

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 6: First Contact

Author's Chapter Notes:

This is a long one, but I didn't want to split it up. So get comfy, grab some tea and enjoy.

Lance opened his eyes. His room was dark and the quiet of the hour permeated the air. He rolled over and pulled his blanket to his chin. Sleep approached again and he welcomed it. His breath slowed and his eyes twitched, but like a phantom lacing his brain, reality hit and he jolted upright and sprang out of bed.

“Shit.” He clamored into a sweat suit and lumbered out the door. Within minutes the purple darkness of dawn embraced him and he breathed deeply. His arms arced into the air and his chest filled with the warm moisture of a summer’s day. As reluctant as he was to roll out of bed, Lance started every morning this way – welcoming the dawn without the gibberish of human contact. The solitude was refreshing.

He started to run a slow, steady pace. The route was mapped, locked in his mind like the face of a beautiful woman. He knew every stone and rut that might twist his ankle; every log to hurdle; every puddle that would soak his shoes. Breathing became rhythmic and easy as blood pumped rapidly through his body. This was his caffeine.

As he rounded the fifth mile of his loop, he saw a stout figure trotting ahead. He touched the laser gun strapped to his thigh, a pacifier to his anxiety about running in the dark. Details became sharper as he approached: short, muscular frame, brown hair pulled back, skin glowing. His commander. Lance hesitated. This run was how he cleared his mind. Did he really feel like striking up conversation with her? Slowing his pace in contemplation, his feet shuffled in the dirt and Waters peered over her shoulder.

“Lieutenant. Good morning,” she said between breaths.

Oh great. Decision made, Lance thought.

“Morning, Commander. I thought I was the only early bird of the bunch,” he remarked as he approached her. Her clothes were drenched, the humid air milking sweat from her body. Her exposed skin was tight and dark, and Lance admired the curves of her female form. Ample breast, round bottom, and a narrow waist made her quite the woman.

“Funny. I never figured you to be the running type,” she retorted.

“Not something I advertise. I have a reputation to maintain. You know, lazy and obnoxious.”

“Right. I am becoming familiar with that ‘reputation’.”

A faint smile stretched across Lance's face, aware that his breathing had changed. Something about this woman intrigued him. He had never been attracted to a woman of her nature, older and demanding. He tended to fall for the quiet, demure type. But this woman had power in her soul, and it heated his blood.

"You've been rough on the team this past month, Commander. Think you can lighten up a bit?" Lance regretted asking as soon as the words left his mouth. He just wanted a quiet run, and instead he was habitually testing the commander.

"It's my job. I've got to know what they are capable of, both in their ships and on the ground," she replied, sensing a challenge to her authority.

"Well, they all have their virtues. All you need to know is that they are exceptional pilots and can stand their ground in hand to hand. Don't push them to do something they can't handle."

"Lieutenant, pushing them will make them better prepared."

Lance stopped in his tracks and wiped the sweat from his brow. The commander ran in place, waiting for the smart response she was expecting. Lance was silent. He took off his shirt and wiped down his chest. The commander eyed him. Alert muscles defined his lean body and his long limbs, the body of a runner. Lance caught her stare and he walked up to her. She stood nearly a head shorter than him, and she looked up into his blue eyes.

"Hunk can't run fast, but he can crush a garbage can flat as a frisbee. Pidge can't reach the top shelf, but he can jump over a wall and land with the precision of a cat. The princess isn't very strong, but she has the fastest defensive kicks I have ever seen. And that should cover it. Now back off. They're beat," Lance demanded, his hands resting on his hips.

"You've got quite the attitude. But fair enough. So if Hunk is strong, Pidge is bouncy, and the princess is fast, what the hell are you?" Waters stepped closer to Lance. She could smell the musk of his skin and she smiled.

"I told you. I am lazy and obnoxious." Lance looked down at her. What harm would it do to kiss her? To reach down, grab her rear and pull her to him? How long had it been since he had touched a woman, tasted the softness of female lips? Too long.

