

Love Is Stronger Than Death by Purrsia

Chapter 2: Perfect

Lotor did his best to ignore the gasps and murmurs of bystanders as he carried the limp Princess of Arus in his arms through Castle Doom. They no doubt couldn't believe their eyes, and at times he still couldn't believe it himself. It actually worked! A plan was made and carried out to its success. The fools on Arus were none the wiser with nobody detecting his departure or giving chase. It was perfect. And now he had what he most wanted since he laid eyes on her – the beautiful Allura.

He walked briskly through the halls of the Castle, aware of a snide grin on his face that he couldn't subdue. He would glance down at Allura every so often and his grin would widen. She would come to enjoy her new home, or so he was convinced. He planned to shower her with anything she may desire - there would be nothing she would lack. In return, she would serve him loyally. As for what his father might have to say about it, Lotor didn't worry himself about it for now. He would not dare openly challenge his father again, but he was also determined not to let Zarkon intervene with his plans for Allura.

Lotor finally reached his destination after a lengthy elevator ride – an expansive suite near the top of the Castle where he would retire in the evenings. He stepped off the lift into the room, heading directly to a grand expanse of bed across the way. Lotor gingerly laid his burden down on the bed and stood back to admire her still-sleeping form.

“She is lovely.”

Lotor spun on his heel to find Haggar standing nearby. On any other day, he'd snap at her for making such a sneaky entrance into his quarters, but his mood could not be sullied. Not with what he'd just achieved.

“When will the spell wear off?” he asked, perhaps a bit too eagerly.

“You're welcome,” she shot back with notable sarcasm.

Although it was still true it would take a lot to sour his mood, Haggar was certainly trying his patience. He cast her a sidelong glance while waiting for her to answer his question.

“Soon,” she said curtly when it became clear she was not going to get so much as a thank you for her role in the kidnapping. “Kitty told me you had returned.” The blue cat emerged from behind the witch and meowed in Lotor's general direction. “I thought we'd come up and see the results of **our** handy work.”

Haggar's heavy-handed hinting did not escape Lotor. “You will be rewarded well, Haggar. That is, *if* she wakes up.”

“You worry too much, sire. She will wake very soon, but I must warn you she will be groggy at first. It’s a gradual process.”

Lotor studied his prize closely and took notice that he could now see the rise and fall of her chest as she took her breaths. So, she was coming out of it. “Excellent.”

“What do you plan to do with her?”

Lotor looked for signs that the old witch was kidding. “Need you even ask? She’ll be my queen.”

Haggar smiled knowingly. “You have to become King yourself, first.”

Lotor chuckled, aware that Haggar wished to coax treasonous words from his lips. She would not have her way. “Everything will happen in time. But for now, I must leave here and see father to discuss our next move on Arus. I want her heavily guarded. She is not to leave this room. Of course, if she begins to awake, I want to be told immediately.”

Haggar bowed slightly. “As you wish, sire.”

“Hey, Keith. You awake?”

Keith raised his weary head up off the pillow and eyed Lance, who stood in his chamber doorway.

Keith could only manage to grunt something unintelligible.

“Better hustle,” Lance said flatly without his usual enthusiasm, “or you’re going to be late for the dedication of the memorial.”

Lance disappeared out into the hall to leave Keith to the business of readying himself for the ceremony. It was late, he noted, when glancing at the clock to see it past eleven. He’d really overslept, and with the dedication slated for noon, he had little time to get himself together. But instead of feeling any sense of urgency, he simply felt drained all over again and certainly not inspired to do much. His head throbbed, and he felt anything but refreshed by the sleep he’d had. Furthermore, he’d fallen asleep in his clothes the night before – boots and all.

Sitting up on the bed, he shook his head. No, he had to get it together. Glancing at his sleeve, he noted the black band put there before the funeral was still wrapped around the upper arm – evidence that this hadn’t been simply a bad dream.

He rose stiffly from the bed and staggered into the adjacent washroom, only bothering to splash some cool water on his face and half-heartedly attempt to tame his hair. Keith knew he should really make a better effort to have a proper appearance. The truth of it was it would be a miracle if he could drag himself to the memorial. At least he could count on Nanny being too bereaved to lecture him on how a gentleman would show more respect than to arrive at such an event in wrinkled clothes and unwashed. Small consolation.

