

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 11: A Lion Falls – Part I

Author's Chapter Notes:
WEP owns Voltron. Rated R

The physical pain from the battle aboard the Maelstrom eased as the voyage on the Lion's Den continued. Keith remained aloof, but the crew clearly revered him as they offered food and wine. He continued to observe the captain and his charges, noting that the ship often sailed itself and raucous activities ensued. The crew had invented games of word, wit, and speed to occupy long days under the summer sun. Captain Hame often joined them, laughing and competing among the circle.

Keith watched as the sailors and their captain sat together at the bow, quickly throwing out words jumbled in random arrangements. A standing invitation had been extended to Keith, but he felt no pull to participate. The game made no sense to him anyway, and he withdrew his gaze to admire the dark sea writhing under foot. The Lion's Den crept up the side of a wave and surfed down, mimicking the serpentine struggle of air over water. The steady wind made him think of Cera, and he looked up, searching for her sleek figure somewhere within the stretched, dark sky. He caught sight of her silhouette perched near the crow's nest, an appropriate place for this bird of high air and distant sight. He wondered if she slept or if she was as alert as he.

"Keith, my boy. Come join us for some Rubin Wine. We have reached the midway of our crossing, and thanks to you we are still living to enjoy this glorious night. It is worthy of celebration," Captain Hame said as he waved Keith over. A lantern hung over the crew and swayed with the rolling ship. Shadows jumped around the gathering in mock at their playful evening.

"No thank you, Captain. I'm not a tidy drunk. I prefer to keep my wits... and my dignity," Keith said as he smiled apologetically from portside. This night had him particularly homesick. It was Lance's birthday and he longed for the familiarity of his friends and the castle. He walked to the stern, the laughter of the crew nagging at his loneliness. *I would even take the hum of computers if it meant seeing them*, Keith thought as he pictured the team eating a large meal in honor of their friend. He imagined them prodding Lance for his wily ways, making light of his contentious nature. He saw each of them around the table with prisms of light dancing around as the sparkling chandelier was lit. Pidge was probably having trouble sitting still, eager for Lance to open his gift. Keith was sure the boy had invented some gadget to make Lance's life easier, or more likely to befuddle and bemuse him. Hunk was certainly dressed in his best clothes, which often amounted to grease-stained pants and a poorly pressed shirt. Undoubtedly, he spent the evening testing every dish set before them, insisting he make sure it wasn't poisoned before the princess ate any.

And Allura. She quickly outgrew the youthful pink gowns she wore when they first met, a result of her growing responsibility and burdens. Keith envisioned her in his favorite light green dress,

complete with deep neck-line and knee-high slit up the side. She had worn it once to a ball and Keith remembered gasping audibly as she entered the ballroom. His gasp had caught the attention of the team around him, and the boys had followed his gaze to the approaching princess. She had walked right up to Keith, and he bowed deeply. That was when he had noticed the creamy smoothness of her leg, skin over flesh and flesh over bone. He had been granted the first dance, and Keith's blood stirred at the memory of holding her at arms length, one hand on her hip where her muscles contracted with each step. His hand had twitched as he labored for control over his longing to explore her body. His other hand had a gentle hold of hers, while her free hand roamed over the metals pinned to his chest.

"What are they for?" she had asked, her fingers lightly touching each pin.

"Each bar represents a battle I have fought, identified by colors and stripes. And the medals -" Keith had paused, feeling the conflict of pride and shame reach his face. "Your Highness, there are very few employers that pin medals to the chests of their employees for simply doing their job. For these, I was simply doing my job."

"Captain, you are too humble. Few jobs involve putting your life on the line for the well-being of others. As one who presents medals and awards to champions, I dare say that these are not given out to just anyone." The princess had smiled firmly at him, her reproach gentle and proper.

"I chose to do this as my job, Princess. I could have chosen to be a farmer or a writer, but I chose this. And I love what I do. I don't like to be singled-out for loving my job." Keith had stated. The dance had ended, but he didn't let go of the princess. They stood still, their conversation frozen. Allura's head had slanted to the side, a pose Keith found very endearing.

