

Winter's Gallows

TWO: The Haunting

Lukan found himself in the midst of a dark room with no lights. Perpetual darkness surrounded him as the familiar tone hit him in the chest. His heart pounded. No. Not again! There was a rustling sound coming from behind him. There was a familiar voice speaking familiar words to him as the shadow appeared in front of him once more. They spoke to him in the echoey and vast dark room as he knew what was coming.

"You're next Lukan Benka. Next. Mine."

Lukan has been here before, but he knew he could not stop himself from screaming.

"N-no! Don't! Let me go! Leave me alone!"

"I will never set you free..." The shadowy figure revealed itself right to Lukan's face as he looked on in horror realizing that the assailant was someone different this time.

This time. It was Klaus.

The otter closed in on him to...

Lukan yelped awake from the recurring nightmare , heart beating uncontrollably as the sunlight shined down on his sweat soaked fur. That nightmare again! That damn nightmare again! But this time... Klaus was there! What does this all mean...?

His mother was already gone to work again, so Lukan had to brave the elements once again. The whole way he could not stop thinking of the otter, nor could he stop thinking of his unexpected appearance in the nightmare he had on a regular basis. Was that a subconscious warning that the happy go lucky otter was not to be trusted? What could it possibly mean?

His morning classes went off horribly because the otter was stuck in his mind. He had no hint of malicious intent whatsoever. None! Even his past "friends" held some sinister qualities, but Klaus? No it can't. Are looks that much deceiving? All he saw was an incredibly tall and happy otter with the happiest face with clothes that were way too tight on him. He made his way to the sub shop slowly, but the voice had already found him at the front door.

"Lukan! ...You look like you were just in a tornado, what happened?" Klaus noted.

Lukan did not even realize that his fur was still a mess! He was so distracted he must have forgotten to brush it all up. Why had no one noted that until Klaus did? How embarrassing... Wait what!?

"K-Klaus!" Lukan jumped a little. "Hi!" he said clumsily. "And it's nothing, I just slept really badly last night...."

Klaus looked sympathetic, "Really? Man that sucks, I hate nights like that. I slept really well for the record. I had this wonderful dream about a young, good looking r--" he stopped himself mid sentence and tried not to look flustered. "Well a good dream," he hastily finished.

'Good for you... I had a recurring nightmare show up again, but this time...' Lukan stopped himself this time.

"This time...?" Klaus tilted his head curiously.

"This time something else happened that was... different." Lukan sighed.

"Go on...?" The otter urged him.

"It is the nightmare from my past," Lukan said flatly.

The otter's small ears dropped. "Oh. Really? Again I did not know..."

Lukan shook his head. "It's okay, but... I don't know if I can trust you well enough to be my friend," he confessed.

"It was me who was in your nightmare this time, wasn't it?" Klaus assumed.

Lukan looked at him, shocked. "What? How did you know!?"

"It's obvious," Klaus said. "Look I... I'm sorry for everything you're feeling. You don't deserve it! And I just... I want to help you... help you by being your first true friend..." Klaus said sympathetically. "You just got to give me a chance..."

Luka sighed, not sure what to do. He knew he could not trust the otter. He knew that nothing could ever work in his favor given his lackluster everything. But he also knew that he told his mom he'd do it. This time he must keep that promise. "...Okay Klaus. I'll go for it," he conceded.

Instantly the otter squealed and hugged Lukan so tightly he yapped. "Oh thank you thank you thank you! I know it must have been hard for you to decide, but I promise you won't regret it!" he said.

"O-okay, okay okay! C-can you let me breathe please?" Lukan said with difficulty.

The otter released him with a small gasp. "I'm so sorry! I'm just glad you are giving me chance!"

Lukan straightened out his shoulder as he breathed heavily. He could smell the subtle scent of the otter's cologne. It wasn't unpleasant yet had a strange fishy tinge. He shook his head violently when the otter spoke again.

"So you have a class right after lunch today?" Klaus asked.

Lukan nodded.

"Oh poo, I wanted to hang out with my new friend," Klaus said good naturedly. "Ah well what can ya do? Can't help when they schedule their dumb classes."

Lukan nodded in agreement. "Yeah... Guess I should go, for real this time," he added when he glanced at the clock on the wall of the shop.

"Okay. Could I see you later sometime today?" Klaus asked. "It'd be a shame to let today end just like that."

"No problem. I'll see ya at 3, right here after my classes?" Lukan asked.

Klaus nodded with a glint in his emerald eyes. "Of course!"

