

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 2: A Letter From Earth

Pidge skipped through the empty halls of the Castle which glimmered with the morning sun and into the dining area where Hunk sat patiently awaiting breakfast. Both team members felt much better after a night's sleep. Time allowed them each perspective, and it felt good to hold their captain in good light again.

"Hunk! Do you think Lance will ease up on Keith today? He has been a bit hard to deal with lately. Glad I ain't captain!" Pidge mused as the kitchen staff laid the first course of fruit and waffles in front of the two pilots.

"Oh little buddy, I sure hope so. I can't help but think there is a rift growing between those two lately. It's like Lance has a grudge, and Keith is too stubbornly loyal to put him in his place! I'm glad I ain't captain either!" Hunk agreed as he chewed on a mouthful of food.

"Good morning, boys." Princess Allura smiled at Hunk and Pidge, sensing their gaiety in the early hour.

"Mornin' Princess," Hunk mumbled between bites. Allura smiled at Hunk's love of Arusian cuisine, no matter which meal of the day. *He should be an intergalactic diplomat*, she contemplated, thinking how sincerely this gentle giant would compliment the cooks of any planet.

"Hiya Princess. Did you sleep well?" Pidge asked as he struggled to stab a grape with his fork.

"Yes. As soon as I hit the pillow I was out. You know, Pidge, on Arus we find it much easier to eat grapes by hand," Allura chuckled at the young man.

"Oh. I didn't know," Pidge blushed. He so easily embarrassed in front of the Princess, always afraid to offend her. She was so regal and graceful, and he didn't want her to think him a bumbling child. Pidge looked at the smile on the Princess' face, and with only a slight hesitation, set the fork down. With the grace of a little fox, he tossed the grape high into the air and caught it on his chin. He gave the princess a sidelong glance to check her reaction.

"Haha! Well done, Pidge!" Allura clapped her hands with pride at the nimble and talented young pilot.

The glee in the room was cut short as Lance entered grumbling a few strides behind the Keith. It was clear they had not said much to each other that morning. It was clear Lance was still angry, and Keith was still bothered.

“It’s a wonderful breakfast for us this morning, boys. Your favorite Lance – waffles!” Allura tried to break the tension with her radiant smile, but Lance only had furious eyes for his downcast captain that morning.

“Great.” Lance snarled as he stared down the table at Keith.

Keith’s patience wore thin, and he banged his fist on the table. The candelabras shook and everyone jumped at the unexpected gesture. “Lance! Show some respect to the Princess and her royal house! Stop acting like a spoiled brat!” Keith yelled as he rose from his chair.

“You’re a fool, Keith! A damn fool!” Lance stood and yelled over the table. Pidge, Hunk and Allura stared at the quarrelers in disbelief.

“Oh really? What else is on your mind, Lieutenant? Care to tell me how you really feel? Why don’t we go for a walk and we can work this out your way!” Keith retorted. The room was spinning with his anger, and he stepped away from the table.

“Stop! Stop this now!” The princess stood from her chair and glared at Keith. At that, Lance snickered, and then she shot him her insistent stare. “What is going on here? You two are friends. Lance, you are so mad. What is your problem?”

“He is a fool doing foolish things in battle. It’s like he doesn’t have his head on straight or something, and we get blamed, and people die. Hasn’t anyone else noticed?” Lance spit out with flailing arms.

“I think you might be the only one who sees it, Lance. Keith does what he can with the tools he has at hand. And WE are his tools. We are the arms and legs of Voltron. We are a team, and Keith is in charge, but we are all responsible.” Allura defended Keith as Lance looked away from her. She turned to Keith. “And where is our level-headed captain? Why do you let the antics of one man get to you? His outbursts have never rubbed you so poorly, Captain. Can you not just discipline him as the subordinate that he is?”

“I can’t... because he’s right.” Keith dropped into his chair. Pidge and Hunk gasped at the submission of their Captain. Lance crossed his arms and smirked. “I have failed you all, especially you, Princess. It’s my duty to protect the people of Arus by leading the team and winning these battles. We’ve won them with great losses to your people, and I-I am responsible.”

Allura looked at Keith and saw the trauma of the battle surface in this fearless man. She understood his pain, as she was a leader too, but she never thought of its impact on him. He suffered with physical and emotional scars from heavy combat the only way he knew how – silently. She grieved for her people with tears and the gentle support of her cousin Romelle, but Keith had no one. He was stalwart and rarely showed his emotions. This she knew from other private glances and touches they occasionally shared. And now, he was overwhelmed.