"I see," the princess had responded faintly, and she turned away from him. Keith had released her and bowed as she walked away but his gut tightened as though he had been delivered a fierce punch, the pain had radiated to his limbs and fingers, and invaded his heart. The thought of hurting or insulting the princess ached in him. Suddenly, he had not only been fated to protect the woman who walked away from him, but to love her endlessly as well. It had been all he could do not to follow her and hear her animated voice speak to him joyously once more. Later that night, the princess had surprised the team, most of all Keith, by presenting them each with the Arusian Crest, an honor reserved for gallantry in battle. Keith had stood erect as the princess pinned the crest to him, and when she had looked up to recite the traditional words of ceremony, her eyes were inhibited by uncertainty. Seeing her so subdued had surprised him and he responded with a gracious smile and playful wink.

So easily his thoughts found Allura, but it was Lance's day and Keith hoped his friend was enjoying the attention that the maids and village women were likely giving him. Always the charmer, Lance was followed by a gaggle of ladies, loyal to his flirtatious bravado. Nonetheless, Lance was surprisingly picky about his women, and their time on Arus had branded him with an extended period of celibacy. When questioned about it, Lance made a declaration that caught Keith by surprise: "Every woman on Arus is interested in one person, and that's you, Keith. Frankly, I don't know what's in the water here, but you're the one they want, and believe me I resent you for it. Seems you scare the shit out of them though and that's where I come in - to

smooth the bumps in their Keith-less roads with a little TLC. Still, I have no interest in being second fiddle to you, and anything more than minor affections is out of the question if she even knows your name.” It had never occurred to Keith that women were infatuated with him, but it no longer mattered. After a mere six months on Arus and the night of the ball, Keith had admitted to himself that the warmth he felt each day was because the princess was at his side. If that made him unapproachable to other women, then all the better.

Keith sighed, his mind racing between thoughts of Allura and Lance. He was sorting memories, rifling through the vaults of time in his mind, seeking that which would bring him respite from his loneliness.

“You appear quite melancholy on this fine night, Keith.” Captain Hame approached and stood next to him, watching the younger man intently. “Forgive my prying, but I have been perplexed by your condition since you stepped foot on this ship. Does something eat at you?”

“My condition?” Keith raised an eyebrow at the man’s choice of words. “Today is a friend’s birthday, and I can’t be there to celebrate with him. I am a bit put out by this... condition.”

“Well, you could celebrate with us.”

“I don’t even know if he is alive or dead, any of them, in fact,” Keith continued, unmeasured words escaping from him. He had already assessed that there wasn’t an ounce of evil in the old captain, and Keith found himself speaking with a kinship of their positions. “I would die for any of them, and I feel so... helpless now. Here, so removed from them.”

“Mmm. I see.” Captain Hame turned to the churning sea, the steady wind pulling at his long beard. “Captain Keith, I must say you are a most dignified and valiant warrior, but your gloominess is much akin to that of a child who wishes to go home from a perfectly delightful sleep-over.”

Keith turned to the captain, unable to determine castration or constructive criticism in the old man’s tone. A faint smile turned the lips of Captain Hame, and Keith dropped his head. “I am here to find the man who killed my parents, Captain. This task provides no room for celebration.”

“Oh. And your losses haunt you. We all suffer losses, you know. Without it, there is no gain. Without death, there is no birth. It is what’s in between that matters, my friend.” Keith felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, squeezing in comfort. He lifted his head to the sea, his eyes warmed with stinging moisture. The captain continued, “Everyone who breathes the Arusian air knows you don’t fear death, young captain. I have witnessed it. What I question, in our brief acquaintance, is why you fear living.”