Even after deciding to be his friend, Lukan could not keep the otter out of his mind as he struggled through his two classes. He kept the image of the otter in his mind every time he tried to focus on his work. But he could not. It felt too surreal to have a new friend just like that. He knew he was making a horrible mistake, and it wasn't just because finals were on the verge of appearing, but something just wouldn't stop nudging him, badgering him to be the friend of the over eccentric and really tall otter character.

After the classes, the otter was standing there in the shop, but he was wearing something different. He was wearing the same shirt he had on before, but now he was wearing shorts, and a pair of flip-flops. Instantly, Lukan was puzzled. That's summer wear, yet it was December!

"Hi Lukan!" the otter greeted him with a smile. He instantly recognized the confusion on Lukan's masked raccoon face when he added. "I was just going to go swimming for a while at the pool and I was wondering if you wanted to join me?" he asked.

Lukan's answer was given, and it was at that point he realized the shorts were swimming trunks, but what answer does he give to the otter? "I usually go home at this point..." he started.

"Oh come on, please!" Klaus pressed.

Lukan did not want to disappoint his new friend again in fear that the chance of bad things happening would increase so he responded with. "Oh... alright... but I can't stay long; I take the city bus home and service stops at 6. And it already takes me almost an hour to get home..."

Klaus shrugged. "You can take the 5 o' clock bus home right?" When Lukan hesitantly nodded he continued, "Alright then! That gives us two hours! And even if it doesn't work out, I can drive you home myself."

Lukan felt his heart skip a beat. So many things bad can happen if such a situation were to arise! At that point the sun would have set and when it came to darkness, he was no fan of it if he was not home. "Oh I dunno... I'm no fan of the dark..." he admitted.

"Don't sweat it, bro, you'll be just fine!" Klaus said.

Lukan was also thinking about how he worked at the supermarket, and thanks to winter having such short days, he would not get off until it was very clearly dark out. And he had to walk home. Obviously if he could be safe going home from work, this too? Then he remembered that with an added bus ride could complicate things. And yet, he said "Okay."

Klaus nodded with a smile. "I'll get you out of that shell of yours eventually, I promise!" he said as he led them to the pool after putting on a sweater to go outside again because obviously, it was in a different building.

Knowing otters have rather thin fur, Lukan had to ask. "Aren't your legs freezing?!" he was surprised at how well the otter could handle such temperatures.

"Yeah, but I was born in Canada; I was born to handle the cold!" Klaus declared.

It took them a few minutes to battle the winds towards the physical education department of the campus. Outside were snow covered basketball and tennis courts dotted around the large building that had a gymnasium, the pool of course, a workout room, an underground track; it was massive. Biggest building on campus, even more so than the Union Building where most of the entire English department was and the student lounges. Lukan admittedly had been in here only once, where they held his student orientation. Physical sports and other things along those lines were very far from his forte. Right before reaching the pool from inside the building, which smelled of sweat and rubber, Lukan remembered something.

"Oh! I suppose I should let my mom know I am going to be home late," he said.

Klaus stopped. "Ah right. That would be a good idea."

Lukan walked back towards the entrance and got out the cell phone he rarely used. And of course. It was dead. He cursed aloud. "Fuck!"

The otter's ears perked. "What? What happened?" he walked over to where Lukan was standing. Lukan's tail twitched angrily.

"My phone's dead!" he exclaimed angrily.

The otter held out his own cell phone. It was far more advanced a smartphone than his. His wasn't even a smartphone actually. "Here, you could call her on mine," he said.

Lukan took it. "Th-thanks." He touched the screen and complicated icons showed up. "U-uh..." he had no idea what to do.

The otter pointed at one particular icon that looked like a megaphone to him. "That one is to make a call. Just tap it and dial and you're set." There was no condescending tone in his voice. Lukan hated how simple some things were, yet they were so utterly confusing.

"S-sorry. Like I said I am a complete dunce when it comes to anything powered by a battery or electricity," he said as he started dialing his home number.

"Don't worry," Klaus replied.

A few dial rings later and. "Hello?"

"Hi mom," Lukan said.

"Lukey? Why are you calling from a phone from a character called Klaus Richtors? I almost did not answer you know," his mother said.

"That's because my phone is dead, and this phone belongs to my friend; he let me borrow it," Lukan explained.

There was an exasperated sigh from his mom. "How many times did I have to tell you to remember to keep your phone charged at all times, no matter how little you actually use it?"

"I know, I know! It's just really easy to lose track," Lukan was tired of defending himself.