Venturing out into the hall, Keith wasn't all too surprised to find it deserted. The rest of the team was probably already boarding carriages to take them to the valley. But as he passed the open door to the Castle study, he caught sight of Coran seated at the desk. The castle diplomat sat slumped down in the chair, which was such a marked departure from his usual impeccable posture. Keith noted a nearly empty wine flask resting atop the desk nearby.

Keith ducked into the library and cleared his throat, to which Coran simply glanced briefly and tiredly in his general direction.

"You're coming with us, aren't you Coran?" Keith asked, his voice sounding raspy and haggard from all the crying he'd done the day before.

Coran shifted his gaze out the window, his head bobbing a little unsteadily. "I have always served this kingdom and the royal family well."

Keith nodded, taking note of the man's slurred speech. "Of course. Nobody questions that."

Keith thought it seemed Coran aged a decade overnight, and he supposed strong drink wasn't helping that impression. Coran had dark circles under his eyes and as intoxicated as he appeared, Keith had to wonder if he'd been up all night with the bottle his only companion. Upon further inspection, he noticed several empty wine bottles stuffed into the trash container beside the desk, removing all doubt.

"Everything we've been through as a people and planet," Coran continued, his gaze still fixed on some point on the horizon beyond the window. He reached for the flask on the desk and disregarded the empty glass beside it in favor of taking a healthy chug directly from it. Coran drained the remaining liquid, a small trail of it escaping the corner of his mouth and dribbling down his chin. Coran unsteadily wiped at the errant liquid with his sleeve as he returned the empty flask to the desktop. It was rare indeed for Keith to see the dignitary so stripped of his stately veneer. He had no idea how to comfort the man. "And it came down to this. We're good people. Why does this keep happening to us? Why did it have to be *her* of all people? Our Allura."

Keith sighed for he had no answers. Part of what made terrible twists of fate difficult was the fact that there often were no reasons.

Coran directed his puffy, bloodshot eyes at Keith. "I knew Allura since the day she was born. A delight. A sheer delight...always."

Coran closed his eyes as his voice trailed off and a small smile formed on his lips inspired by, Keith supposed, fond memories. He knew Allura a very short time by comparison, so he could only imagine how deep the loss cut for Coran. Coran then spoke a few other babbling sentences and it was clear to Keith that the man had reached his limit. Keith weighed whether it was such a good idea for Coran to go to the memorial under such influence.

Keith was about to leave, having made the decision not to press and go on without the royal advisor, when Coran fumbled his cane in an effort to get to his feet. Keith scrambled to help support Coran's wobbly legs.

"Here, let me help you to your chambers. You should probably go sleep this off."

"Memorial," Coran muttered. "I must...go."

Rather than argue, Keith gently led Coran to the man's quarters and guided him to the bed that indeed looked as if it hadn't been slept in the night before. Though the diplomat still uttered occasional protests, he did not put up a physical fight. In fact, he lay down on the bed more or less of his own accord. By the time Keith pulled up a blanket to cover Coran, he was already asleep.

Lotor broke from his war plans, leaving Mogor to hash out the last-minute details when word came to him that Allura was stirring. The news even dulled his anger at his father, for not having made any prior plans running under the assumption Lotor would fail again. With much anticipation, Lotor dashed into his penthouse suite to see Haggar standing over the bed where Allura lay. The Princess moved about fitfully, her eyes fluttering open briefly now and then, but it was obvious she was not yet with her wits about her.

"She awakes, sire," Haggar remarked, her golden eyes sparkling with delight. "I assume you are pleased?"

"Yes, very. Now leave us."

Haggar's eyes narrowed at the curt dismissal. But she did not quarrel or tarry. Once the old hag was gone, Lotor put all his focus back on Allura. She was in her formal attire, looking every bit the feminine beauty he'd longed to possess. He slid into bed beside her, putting an arm around her to still her restlessness. She responded to the touch by turning and looking up at him briefly through glazed eyes. She muttered something soft and incoherent.

"You're home, Allura. With me," Lotor assured her, figuring she might as well get used to Castle Doom as her home. He pulled her close to him, close enough that he could feel the

beating of her heart. She looked up at him again and held his gaze, causing his own pulse to quicken considerably. He was surprised she didn't act repulsed by the sight of him. "Mmm, so perfect," he murmured, studying her delicate features and wondering why he'd been advised in the past that fantasies don't often measure up in reality. Up close, she was every bit his ideal with no distressing flaw detected.