Keith shot a look of contempt at the old man, and growled under his breath. He felt threatened by the accusations and his fists clenched. Although he had witnessed it many times in Lance, the sensations of this primal response within himself caught Keith off guard. Its origin was deep and it erupted in a fever of reaction. He had just been told a truth that subconsciously gnawed at him

and this affront on his character was ultimately a challenge. Captain Hame caught the defensive glint in Keith's eyes and stood tall, unflinching in his summation of the young pilot. As quickly as the anger boiled up in Keith, it fell silent, the fire extinguished by the calming presence of Captain Hame. The captain removed his turban of white linen that rested precariously upon his balding head and from its inner folds removed a picture.

"My wife and son. Dead twenty years now." He handed Keith the picture. Two images looked up at him; a formidable woman of blue skin, her matching hair cascading from her as though an extension of her body; and a young man, perhaps Keith's age, with large smiling eyes and sharp features. "When I saw you on shore, I thought I was seeing a ghost. Your resemblance to my son is... frightening and miraculous at once."

"What happened to them?" Keith asked as he handed the picture back, his head swimming with discomfort.

"My wife was named Agna of Planet Lagoura," the captain started.

"The Water Planet." Keith confirmed his knowledge of it with a nod and a quick memory of soaring over the soaked planet in Black Lion, searching for a Doom slave ship.

"Yes. Sailing was in her blood. She came to Arus after Zarkon had raided her planet and we fell in love. She wanted to sail and I knew a trade route was needed here. This was an unwelcoming sea on which to sail, but we knew trade was important to the area. Agna feared no water, in any form. So here we sailed for many years, our young son growing up on board. The last night of King Alfor's reign saw deadly battles across the land... and sea. We were overtaken by Doom pirates. My wife was weak from illness and was pushed over board trying to defend our son who had been dealt a deadly blow to the chest with a blade. He died soon after. My ship sank and I lost my crew." The captain held Keith's gaze throughout the account, briefly searching in the eyes that were like his son's for the any semblance of hope. "I am not without grief, Keith. But after chasing a distant dream that they may have survived, I carried on with my life and found a new crew, my new family."

Keith glanced over the shoulder of Captain Hame at the crew he called family. He understood the captain's fondness for them, but he was left with a sense of dread. He turned to the captain again, a pleading in his eyes that did not escape the older man.

"Death, loss, grief. Ugly beasts that can subdue the mightiest of men," the captain whispered.

"I'm consumed by the task that has been laid before me, Captain. I have no time to be joyous. Is it so wrong to try to make the universe a better place?" Keith asked, his words searching.

"But Keith, you have no time to waste! Because you fight for the greater good, you cannot afford to be so detached. You are always at risk and to die with bitterness in your heart is a life wasted. To me, that is inexcusable." Captain Hame's voice trembled with resolve and he sighed heavily to ease the ache he felt for Keith. "What happened to your parents?"

Keith gulped, fending off the burn in his stomach. His dry mouth opened and the horrors of death caught in his throat. "They were assassinated. I was three. They died in front of me." It was all he could bring himself to say, his standard response.

"What were they like?"

Keith felt a pressure rise in him at the continued questioning, his heart throbbing quickly against his chest. He was unaccustomed to people wanting more information. Usually the word "assassinated" was enough to shirk further probing. But faced with the genuine interest of Captain Hame, Keith knew he had only two memories of his parents, one good and one horrific: a morning of sledding and playing, and then in the same day, an afternoon marred with death. Keith conveyed this to the captain in shuddering words until his throat tightened and his stomach lurched. He hung his head overboard, his innards rejecting and purging into the sea. The captain draped his arm over Keith, and whispered into his ear. "Fight that beast inside you, Keith. This is no way to live."

A thin frown marked his tired face as he steadied himself against the boat and looked to the old man standing next to him. In a few short days, he had related to Keith as a father would to a son, and Keith felt a longing for the man whose blood was in his veins, the father he never really knew.

"I'm sorry if I disappoint you, Captain." Keith's throat hurt with the rawness of vomit and he swallowed hard. "I am not your son and you are not my father, and yet your words... strike me as though we are kin. I have never been so wrought with fear as I am on this journey. The feeling is so foreign to me."