"You still need to keep it in mind at all times!"

"Yeah I know."

"But you said your *friend*? You have made friends with him now?" she sounded strangely hopeful.

"Yes mom," Lukan confirmed.

"That's my boy! I told you, you'd have no problems!" she said.

'*Not yet*,' Lukan thought. "Yeah, I was calling you to let you know that I am going to hang out with him for a couple hours and will be home late," he explained.

"That's perfectly okay, honey, just remember to get on that bus before you can't again until tomorrow morning!" she said.

"And if he does not make it on time, I'll drive him home myself, Mrs. Benka!" Klaus spoke loudly, close to the phone and in Lukan's face so he could smell his breath. It was... oddly minty.

"Okay, Klaus was it? Have fun you two!" and she hung up.

"Well now that that is out of the way, let's hit that pool!" Klaus declared.

It was then Lukan also realized. "I have no swimsuit with me!"

The otter looked behind him. "Oh? Oh don't worry about that; I always carry a few spares in case I forget mine! I promise they're clean!" And with that he reached into his pack and pulled out a green suit with paw print decals all over it.

That otter... he was prepared for everything wasn't he...? Just what was his deal...? Lukan had no time to ponder as the otter snapped him back to reality.

"Um... Earth to Lukan? Are ya there, friend?" he waved his handpaws in front of Lukan's face.

"Huh what? Yes Klaus?" Lukan said almost absentmindedly.

"Are you ready now?" Klaus was still happy, but Lukan detected a tinge of impatience. Or... was it anticipation...? He could not even tell. He nodded and started walking before he daydreamed again. Seriously. Who was this guy!?

In the changing rooms, it was stifling hot compared to outside and it smelled of both sweat and chlorine so thickly, Lukan had to stifle choking on it. The otter spoke to him. "You'll have to share a locker with me since I had rented one out already for the semester. At the end of the semester like this, it'd be way too difficult to get one of your own you know?" Lukan nodded in understanding. "Locker 38A, remember it," as he approached the locker he mentioned. Once Klaus opened the locker he started to take off his shirt. Lukan, realizing that he was not already in the suit, started feeling embarrassed for changing in front of him. He nervously kept his back to the otter as he undressed himself. He couldn't believe he was doing this; of all the things. Of all the THINGS that could happen, what he was letting himself do was absolutely absurd. A huge part of Lukan wanted to bolt out of the building for fear, and yet, he continued to pull his pants down, exposing his deep blue boxer briefs. He begged in his mind that the otter wasn't looking, because he knew that the otter was ready to go already. A quick take off of his shirt and flip flops and he was good to go, but Lukan had the whole schabang to go through. His ears burned as he slowly pulled down the last garment on his body, making sure his tail covered himself as he did so. Whatever risk there was that the otter was looking, he did not want to take it. As quickly as he could, he grabbed the trunks the otter had given to him for borrowing and pulled them on, clumsily tripping on some of the soft mesh-like fabric inside on his footpaws as he did, nearly causing him to fall over. But for ten seconds flat he was completely nude, and in that long lasting moment of time he prayed no one saw him. Then he turned around and to his dismay, saw the otter looking at him, also ready to go. He was surprisingly athletic, the muscles obvious under his fur. He was quite the lean creature, Lukan noticed. Almost... but wait. Was he watching him the whole time!? Wh-what did he think he was, gay!? He decided not to ask, fearing a probable yes.

"Really shy aintcha?" he said teasingly. "You really don't have to be; we're friends in this; it's not like we're total strangers!" he said.

Lukan tried the best he could not to blush. "Y-yeah, but even if we are friends, we haven't been friends for very long... and I've always been uncomfortable about this sort of thing," he said in a low voice.

Klaus patted him on the back. "You're just fine, now let's get into that pool, shall we?"

Lukan nodded, biting his lip. Unlike the otter, obviously, Lukan was not very good at swimming. Sure he would not drop like a rock, but he could not swim nearly as well as most others, let alone an otter like him. He and the tall otter walked out of the changing room's back door which led directly into the pool. It was cooler inside the pool room, but the chlorine smell grew much stronger, almost overpowering Lukan as he looked around. Many of the creatures that were there were aquatic like the otter,

mostly mustelids like him. It made Lukan feel somewhat out of place despite the occasional fox or wolf...

His thoughts were once again interrupted by a loud splash. Klaus had jumped in and the splashing wave that resulted washed over Lukan's footpaws. "Hey Lukan, come on it!" Klaus called from inside, as he used his webbed paws to expertly maneuver through the water.