"So you have no secret weapon?" Waters was surprised at her own flirtatious tone.

"Well... I'm one hell of a lover," Lance replied. *Hook, line, and sinker! How the hell did she get me to say that?*

"That won't win this war, I'm afraid." The commander stepped back from Lance, attempting to regain control of her amassing thoughts. "But I will have to assume you are a runner, so therefore you must have endurance."

"Sure." Lance had no other response, his mind lost in the love-making he ached for.

Commander Waters laughed as Lance's ogling continued. She didn't mind the admiration, as it was infrequent she caught someone's attention. And this man before her, her subordinate, was gorgeous and spirited. She shook her head and Lance looked away. They both scanned the horizon, searching for something to pull them from their desires. The sun had initiated its penetration of the sky and clouds overhead took shape, cotton wisps lined with a red glow. Shadows had faded and square frames of light dotted the village as people awoke.

"I'm hungry. I bet the cooks have a hearty breakfast waiting for us." Waters finally spoke.

"You and Hunk should hang out more often," Lance replied as they started to run back toward the castle.

All members of the Voltron Force sat at the dining table feasting on the sweet fruit of the season and savoring the fresh air rustling in through giant open windows. It was the heart of summer and the winds brought warm smells of nectar and new life. The voices of villagers were carried into the hall, the instructions to work animals, the laughter of children, and the flirtations of young lovers brought comfort to the team. Peace prevailed, at least for now.

Full stomachs and the intoxicating warmth of the breeze quieted the room. The silence broke when a young servant ran in waving something in his hand.

"Coran! Coran! It's the falcon! Cera delivered a letter from Keith. She came just now," he said. He reached Coran and placed the rolled parchment carefully into waiting hands as though it were a priceless treasure.

"Thank you, Orlin." Coran looked at the wax emblem and saw the seal of Arus marked with a discreet letter "K" indicating its origin truly was with the captain. Coran looked up and nodded at the team, confirming what they so fervently wanted to know.

"Read it Coran!" Pidge exclaimed.

"Yes, please do, Coran." The princess calmly sipped her tea, her eagerness masked behind the steaming hot liquid.

Coran unsealed the letter and began to read:

Dear friends,

Forgive me for taking so long to write. I have been gone from the Castle of Lions for nearly a month now and have been so entranced by the beauty of this land that I believe I forgot my promise. I think of you all daily and miss your spirit and laughter. Please also forgive me for subjecting you to my awful handwriting. It seems the art of straight lines is a distant memory of my Academy days and my skills in penmanship have rapidly declined henceforth.

“Henceforth? Only Keith would use that word. What a geek!” Lance interjected as he leaned back in his chair. He frowned at the thought of his friend sitting by a campfire thinking up ancient words for his letters home, and the word “fool” came to Lance’s mind again. Allura glared at Lance and asked Coran to continue.

I wish I owned the words to describe the land I am crossing. It is full of a life particular to the season – birds sing at all hours, day and night; creatures I cannot begin to understand or name cross my path; fish leap out of lakes and walk on land. Yes, WALK on land like little rainbows across the grass. Perhaps they aren’t fish, but some type of frog. It’s difficult to tell. I wish I had time to play the Charles Darwin of Arus, but my mission is urgent and much bleaker than the discovery of this world’s natural wonders.

Nonetheless, I marvel at what I see. The colors of this planet are so deep, so vibrant that they appear to breathe. For all I know, they represent living entities. The tall trees sway, the green mosses crown them like carpets of ragged hair, and their roots make love to the ground. It is a harmonious dance, a symbiosis of soil, air, and cells. Being out here makes me feel so much a part of it.

“Oh man, now I know he’s lost it. We gotta go rescue the poor guy! Making love to the ground! Hah!” Lance laughed.