"You can't disappoint me, my boy. Your lessons are your own. If you were my son, that would still be true. As someone who understands the depth of your loss, I have told you what I know about grief and suffering. What you do with it that knowledge up to you. But I must tell you – knowing is not enough. You must live it, apply it, and conquer this new sensation of fear." The captain's eyes sparkled with hope and compassion, and Keith slowly blinked in awe at the words that had followed him throughout his life in all their varied meanings – to know is not enough.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind toasting my friend Lance. For his birthday," Keith asked with a weak smile, remembering his friend's final words to him.

"Ah, yes indeed. I have heard that he too is a great warrior. The lieutenant has undoubtedly earned a celebration on the day of his birth," the captain remarked and he turned his head to the crew. "Lads and lass, raise your drinks to Lieutenant Lance, second in command of the Voltron Force!"

"To Lieutenant Lance!" the crew collectively shouted from the bow, their voices spread out in the air by the growing wind.

“And here’s to lovely nights on a sea of terror, lovely days on winds of summer, and lovely queens we want as lovers!” Captain Hame raised his flask and drank heartily as the crew cheered.

A husky voice rang out from the sudden laughs and cheers as a hulking man jumped from his barrel seat and pointed skyward. “Captain! Look up!”

The two captains standing together instinctively tensed at the urgency in the booming voice, and they turned their faces upward. The sky appeared frozen as the Lion’s Den rocked in the waves, but instantly the illusion was shattered as five lights streaked steadily across the sky. Keith’s mouth opened and he ran to the bow of the boat. The Voltron Force was on their way somewhere. Were they being threatened or was this a reconnaissance mission? Keith scanned the sky looking for their possible target and his eyes locked on a large red light, pulsing in the distance. They were being attacked. The crew buzzed with excitement at seeing the legendary lions in their sky, but Captain Hame kept quiet vigil over Keith who steadily gripped the ship’s side, his eyes never shifting from above. He wondered how the young captain would react to watching his fleet in action without him.

The pulsing light moved closer to Arus at and Keith grimaced at the familiar pod which transported robeasts from Doom. He focused on the lions, noting their positions at approach. Black was leading, flanked by red and blue then yellow and green. *Good formation. Appropriate line up. Steady speed.* He had spent every training session with Commander Waters drilling into her the necessity for preemptive defense. This was a tactic imperative to containing destructive battles high in the Arusian atmosphere and away from innocent people below. Waters was keeping to this strategy and Keith squinted to discern the features of each lion machine. He watched the robeast emerge from its metallic cocoon and the lions circled it as though a cohesive pride hunting their prey.

The robeast flicked razor claws from the ends of multiple legs as thousands of bulging eyes throbbed across its broad face. Keith knew from experience that what appeared to be an eye could easily be a deadly projectile capable of blasting holes in the mighty alloys of Voltron. The lions flew through the air, circling the robeast with calculated movements. Black Lion attacked first and latched on to an arm with a fierce bite. The arm showed no signs of malfunction as it extended out like a snake and encircled the Black Lion, flinging it far into the sky. “Use your stabilizers, Commander,” he said under his breath as the lion tumbled through the air. As though he had been heard, Black Lion skidded to a halt and throttled back to the other lions waiting in formation.

Red Lion roared loudly and lunged for the beast’s chest. A great clashing of metal on metal, a bursting of structure ensued and Keith hollered out. “Go Lance! Show him how it’s done!” Keith felt the thrill of battle in his gut and was unaware of the crew gathering around him. Their silent passenger was animated with a voracious energy they had not witnessed before. *He has something to live for. His family is up there. Now, he just needs to find his way,* Captain Hame pondered as he watched Keith concentrate on the unfolding battle.

