

It was the eve of their wedding, and Sven sat quietly in his quarters at the royal palace on Pollux, alone with his thoughts. He felt numb. Part of him still wouldn't believe this day had arrived. Though he knew in his heart it eventually would. He leaned back in his chair, which afforded him a spectacular view of the valley below and the mountains beyond. The mid-afternoon sun glistened on a distant stream in the valley, creating a winding thread that sparkled like a diamond necklace. It was a lovely day, one perfect for a royal wedding.

His window also gave an impressive view of the castle's great expanse of lower-level balconies and this was where the royal servants could be seen, bustling about to get everything in order for the coming ceremony. Pots and vases full of flowers were everywhere – it was a sight to behold. But Sven preferred to close his eyes and drift back to a different time. Back when he first fell for Romelle.

He'd long become resigned to living out the rest of his days in the caverns under the Pit of Skulls, depressed and angry for failing himself and the Voltron Force. That is, until she tumbled down to him like a fallen angel. It wasn't just her beauty that caught his eye – her resemblance to Allura was indeed uncanny. Rather, it was her strength of heart and compassion that really sold him on her and brought him back from the brink of insanity. He'd pushed her away at first but she would have none of it. She had been determined to see them both through that horrible time, though he was sure the cruelty that she would witness there on Doom would crush even her spirit, as he believed it had his own. How much more then had it impressed him when she overcame it all and emerged from that nightmare not only sane but with a vow to return for the other slaves they were forced to leave behind. That vow she would not break.

He learned pretty early that she was a Princess, the way she carried herself gave off such an air. Though there had been a time when he'd have been quick to believe the stereotypes of such a station – the snobbery, the unwillingness to get one's own hands dirty – Romelle proved to him otherwise. Even after their initial escape from Doom, she went back with him to help fight and liberate the slaves there, paying more than just lip service to her promise to come back for them. She'd earned his respect, love and admiration and she would always have that.

It was during this second time on Doom when he was feeling confident enough to show how he felt. They were spending another long night in hiding, biding their time for the right moment to strike. Sitting by a small campfire tucked inside an otherwise dark and dank cave, they shared stories in hushed tones to pass the time. The tales started out light and general in nature, but soon turned more personal and touching. He found himself telling her things he'd been afraid sometimes to even admit to himself. She somehow always knew what to do or what to say to make him feel better, so that he felt less embarrassed for bearing his soul and most of all, with

her he felt as though he belonged again. With her, he could forget his failures and matter once again.

And in that moment of bonding, he had to reveal one more thing. He was madly in love with her. She faltered and he thought for a moment he'd gone too far, said too much. But, then she began to gently explain that, though she had similar feelings that she was already promised to another of royal lineage – it was a marriage arranged long ago by her father. Part of her was loyal to her father's memory and her planet's traditions. But part of her wanted to feel the touch of the man she truly loved, not some stranger she was pledged to that she hadn't even met yet. For centuries, love hadn't been part of the equation for Polluxian royalty – it was a calculated transaction for the sole benefit of dowries, status and bloodlines. She confessed she hated the idea of a loveless union.

Their eyes met and Sven could tell she was on the precipice of daring to defy those traditions. And perhaps it had been wrong of him, but his own emotion drove him to encourage her as he drew her close and kissed her passionately. Why shouldn't they be together, he had reasoned. Her father and eldest brother were gone, she was the heir to the throne and had already ushered Pollux into a new era of being motivated by what was right rather than by what brought it the most gain. Being together seemed perfect. Her body was so warm, close and soft. This would be just another part of the changes that had swept their lives and so he reveled in the moment and the confidence that she would choose love.

The release of their mutual pent-up emotion was powerful, and they eventually ended up making love by the fire. Sven had had his share of lovers, but despite the despair of their surroundings and a little creative maneuvering to lessen the discomfort of lying on the hard ground, it was an amazing experience. One he knew he would remember all his days. There was no self-consciousness, no shame. Just an overwhelming feeling of love, passion and acceptance as they physically merged together. He held her through the night and never wanted it to end.\

Yet, as it must, it had.

Sven opened his eyes, knowing he had to face reality. Though he thought their love would endure and that it would be him ushering Romelle off to some rose-petal strewn honeymoon suite tonight it was not to be. In the months that passed after that night on Doom, Romelle could not escape the trappings of her station, though at first she tried. At one point she'd even sworn she'd give it all up and let her young brother Bandor assume the throne. But in the end, she'd made a promise to another man she deeply loved – her father – and she could not bring herself to forsake it. The matter of her people, and the fact that they'd grown to depend on her leadership also greatly pressured her. He could tell it broke her heart to do so, and Sven wished he'd known what to say on that last intimate night they shared together months ago when she tearfully confessed that they were not meant to be.

The arranged marriage would go on as planned and Sven's dream of growing old with Romelle would die tonight. The memories made it too difficult to stand any longer. He wanted to be the

bigger man – attend the wedding, wish Romelle love and happiness. They had both met her intended, of course, by now and as much as Sven hated to admit it, he wasn't a bad man. He was handsome, confident and yet, romantic and thoughtful – and most of all, a Prince. Just about everything Sven wasn't. He surely had more to offer Romelle than the drudgery of a simple civilian life. He would also be lying if he didn't admit it hurt to watch her grow fond of her Prince as he courted her. Romelle ended up, it would seem, getting it all – her station, her Prince, and love. He should be happy for her, but his own misery wouldn't let him.