“All right, Lance, I’ve had it with your smartass remarks about Keith. He ain’t even here to defend himself. I don’t wanna sit here and listen to you flap your mouth! I wanna know how he’s doing. We never shoulda let him go alone. I should be there with him. And instead I am stuck here defending your pathetic ass!” Hunk shouted, the vein in his temple pulsing rapidly.

“Hunk, calm down,” Commander Waters interjected sternly. “Lieutenant, it appears your teammates have a more vested interest in this letter than you do. Someone you call your friend has taken the time to write. Perhaps you can find it in your bitter heart to keep quiet while they listen.”

“This doesn’t concern you, Commander. This is not an Alliance matter. You don’t know anything about Keith, or anyone on this team. That letter is personal material and I you should butt the hell out.” Lance replied as he sat upright in his chair. No one uttered a word as the commander sat quietly. She masked the surprise at Lance’s attack with a stern expression in his direction. Then, she silently rose from her chair and walked out the door.

No one spoke. Lance had put the commander in her place appropriately, but not necessarily with tact. Allura regretted that the commander was not yet acquainted well enough with the team to understand the innuendos of its emotional bond. She was too new to the Force, and with Keith absent, there was no way for her to comprehend the dynamics of the team. And no way for her to know that Lance’s remarks were a reflection of his concern for Keith. And no way for her to know that Hunk’s reaction was a product of his loyalty and devotion to Keith. And there was no way anyone knew that all Allura wanted to do was take the letter from Coran and retreat to a quiet place in the castle to read it alone. She yearned for a private letter, for words that spoke to

her alone. She wanted to smell what Keith smelled, taste it, and touch it as he had. No one knew that.

Allura cleared her throat and urged Coran to read on.

Princess, I have yet to meet any of your people on my travels, but I already feel closer to them. They are people of the land, as we have talked about many times. They live off the land as the early cultures of Earth once did. I dig my hands in the rich soils along the River Boleej and its fragrant smell includes that of life. No wonder your people are so kind and happy – the land returns to them all they need.

Being so removed from the technological advances of the human race has been very refreshing, although the comfortable seat of the Black Lion is sorely missed. Let's just say, so many hours in a saddle takes some getting used to. Nonetheless, being the techno-phobe that I am, I have no computers screaming at me, and life is so much simpler.

Do not mistake me, though my friends. I think of you all fighting the hard fight and I thank whatever powers that be that you are encircled in the finest alloys with the fastest computers and the most powerful weapons. I am also thankful that you are so loyally awaiting my return, as I so anxiously cannot wait to see your smiling faces (even yours, Lance).

You are in my thoughts.

Keith

Everyone remained silent, thinking of Keith's words, hearing his voice in their minds. Coran broke the silence with a cough and confession. "I had no idea the Captain was such a prolific writer. His words make it seem he is here with us. And it makes me miss him all the more."

That evening, Allura walked the castle halls deep in thought about the day's training session in the lions. Commander Waters had given no indication of retribution toward any members of the team for the incident with the letter, and Allura was thankful for the apparent military front her new commander embraced. Allura stopped at every window she encountered on her stroll and spent mere seconds looking at the stars before she moved on. She was restless, wanting to be outside in the warm summer air, but the day came with increased alerts of potential attacks from Lotor which limited her excursions. Her mind jumped around from thoughts of Keith, to worrying about Lotor, to wondering if Nanny had washed her flight uniform. She needed to rein in her thoughts, and it suddenly occurred to her that Keith might like a letter in response. Coran had slated Cera to carry some coded information to Keith, but a short letter wouldn't be too much weight for the hefty bird. Allura picked up her skirts and jogged to the rec room where she had last seen paper and pen.

The door slid open and she stepped into the dimly lit room, her senses more acute as her eyes adjusted to the shadows. Training had taught her to scan the room for danger, and a slight level

of concern greeted her when the computer did not register her presence by lighting the room. Keith had assured the princess she was capable of causing severe damage with her pointy elbows and high kick, but he had stressed it would only work if she believed she could do it. In that lay the problem. The shadows in the room flickered into shapes of evil-doers, and she forced herself to be rational – the room was empty, and the computer had simply malfunctioned.