As quickly as the Voltron Force made progress on subduing their aggressor, the robeast radiated a blinding stream of light that stiffened the lions in mid air. Keith saw them quaking as though in a fever and his brow tightened with rage. Yellow Lion stiffly twisted around to face the robeast and blasted a proton missile directly at it. The giant machine appeared enraged as its cosmic grip on the lions faded with the exploding projectile. They were free and Keith knew what was to come. But the lions did not raise high into the sky and join together to form Voltron. Instead they stayed as separate entities, nipping and biting at a machine that was far more powerful than each individual lion. "Damnit, form Voltron! C'mon Waters! Do your job!" Keith yelled at the sky.

There was no formation, no strategy to their movements any more and Keith was dumbfounded. *What the hell?! Why is she waiting?* The giant tentacles of the robeast flew out from all sides and grappled for lions. The team had not lost their skill at evasive maneuvers, dodging swings from the left and right with dips and dives. In the blur of mechanical arms thrashing through the air, Keith caught site of Blue Lion getting hit then trapped in a tight, constricting grip. The lion stiffened as jolts of electricity surged through its mechanisms. The robeast released Blue Lion as Red Lion blasted through multiple groping arms. Keith's mouth opened as he watched Blue Lion fall from the sky, a lifeless machine with precious cargo, plummeting downward. "Stabilize, Princess. Pull up, pull up! Allura, no!" Keith yelled as she hit the Sea of Meemore with an eerily silent impact. His heart raced and his eyes focused on the darkness where Blue Lion had entered the water. He didn't hear Captain Hame barking commands to his crew scrambling about the deck in frenzy. He heard nothing but the wind and the silent scream in his mind, *Not you. Please.* A hand on his shoulder snapped him alert and he spun around, face to face with the captain.

"Keith, swallow stones! We're about to be hit, my boy!" Captain Hame frantically searched Keith's eyes and they locked in a brief stare. The captain looked at the man before him with inexplicable pride, and a regretful smile fluttered across his lips. He ripped the pouch of stones from around his neck and in a quick motion, tossed it at Keith then turned to relay more urgent instructions into the amassing wind.

Keith stood puzzled at what had transpired between him and the captain. He watched as the shipmates turned portside in synchrony and heard a muffled yell from the captain. "Stand fast team! The ballast will hold her!" A monstrous rumbling vibrated in the air and Keith's breath was knocked out of him as a massive wave collided with the Lion's Den. Blue Lion's impact had created a menacing swirl of toxic liquid up and over the mighty vessel. Crushing and tumbling through a heavy darkness, Keith held his mouth shut tight to avoid swallowing. He was disoriented and large splinters of wood thrashed against his body, slamming his back in a torrent of chaos. His head finally rose to the surface and he gasped for air, struggling against the pulling waves. He looked around in search of a landmark and saw the head of Blue Lion as he crested on a wave. A quick glance in the opposite direction revealed a miasma of disorderly fluid and relentless waves swirling about. The Lion's Den was gone.

Legs kicking fiercely to stay afloat, Keith opened the pouch still in his grasp and swallowed a handful of stones. He looked once more to where the Lion's Den had been and a brief flutter in his mind urged him to swim in search of the good captain. But Keith's loyalty and heart lay elsewhere and he turned toward the Blue Lion, sinking slowly into the viscous sea. He kicked toward Allura, desperation and dread feeding his adrenaline. As he moved slowly through the

thickness of mind and body, something tugged at his neck. He clawed at the pressure encircling him and discovered his cloak was weighted with the heaviness of the water and pulling him down. Keith's mind stopped thrashing in panic and he calculated every move necessary to reach the princess. His skill at remaining calm in the midst of bedlam had seen him progress quickly through various trainings and promotions within the Alliance. While in most people instinct often resulted in self-preservation, Keith's instinct was to adapt and overcome in the name of self-sacrifice. With his wits suddenly intact, the turmoil of his surroundings became secondary and Keith reached for the dagger strapped to his boot. His breath was stilted by the tightening cloak and he carefully sliced through the heavy fabric until he was free. With the dagger back in place, he swam fiercely toward the woman he loved, her condition unknown to him, but his heart desperate to save her. Above him, a ruthless battle persisted, but Keith's goal was distinct and urgent. He must save her. She will die in these waters. She can't die.