Lukan looked in and hesitated, only dipping a toe in the water before the otter came up, and yanked his legs, forcing him in the water. Lukan yelped aloud with surprised as he ended up under the water. Under the water it was unusually quiet. Too quiet. He could feel the otter swimming around him as he slowly surfaced with a long gasp of air, despite being under water for barely ten seconds.

He heard the otter laughing as he felt the otter's legs touching his softly from treading the water. "Hey that's not funny!" Lukan protested as he splashed water in Klaus' face as he tried to swim away from him. But due to him trying swim away from an *otter* that worked nowhere near in his favor, as Klaus caught up to him instantly and splashed him back.

"Oh yeah it was!" he said brightly.

Lukan looked at the smirking face of the otter. It almost looked mischievous, naughty even. But it was an obvious expression of having fun. Lukan could not remember the last time he held such a face. And he wondered if that streak was over this day?

Splashing water woke him up immediately. The otter had splashed him once again and was swimming way to the deep end of the pool, laughing. Lukan instinctively chased after him, but stood no chance as the otter continued to gain distance on him. In an attempt to swim faster, Lukan was self conscious as he did, that he was just flailing his arms and legs like a helpless cub who had no idea how to swim at all. The otter stopped at the far wall and hung off it watching the raccoon struggling to swim at him with a good natured smile on his face. It took Lukan almost a minute to catch up, and when he did, he dunked the otter's head under the water briefly before panting out, "That wasn't fair! I don't have webbed paws like you!" but he couldn't stop feeling his smile widen at the otter. When was the last time he felt like this!?

Klaus stuck out his tongue playfully. "I know that, I was just teasing you, you silly raccoon!" he said as he started floating on his back. That was something Lukan could not do. He did not practice swimming enough to be able to achieve such a thing.

Lukan looked at him. "I'm not a silly raccoon! *You* are the silly otter around here!" he exclaimed indignantly but still had that smile on his face.

Klaus giggled. "See you're having fun aren't you? See what you would have missed if not being friends with not just me, but anyone?" he asked as he kicked his legs out to move slowly backward.

Lukan looked down at the ripples in the water. "Yeah, I guess so..."

"You have to put yourself out there more, man. Don't count on other creatures like me randomly talking to you themselves," Klaus said as he turned around, getting closer to Lukan. Lukan knew the otter was right. Maybe the otter showing up was his opportunity to try to change his life in at least one or two aspects. But he could not help but continue... wondering about him in numerous ways. Why *did* he actually decide to talk to him? Why couldn't Lukan get him out of his head whenever he was trying to work, and now, why was he looking at him naked in the locker room!? But such thoughts plagued him not for the several minutes that followed as they continued having fun in the pool, taking turns on the diving board, splashing each other and playing with the pool toys together. It was a strangely fun time for Lukan.

Then Lukan got a glimpse of the clock on the wall. 4-4:40!? He was going to be late for the final bus for the day! "K-Klaus!" he exclaimed fearfully as he pointed at the clock.

"Oh shit!" Klaus exclaimed. "I'm sorry! Let's go!" he yelled as he swam rapidly to the edge of the pool. Unluckily, they were in the center of it when Lukan noticed the clock as he half swam, half flailed his way to get out. He and Klaus sped walked to the locker room, trying not to slip and fall. "Bah, there is no time to shower, is there?" Klaus fretted.

Lukan shook his head as he approached their locker. "No, we just gotta get dry and quick." he said. He did not feel nervous about taking off the suit and being nude again, because he knew he had not time to worry. He hastily pulled them down, looking at the otter doing the same as he grabbed for a towel to dry his fur off. Lukan briefly caught sight of the otter's more private areas of his body, but he only pondered on it for a second as he dried himself off as quickly as possible. He was not even sure if the otter glimpsed at his this time, nor did he care at this point. He did not care how messy his fur was or how difficult it became to put his clothes back either on as he forcefully shoved his boxer briefs on, hearing the fabric tear slightly as he stretched it too far. He redressed himself in what he thought was record time despite still being damp. He even beat the otter who only had to put on the shirt, a different pair of shorts, and flip flops.

"I was an idiot and ended up leaving my real clothes in the Student Center where my class was," he said hastily. "So if you don't make it, that's where I'll be, okay?"

Lukan nodded as he saw the clock moving unnaturally quickly past 4:50. Where the bus stopped at the school was, to his further luck, on the other side of the campus. He looked back at the otter, waved goodbye as he swung his pack over his shoulder and quickly walked out of the building. Once out, he sprinted across the campus, breathing heavily as his tail flew behind him, struggling to keep up on his body. It was

already dark outside, and it was also colder. The air shocked his body as he was just in a warm pool and was far from aiding him as he ran.