Allura remained close, looking at him almost expectantly. Sensing a window of opportunity, Lotor leaned in and tasted her lips. And when the sharp slap across the face he expected never came, he increased the passion and fervor of the kiss. It was almost too good to be true when she reciprocated. He desired to possess every part of her as his passion built. That is, until she broke off the kiss briefly to utter something that replaced his passion with ire.

"Keith," she said dreamily, her speech slightly slurred while looking once again into Lotor's eyes.

Lotor felt his temper flare and he rolled off the bed, the mood of the moment tempered by her utterance of that name. Of course, he knew she was still not in her right mind, but it galled him to no end that she only kissed him willingly because she thought he was not just someone else but *Keith*. He could feel the urge to rage coming on and decided it best he go elsewhere lest he take it out on Allura. Leaving Allura behind safely locked away in his suite, he thought it best to direct his fury in a far more deserving direction – Planet Arus, and most of all, the Black Lion pilot.

Storming off the lift and into the hallway, he was about to make his way back to the war room when Haggar emerged from the shadows. He grimaced, in no mood to deal with her.

"Sire, I –"

"Not now," he snapped without so much as a break in his stride.

"I can make her love you."

Lotor stopped in his tracks and slowly turned around to face the witch. It unnerved him that she always knew what was going on. "What?"

"You have Allura in body, but not in mind and spirit, Lotor. I can use my magic so that you may possess her on every level," Haggar explained.

Lotor paused to consider it, only to ultimately brush it aside. "No, I'll win her over. She can't pine for her hero forever, especially after I kill him and decimate her planet. She'll have nothing left and no one to turn to but me." Besides, Lotor thought, it troubled him to think what Haggar would demand for such services. She was already nagging him for compensation for her earlier spell.

Haggar's response was a light chuckle, which irritated Lotor. "You're quite the charmer."

“He’s got all the charm of a rattlesnake.”

Lotor turned to see his father, King Zarkon, standing behind him. “Hello, father,” Lotor responded, the last word dripping with contempt.

Zarkon looked his heir over for a moment. “You don’t know the first thing about women, Lotor. You’ll never win her over the way you hope to. Women of virtue don’t simply fall in love with the likes of you. This is why I say we use her to force Arus to surrender. We’ll win without firing a shot or losing a single ship.”

“I see,” Lotor scoffed, deeply insulted that his own father found him so contemptuous and unlovable. “For not having faith in my plan before, you certainly want to tell me how to finish it out now that the hardest part is done. I know what I’m doing.”

“Do you?” challenged Zarkon. “Seems to me you’re well on your way to letting your ‘feelings’ for a woman lead you down the path to ruin again. You’ll never learn.”

Lotor’s cheeks burned with the rage at such insults. “Winning over Allura is just a bonus – Arus and the Voltron Force have their days numbered regardless. I’ll just take extra pleasure in taking the captain out personally.”

He looked to Haggar for support, but she remained silent choosing to let a peculiar smile on her unsightly face speak for her. Of course, she would choose this moment to be petty, leaving him out to dry because he wasn’t quick enough for her in his rewards. Lotor glared at her before turning back to his father.

“Your way just gives them time to find her and rescue her,” Zarkon countered.

“They think she is dead, father. They should keep thinking that. If we use her as a hostage, then they *will* try to come here and rescue her. Is that what you want? Voltron on Doom? They’ve never taken the offensive on us before under the foolish notion that they’re ‘defenders’. Their Princess held hostage here will give them a noble reason to invade.” Lotor was satisfied when Zarkon remained quiet, emboldening him to go on. “They expect us to get wind of Allura’s untimely passing and to take advantage of their lack of a pilot for Blue Lion. We should not disappoint them. But the more we wait, the more time they have to rally their allies.”

“Not wanting to waste time...this is why you broke from war plans to go make a play for your Princess?”

Lotor’s jaw went slack for a moment. If his father had a shred of faith in him, *he* would have the war plans drawn up by the time he’d returned with Allura. Lotor thought he’d earned the right to revel in his victory a little. “I was just—“

Zarkon silenced him with a wave of his scepter. “You were just being typical Lotor, following the orders of your little general. Mogor told me you went rushing off the moment you heard she stirred. Not that I couldn’t have guessed.”

Lotor clenched his fists, his mind filling with murderous contempt for Mogor. He’d act on it, too, if he thought he could ultimately get away with it and not stoke his father’s true anger. “Okay,” he seethed. “You’ve made your point. But my plan has worked so far. Let me see it through. You won’t be disappointed.”