An ironic smile crossed Sven's face as he realized he was back where he began – in that limbo of no longer really belonging anywhere. He couldn't really return to Arus and join up with the Voltron Force again. And his presence on Pollux was suddenly unimportant, not to mention intrusive in a way. Not that Romelle ever made him feel unwelcome but he surely had a hefty case of third wheel syndrome.

Tears stung at his eyes and he hastily wiped them away. He wasn't sure where he was going to go, but he felt he could no longer bear witness to the union of the woman he loved to another. It was too much. He simply hoped Romelle would understand and if she ever thought of him, that they were fond thoughts. With that, he rose from the chair and gathered a few personal items from the room. Before leaving, he hastily scribbled a note and left it on the stand beside his bed. Stepping out into the hall, a stand with a vase upon it filled with Irises caught his eye. It was, he knew, Romelle's favorite flower. It also dominated the arrangements on the balcony below for likely that reason. On impulse he plucked a bloom from the vase, and with its stem dripping a trail back to his room as he carried it, left it beside the note he'd penned. Of all the things her prince had lavished on her, including flowers of all types, it seemed to escape him the particular things Romelle favored most. But Sven knew. And this was his way of showing it one last time.

Afterwards, he stole down the hall careful to avoid eye contact with anyone he passed and hoped he would not run into Romelle. He was almost successful, but as he reached the lower level of the castle and made his way to the west wing exit – in the vain hope it was bustling with less activity – he heard a soft and familiar voice call his name. At first, he kept walking briskly, as if he hadn't heard. It was no use. She caught up with him, and he had to turn to acknowledge her when she'd reached out to grab his arm. To his surprise, it was not Romelle after all, but her look-alike cousin Allura who had no doubt traveled to Pollux from her native Arus to witness the nuptials.

"A-allura," he stammered in surprise. Sven gulped, not knowing what to say and kept his eyes downcast in the hope she wouldn't notice he'd been crying.

It was futile, of course. The Arusian Princess could tell something had him upset and if he knew her at all, she wouldn't just let it drop. He sighed heavily, dreading the interrogation to come. Sven's eyes slowly met hers, and immediately he saw her pretty face was a mask of deep concern. After reading his expression a moment, her expression changed to that of sudden understanding and sympathy – it was almost too much for Sven to bear.

When she glanced at the bag he was holding, he knew she'd likely figured out the rest of his intentions as well. "Sven, tell me you're not leaving. I know it's hard," she continued in soft,

hushed tones and it was clear Romelle must have confessed their affair to her for she seemed to gather Sven had more than a passing interest in her cousin, “but your being there would mean a lot to Romelle.”

Suddenly, Sven felt angry and though he’d later regret it, he lashed out at Allura. “You don’t understand,” he accused her bitterly. “I can’t. I can’t do this. Now leave me be.” He turned and took a few steps as if to leave it at that

“I understand more than you know,” Allura replied firmly. She gathered the excess material on the skirt of her fine gown and dashed over to Sven so that he had to face her. “Romelle and I – we have the same quandary – be with the men we truly love or do what we have to do for the sake of our families and our people. It’s you she’ll always love Sven. You still need each other. The people of Pollux need you.”

He gaped at Allura for a moment. She hadn’t seen Romelle and her betrothed grow ever closer over time – she knew nothing! “We’ll see what happens when the day comes that you marry your prince. I’m sure Keith will be all smiles and showering the two of you with his blessings. I, however, cannot live in this castle with Romelle and *him*, while continuing on as if the knowledge of her true love is going to keep me warm at night.”

Allura simply looked crushed and helpless

“Give Romelle my regards as she moves on with her life. Meanwhile, I’ll be getting on with mine. Elsewhere.” Sven hadn’t meant to sound so bitter, but it was how it came out nonetheless.

He sidestepped to get around Allura, and headed for the exit without looking back. She was right about one thing – he really couldn’t abandon Pollux or its people. But for now, he simply had to get out of that palace and clear his head.

As the sun sank low in the sky, Sven turned toward the east, the sound of bells and distant cheering carried to him on the wind. In the distance, he saw the silhouette of the castle he once called home and knew from whence the noise came.

It was done.

He stood frozen on the hillside with the wind whipping through his shaggy, dark hair and fought the urge to imagine the joy on Romelle’s face and at the same time not feel bitter that it wasn’t him beholding it firsthand as her new husband.

Things were as they were meant to be, he knew. Now, he had to choose the path to take for his own life. After a long moment, a small smile touched his lips, and he turned his back to the castle for the last time. He walked on into the coming night, hoping for Romelle peace, joy, and happiness. He was satisfied to know that, at least for a while, she knew the real Sven.

*And I'd give up forever to touch you
'Cause I know that you feel me somehow
You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be
And I don't want to go home right now
And all I can taste is this moment
And all I can breathe is your life
and sooner or later it's over
I just don't want to miss you tonight*

*And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am*

-- Iris, Goo Goo Dolls