispers something in Shiro’s ear before he slips away and onto the ship. The conflicted expression on Shiro’s face tells Keith it was a tender confession. His heart breaks for his littermate and for Adam, who finally found each other only for them to be kept apart by duty and honor.

As the ship lifts off the ground, Lance catches Keith sniffing into his new pet’s fur, trying to hide it. The crown prince doesn’t question the cub’s presence, having known about it the whole time. Instead he just holds his husband close, lets him cry.

There’s not a whole lot else he can do. Pidge’s feelers creep over his hands, investigating them both. They hum, soft enough to barely register, sitting quiet for a moment before going to watch Altea loom larger and larger before them. They whisper quietly to Adam, who only shakes his head.

Leaving here is far harder than leaving Altea.

End Notes

Next time on Love After the Fact: Some kind of fluff, but I'm not sure yet. Open to suggestions! <3<3<3

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