Zarkon paused, and when his answer came it still made the hairs at the nape of Lotor’s neck stand on end. “Don’t fail.”

As his father departed the hallway, Lotor turned his attention back to Haggar. She was still standing there with that stupid smile on her face, in addition to chuckling softly. The audacity of it incensed Lotor.

“Don’t you have a pot you should be stirring, you old hag?” Lotor barked before stalking off to the war room. He only hoped Mogor was there to further give him an outlet for his rage. They would all soon see the grand wisdom of his plan and regret the day they ever doubted him.

Keith slowed his steed to a mild gait as he neared the last rise before reaching the valley. The green of the fields were broken on either side of the path by stark white head stones dotting the landscape for as far as the eye could see. The markers all matched, and Keith knew they marked the graves of those who fought and lost to defend the Castle against Zarkon in the first devastating raid on Arus. Most likely, they were young souls who once had their whole lives ahead of them, their potential and momentum in life cut tragically short. Not unlike Allura. It was a depressing backdrop to an otherwise serene scene. As if it wasn’t bad enough that he couldn’t stop obsessing about death, it surrounded him now no matter where he looked.

Finally, he crested the hill and could see the gathering a short distance below in front of the monument. Though he was out of the cemetery, Keith dreaded what lie ahead more. Nothing was ahead of him but more sorrow, tears and anguish. He didn’t blame them for the emotion – he felt them himself – but being constantly surrounded by it all was wearing on him.

The ceremony would start any moment now, but at least he hadn’t missed anything. Few took notice outside a passing glance as Keith approached and dismounted the horse. He left the animal to graze in the meadow and joined the other team members at the site. He chanced a glance at the remaining Voltron Force and noticed they looked just as bedraggled and unkempt as he did. Pidge cast a forlorn look at Keith before frowning with concern.

“Where’s Coran?”

“He’s...resting,” Keith replied, thinking it best not to divulge too many details.

“Oh. I thought he was supposed to head the dedication.” Pidge looked to Keith expectantly, and Keith got a sinking feeling Pidge – along with everyone else – would expect the captain of the force to do the honors.

Keith looked helplessly to Lance and Hunk for support and found little, for they seemed to be of like minds. “Guys, I ---“ Keith began, faltering as he searched for a fitting excuse. “I really think an Arusian should do this.”

“I don’t think they’d mind,” Lance countered, indicating the gathering of dignitaries and court members from kingdoms around Arus. “We’re practically citizens for all we’ve been through to bring this world back and defend it. Besides, I think it would mean more if you did the dedication. These people respect you.”

Though Keith agreed Arus felt like home, he scanned the gathering and still felt no urge to make himself the focus of attention. But then Lance gave him little choice. Clapping Keith on the back, Lance moved them both forward out of the crowd and cleared his throat.

“I regret to inform you that Coran is not feeling well,” Lance announced, gaining the full attention of the gathering. “In his stead, Captain Keith will oversee the dedication of the monument.”

The somber group politely and lightly clapped while Keith begrudgingly accepted his fate. He made his way to the stone, which was for now covered by a canvas material, all too aware of the eyes upon him. Just as he was about to reach out and pull the canvas down to reveal the hard work that went into the creation, a palace guard cut through the crowd. Keith frowned at the intrusion, thinking the message must be urgent to interrupt such a ceremony. And indeed, it was. The guard informed him that Prince Bandor, of Planet Pollux, had called into Castle Control seeking council with Coran or the Voltron Force. Whatever his news, it sounded urgent. Keith had little choice but to sheepishly bow out of the ceremony, and in an opportunity he couldn’t miss, appointed Lance his successor before riding back to the Castle.

*Passing by a cemetery,
I think of all the little hopes and dreams,
That lie lifeless and unfilled beneath the soil.*

*I see an old man fingering his perishing flesh.
He tells himself he was a good man and did good things.
Amused and confused by life's little ironies,
He swallows his bottle of distilled damnation.*

*Oh, what a perfect day,
To think about myself
My feet are firmly screwed to the floor.
What is there to fear from such a regular world?*

*People turn around with unseeing eyes.
They're looking for something that doesn't exist.
The world you once knew is being eaten up by rust.
No-one has time for the past, but still, in God they trust.
The future is now, but it's all going wrong.
Bodies good for nothing, but it's to nothing they belong.*

*Oh, what a perfect day,
To think about myself
My feet are firmly screwed to the floor.
What is there to fear from such a regular world?*

--Perfect, The The