

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 3: Conference

Author's Chapter Notes:
Some death here, be warned.

Conference

Keith entered the private conference room and waited for the screen to come alive with the static of an incoming transmission. He fidgeted with the letter in his hand until the booming voice of General Roberts echoed through the small room. "Captain, General Roberts here. Are we alone?"

"General, yes we are. Sir, I received a letter from Marshall Hicks today that I don't understand. Can you please clarify its contents for me?" Keith took immediate charge of the conversation.

"Captain, I apologize for the letter. You weren't supposed to receive that until after this conversation."

"General, I am very concerned that you are asking me to leave my post here on Arus. Despite the losses, we have made great progress in restoring this planet. I do not understand the purpose of my dismissal." Although in that moment he didn't feel he deserved to stay, Keith poured every ounce of confidence into his speech, not wanting to disappoint the Princess' request at the stable.

"No Captain, you have it wrong. We are not asking you to leave. We are *offering* you leave. Keith... we have new information regarding the assassination of your parents." The General paused. "Would you like me to continue?"

"Yes," Keith replied faintly as he sat down.

"As you know, we suspect the motive for their assassinations was their connection to the Alliance, but we do not know that for certain. All we know is the man who killed your parents is still alive. And Keith... our new information has him on Arus."

"What?!" Keith stood up, a new emotion coursing through him. In that instant, it reached his lungs and he quickly inhaled. Was it anger seething in him, or was he afraid? He had few experiences with fear in his adult life and was unfamiliar with its pounding, desperate sensation. He felt close to anger, like he wanted to explode, but he felt the need to run somewhere, anywhere but where he was. Instead, he brushed it all aside, gulped some water, and listened intently to the General.

"Keith, we believe he is in Aspa, which, as you know, is in the White North region of Planet Arus. He goes by the name Panic, and he has been under the radar since the death of your parents. We know little about him other than he was born on Earth, and that he has spent a lifetime killing throughout the Universe. Otherwise, he eludes us. After much discussion and

debate, Marshall Hicks and I have agreed that your hard work as captain of the Voltron Force has entitled you to take time off to, shall we say, ‘deal’ with this new information in whatever manner you see fit. However, you will not be under the jurisdiction or oversight of the Alliance during this leave, and you will not have access to its resources, especially Voltron. Do you understand, Captain?”

“Yes. I understand, General. But if I accept your offer for leave, who will take my place? How will I know that Voltron and Arus will be in good hands?”

“We discussed having Sven return to Arus to fill in as commander, but he is needed on Pollux. Therefore, we intend to send a pilot who has been with the Alliance for some time now. Her name is Commander Percina Waters. She has more flight time than any pilot here on Earth, and now teaches at the Academy. She would be a fine substitute. And don’t be mistaken, Captain. You are not being replaced. You are our finest Captain, and the Alliance has great plans for you once Zarkon has been defeated.”

“If you say so, sir. I need to speak with the team about this, General. I will get back you.” Keith clicked the prompter off, not thinking of the usual salute to his commanding officer. He exited the conference room and walked the long hallway, unsure of where he needed to go first. He was lost in the last memory he had of his parents.

It was a winter day at their home on Earth and a fresh layer of snow beckoned the children to play. Keith and his father spent took advantage of meandering flakes that continued to fall and went sledding at the hill by the town hall with the other Alliance families. Most families in his small town worked for the Alliance and a very close-knit community resulted where neighbors were dear friends. All the children of the neighborhood were out, and a three year old Keith impressed everyone with his fearlessness on the “big kid slope”.

“Daddy, I wanna go down the big hill by m’self!” he mumbled from under his scarf and hood.

“Oh I don’t know, son. It’s a big hill and only big kids are allowed on it,” Keith’s father replied.

“But I wanna. I’m not scared, Daddy. Pleeeeease!” Keith tugged at his father’s coat in desperation.

“Uh, Keith. Okay. Okay, we’ll try it.” Keith’s father walked him over to the top of the hill and picked up his little body, bundled in a heavy snow suit, and placed him on the sled. “I’m a little nervous about this, Keith.”

“Lemme go, Daddy!” Keith squealed with delight as his father gave him a small push at the top of the hill. He watched his son build up speed on the sled and in a panic, immediately started to run down the hill. The sled slowed as it reached the flattened bottom of the slope and came to a stop, Keith smiling ear to ear.

“Keith! You did it, little buddy! You did it!” Keith’s father reached the sled and fell to his knees, embracing his son.