“It’s okay,” she whispered as she placed a hand on his arm.

The door to the dining hall opened and Coran's heavy-footed walk echoed as he approached. "Keith, this letter arrived for you via certified mail. It appears urgent. And General Roberts would like to speak with you in private conference at noon today."

"Thanks Coran," Keith sighed as he took the letter and stared at the official insignia and seal. He rose from the table without looking at the others and walked out the door.

"Did I say something?" Coran asked as he looked around the table.

"No. He's just finally getting a clue," Lance charged as he started to eat his breakfast.

"Lance!" Hunk growled. He rose vehemently out of his chair and it crashed to the floor. Hunk stormed away, disgusted with what he had seen that morning.

"Wow. The big guy is mad. He didn't finish his waffle," Lance mumbled. He dared a look at the Princess who sat quietly staring at her food.

"You can be a real ass, Lance!" Pidge declared and he too left the room.

With that, the princess felt the day ahead spoil.

Keith stared at the opened letter in his hand. He couldn't imagine what it all meant. He read it again.

Attention Captain,

By order of Galaxy Alliance, I hereby grant you extended leave for the length of 1 year from your post on Planet Arus, due to the severity and nature of the newfound information provided you by Alliance Intelligence. Please reply, post-haste, regarding your timeframe for leave and the expectations you have for the Voltron Force during your absence.

Sincerely,

Marshall Hicks

Galaxy Garrison

Intergalactic Headquarters

New York, NY

Planet Earth

No matter how many times he read it, he simply didn't understand its contents. Were they dismissing him? Or was he being temporarily reassigned? *I wonder if Lance had something to do with this*, Keith thought as he remembered his angry friend's words that cut so deeply into his heart. *He is right. My leadership has been so poor lately.*

It was nearing noon, and Keith intended to ask General Roberts directly the meaning of this letter. In the half hour he had until the conference, he decided to get some fresh air. He stuffed the letter in his pocket and walked out the main entrance of the castle, across the moat and down to the stables. The smell of hay and horse reminded him of his days at the Academy, before they discontinued cavalry training. He remembered the awards and ribbons he won at Western riding, and the rewarding smiles he got from the Academy girls. It was Lance who got the girls, as Keith was devoted to his training regimen. But the occasional flirtation from an admiring female rider always made him ride taller.

Keith sighed heavily as he found the stallion he had come to depend upon eating in his stall. A sturdy black Porga horse, a new breed derived from the mighty Morgan horse of Earth, and the intelligent Pogal horse of Arus, was a powerful runner and highly intelligent. Keith buried his head in the sweet-smelling mane of Orion who shifted his head into his master's neck.

"Ahem. Excuse me, Keith. I didn't hear you come in," a quiet voice stated from the tack room door.

"Princess. I didn't know anyone was here," Keith said as he wrapped his arms around the powerful neck of the equine. At that moment, he didn't care who was around, he just wanted to connect with the simplicity of the animal world.

"It's okay," Allura smiled worriedly as she tossed hay into the stall next to her. "Keith, I was thinking you should take some time off. Maybe go visit Earth for a bit. I bet Sven can cover for you while you are gone. I know he would."

"Hm. Allura, the letter Coran delivered to me today seemed to suggest I 'take time off' as well."

"What? Are they removing you? They can't do that!" Allura walked over to Keith and looked him in the eyes. He was familiar with her wrinkled brow and knew she was demanding more information.

"I don't know what the letter means, exactly. I intend to confront the General at the conference." With that Keith looked at his watch and touched Orion's soft muzzle. "Speaking of which, I better go."

Allura scratched Orion's ears as Keith continued to stroke his muzzle; he was hesitant to leave the peace of the stable. The Princess could feel Keith's eyes on her, and she glanced up. Her hand slid down between the eyes of the horse until it found Keith's hand. She gently touched his fingertips and admired the strength in his hands. She knew those hands were weapons and he was trained to kill when needed, but she was certain his heart was too gentle to ever consider

such a task. Allura became lost in her admiration and found they had slightly laced their fingers together. Keith drew her into his gaze and their eyes locked.

“Don’t let them take you away, Keith,” she said as she stared into his dark eyes. She tightened her grip on his hand, and he responded by lifting her hand to his lips for soft kiss.

“I will do what I can, Princess.” Keith released her hand and walked out of the stable, leaving Allura breathless and afraid. He had never touched her so longingly before.