Another scan of the room and Allura saw the door to the balcony was open. A figure was apparent under the moonlit sky, the familiar form of Lance took shape. Allura relaxed and slowly walked toward the open door, her skirts brushing against the lounge chairs, the table, and then the potted plant in the corner. She stopped at the threshold and watched Lance lean his arms on the grey stone of the balcony, his back to her. His mousy brown hair lifted and fell in tufts as the breeze came and went. He shifted the weight of his body from one leg to another and turned his head to the side, sensing someone's presence.

"Hi Lance" Allura said when she caught his eye.

"Hey, Princess. Nice night, isn't it?" Lance replied as the princess stood near him. He glanced her way and noted how the purple dress she wore revealed the sleekness of her arms as well as the curves of her breasts.

"It is. I wish I could be down there walking around the lake." She nodded to the darkened landscape below them. Deep purple mountains greeted the night sky and the water below fragmented the moonbeams into thousands of wavering stars.

"Yeah. Well, unless you feel like keeping company with Blue Boy, I think you're better off up here," Lance commented. His favorite nickname for Lotor brought frequent laughs to the team, but tonight Allura was feeling more contempt for the evil prince and was not particularly interested in making light of the constraints he imposed on her freedoms.

"I guess so. But it gets old," she replied, resting her chin on her hand.

"I know." Lance could think of nothing else to say.

"Are you still mad at him? At Keith?" Allura asked quietly.

"It's complicated, Princess," he sighed. "Keith and I go way back."

"So does that entitle you to be mad at him for no reason?" Allura probed, her words biting and precise. "You know as well as I do that he's what keeps us working as one. We all have our specialties, but he does it all. I don't understand your problem with him, Lance."

"That's exactly it, Princess. Keith is perfect. I know it. The Alliance knows it. I am afraid even Zarkon and Lotor know it. I have always looked to him... like a brother. He's always had my back. Always." Lance looked at his hands, memories of Keith scattered in his mind. "He's been less than perfect lately. And I don't know what to make of it. It worries me because I care, but it pisses me off because he is supposed to be the best. He's letting me down."

“So it’s about you, not about him?”

“No. He... I just wish he would stop being so miserable. I don’t get it.”

“War.” The single word from Allura’s lips gave Lance pause. They were at war.

“Yeah. We had illusions when we were at the Academy. We were going to save the universe in one fell swoop. Just our luck we’re faced with those Doom bastards,” Lance replied. “Still, Keith’s smart and even-keeled. Why this war is bringing him down is beyond me. I can’t figure it out.”

“Lance, the loss of innocent lives is the antithesis of perfection. And since everyone expects him to be perfect... well, no wonder.” Allura sighed.

“You miss him, don’t you?” Lance stepped closer to the princess and their shoulders touched.

“Yes, I do. Every time I step into the Blue Lion I hear his voice.”

“He needed to get out of here. He needed something other than Voltron to focus on.” Lance was still puzzled over Keith’s journey, questioning the true intent of the Alliance. But without evidence, he wasn’t compelled to worry anyone else with his rebellious thoughts. “I think this change of scene will be good for him. He might learn something. And really, I think it is good for all of us too.”

“How so?”

“Well, besides the fact that absence makes the heart grow fonder,” Lance said, throwing an impish smile at the princess, “now we can actually experiment on Blue Boy. I’ve always wanted to know what it would take to make him weep like a baby, but Keith didn’t seem to think it was the best military strategy. Now’s our chance.”

“I am sure Lotor would weep if he knew you had a nickname for him,” Allura said, her chin resting on her hand.

“Blue Boy is the nickname I use when I am feeling kind. Keith is the only one who knows about the other terms of endearment I have for Lotor.” Lance paused. His thoughts flashed to Keith, and for the first time since his departure, Lance wished he could have joined his friend.