“That’s one brave kid you got there,” said a middle-aged man unfamiliar to Keith’s father.

“Thanks!” Keith’s father swelled with pride and ran a hand through his own dark unruly hair, then picked up his son and started the trek up the hill.

“Thank you, mister!” Keith’s little voice yelled from his dad’s shoulder. The man smiled and waved at the little triumphant boy.

“Let’s go home and tell mommy what you did, and then build a snowman!” Keith’s father suggested.

Keith’s mother was very pleased at her brave son and she tickled him with her black curls which brought a melody of giggles to the warm kitchen. “Now, go make a snowman with daddy and I’ll make you some hot cocoa when you are done.”

“Yup.” And Keith ran out the door, dragging his father behind him.

The base of the snowman took a long time to make, or at least it felt that way to the young Keith. Keith started work on the head and his father was rolling the midsection when the child heard a muffled pop. He looked around, but his hood obstructed his view. He continued rolling the head and then, very carefully carried it to his father.

“Daddy?” Keith saw his father laying in the snow, his hair matted with a deep redness. He dropped the head of the snowman when he heard another pop and felt something sting his cheek. His mother screamed his name and instantly her hands lifted him to her. He felt her body engulf him as she hunched over protectively. Another pop sounded from the distance and his arm burned. They fell to the ground together, a mother collapsing on her child who sank into the deep snow. Keith heard a quiet moan and a muffled scream. Then his world went dark.

Keith found Coran and asked him to gather the team for an urgent meeting. He walked toward the recreation room, his hand unconsciously rubbing the scar on his left arm where a bullet had shattered his tiny bones. He rarely felt any pain from the injury, but today it throbbed. When he walked into the room, the whole team sat waiting for his arrival. He looked at them all individually and felt a deep fondness for each of them, even rebellious Lance, one of his oldest friends. He didn’t want to leave them behind, but his memories haunted him and he needed answers. In the hour since his conference with the General, Keith had made his decision. He sat down across from them so that he could see all of their faces, even that of the disapproving Nanny who sat annoyingly close to her charge, the Princess.

“Team, I am taking leave from my post,” Keith said in a measured voice.

“What?!” was the collective response from the group. A jumble of questions erupted and Keith raised his hand for silence.

“This is voluntary leave,” Keith sighed as he dug deeper into his story. “You all know my parents were assassinated when I was 3 years old. The Alliance has information that the man who killed my parents is on Arus. They have offered me leave to seek this man out and place him under arrest.”

“But Keith, Arus and the Alliance have troops that can do this for you. Why do you need to go?” Pidge pleaded, a look of fear flashing over his face.

“Pidge, it is more personal than that. This man has eluded Alliance Intelligence for years. Perhaps he can’t elude a single person, and I will do it as a civilian, not an officer. Do you understand?”

Everyone was quiet, the information sinking into their minds. Vengeance. Retribution. The Alliance was turning a blind eye to the situation, and yet encouraging it. The tactic was evasive and Keith’s role was clear. The Alliance was asking him to be an assassin. After several minutes, a gentle voice broke the silence. “Keith, who will replace... who will fly the Black Lion, and for how long?” the Princess asked.

“Commander Percina Waters. She teaches at the Academy and is a great pilot. I don’t know for how long, Princess. They have granted me 1 year of leave, as well as my job back when... I return.”

“When do you leave, Captain?” Coran asked calmly.

“As soon as Commander Waters arrives and I feel she is ready to take over. I will contact the General after this meeting to confirm my leave and the commander will be on her way.” Keith looked at the sullen faces around him. Hunk appeared to be in shock, his eyes wide and his lips quivering, while Pidge frowned. Coran looked withdrawn and Nanny simply patted the knee of the Princess whose eyes were moist with tears.

Only Lance appeared unmoved by Keith’s announcement. Something wasn’t sitting right with him - Keith being granted leave in the middle of a war to find a man who eluded the Alliance. Why did he have to go do their dirty work? Since when was any member of the Voltron Force trained to be an assassin? Lance’s mind worked quickly, searching for reasons the Alliance might want to support Keith, and reasons they might want to be rid of him. His intuitive sense for detecting sticky situations was not piecing things together, and he scowled with frustration. *The man could surely use a vacation, but this is a bit extreme.*

Keith rose from his seat and stood beside Lance. “Well, Lance. It appears you are rid of me for awhile. I hope the new boss will meet your standards better than I have. But more importantly, my friend, I hope that she keeps you all safe.”