“Oh.” Allura sighed heavily and her mind flew back to Keith’s touch against her cheek. She remembered his fingertips were warm and rough, but his touch was so gentle it almost tickled. Allura sighed again and rested her head on Lance’s shoulder. His leather coat greeted her face and she smelled the aged hide lined with the distinctive odor of man. Lance remained still, but when Allura repositioned her head, he draped his arm around her shoulder and kissed the top of her head. Allura felt a distant flutter in her stomach and she silently held her breath. This was Lance, her dear friend. His kind gesture should not have caused this. Her love was for another

man... and yet. And yet, was it glee she was feeling at being touched, at being kissed? The sudden conflict racing through her made her jump from Lance's embrace.

"Lance, I think we should write Keith a letter. The falcon is set to leave here tomorrow morning. I'll get the pen and paper. I'll be right back," she said, turning into the room in search of the supplies she needed. As she entered the darkened space, a receding line of light marked the closing door. Someone was in the room. Allura paused and the lights switched on. The room was empty. She scrambled to the drawer with scraps of paper and pencils, and turned to the balcony. She stopped at the threshold, aware of her excitement. Keith. She looked at Lance, his thin figure silhouetted against the stars, and she swallowed. Lance. Allura shook her head and stepped onto the balcony.

"Okay. Got it," Allura said as she stood next to Lance. She started to write.

Dear Keith,

Lance and I are enjoying the warmth of this summer night on the balcony of the rec rom where the view of the moon and mountains is wide and inviting. It smells like the villagers have been digging in the ground, as the rawness of dirt wafts up to us. It is the smell of home to me, the smell of summer on Arus.

Lance read over her shoulder as she wrote and when she paused to think of her next sentence, he took the pen and started his own addition.

Hi Keith,

Yes, it is a nice HOT night here at Castle Arus. I am on the balcony moon-bathing with the princess. Yup, you know summer is in full swing when she starts wearing a bikini to training! Tonight she is wearing a rather revealing one, I might add. How do they say? "Itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny, lacking coverage, it's BIKINI!" I think you would like it. I know I do. All that skin glows in the moonlight, like a goddess! Wow!

Keith! As you probably can surmise, we are not "moon-bathing" and I am certainly not wearing a bikini. Lance has on his leather jacket, for goodness sake! And I am fully clothed. But the big news around the castle is the hideous growth Lance has on his nose. Doctor Gorma says it has teeth and will continue to grow. Just what we need – another mouth on Lance! Anyway, it is ugly, and as you can imagine, Lance is ugly too. All the maids are in distress over their playboy being so disfigured.

Allura handed Lance the letter, and his sudden laughter at its words spilled out into the night. He quickly started to write.

I don't know, Keith. I think the princess has a soft spot for ugly men. I mean, look at you! And now, with you gone, and my new "growth" she is all over me. Oh, she is giving me "the eyes" now, which are shockingly effective. Hey, you must know. What does it mean when she starts to

lick her lips? I better go take care of her needs, since you aren't here to do it. You did tell me to look after her, didn't you?

“Lance! Knock it off!” Allura shouted as she grabbed the letter from him and punched him in the arm, a laugh stifled.

“Ow! Jeezum, lady! I gotta use that thing,” Lance said as he rubbed his arm.

Keith, in all seriousness, you are missed. Waters is doing a fine job keeping us in shape on land and in the air. She's a decent pilot. Anyway, I hope you are safe and well. But more than that, I wish you were home. Yours truly, Allura

Lance read the Princess' words, fully intending to continue his chiding, but his eyes fell upon her last sentence and it gave him pause: “I wish you were home.” It suddenly reminded Lance that the Castle of Lions was Keith's home, his only home. He had no one back on Earth. Lance paused for another second, and then finished the letter with a simple statement.

Safe travels. Lance