As he reached where the bus was, he saw the thing, starting to pull away from the stop, and it was to Lukan's dismay, that the bus had come early and decided not to wait until the proper departing time as they were supposed to. "No wait! WAIT!" he yelled, waving his arms as the bus did not slow down. It was at that moment he realized it might not see him because it was so dark, making Lukan's gray fur impossible to see easily. "God fucking damn it!" he swore so heavily and loudly that he could not believe even he said it. He kicked a light post violently, which responded with a dull *dooooonng* and a sharp pain in his footpaw, causing him to jump up and yelp in pain, causing yet another heavy swear pass his tongue. Now he realized he had to limp back to the Student Center to find Klaus and ask him to drop him off at home.

It took him twenty times longer to get back to the Center because of throbbing in his toes. And Klaus was just exiting the bathroom, fully clothed as Lukan entered with an obvious bitter face.

"Didn't make it?" Klaus said sympathetically. When Lukan nodded, Klaus continued. "Oh don't worry, I'll make sure you get home," he said.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" Lukan asked as he winced from the pain in his paw.

Klaus nodded adamantly. "Of course!" Then he looked down at Lukan's feet. "Did you hurt yourself?" he asked.

"Yeah, but I'll be alright," Lukan said.

Klaus looked skeptical. "Are you sure?"

Lukan whined a bit; the pain seemed to escalate for no reason. "Yeah. And besides, the Health Center closed for the day..."

"But I can support you if you'd like?" Klaus offered.

Lukan shook his head. "Nah don't worry, and you've done so much for me already; I can't ask you to do any more," he replied.

This time Klaus shook his head. "Really it's no trouble," he offered his arms, which Lukan graciously took. Klaus then took Lukan's arm over his shoulder as they walked out to the parking lot.

"Thank you again, Klaus," Lukan said.

"Don't sweat it, you heavy 'coon," Klaus said.

"Me? Heavy? To a lean guy like you?" Lukan said incredulously. Klaus almost stopped when he said that. "What?" Lukan asked.

"Oh nothing it's just, I'm not *that* strong, I mean, I used to work out, but I prefer swimming a lot more," Klaus mumbled as if he were shy this time.

Lukan noticed immediately. "Hey! It's my job to be the shy one around here!" he said with sarcastic indignity.

Klaus looked away as they approached his vehicle, which was a large red pickup truck, and it was parked awkwardly in the space it occupied. "It's just kind of embarrassing," he said.

"Why?" Lukan asked as they got in the truck.

As Klaus started it, "Because I worked out not because I wanted to gain more muscle... Look I don't really want to talk about why all this was going on, just... know it did and I stopped because I lost interest."

Lukan just shrugged. "Alright then. I'll tell you what. I'll tell you why I never wanted more friends if you tell me why you stopped working out," he smirked as the otter almost slammed the brakes the moment he started driving.

"Oh you cheeky little sneaky coon," Klaus said, but it was obvious he was smiling. He started to get onto the road as he sighed. "Okay you win, I'll tell you if you tell me. Alright?"

Lukan nodded, "Fair enough." Though he did not understand why the hell he was going to make such drastic confessions that'd make him more vulnerable to a guy *he just met!*

"I'll go first then... it seems your past bothers you more than me, so if you don't tell me it's okay," Klaus stated as he turned. "Oh wait before we do, you never told me where you live, silly me."

"I was going to say, you're going the wrong way," Lukan smiled.

"Sorry; I am just so used to going straight home myself that I forgot," Klaus said.

"1215 Forrester Drive is my address by the way," Lukan stated.

The otter looked confused. "I don't know where that is," he said.

"Okay so you know where the supermarket is on the west side of town? It's around there. I'll direct you there when we get close enough, alright?" Lukan said.

The otter nodded. "Alright. So the reason I ever worked out in the first place was so I could get a good look at ripped young guys who worked out there as well..." Klaus said with a mumble.

"Wait! So that means--!" Lukan slammed the paws to his face when he realized he was voicing his thoughts aloud again.

The otter nodded and bit his lip. "Uhh yeah. I'm gay," he confirmed it. "And I was hoping to meet a good looking guy there, but... they noticed and... pretty much harassed me out of the place. I can never go by that place again; it was so bad. Left and right is faggot this and homo that. It was awful. And now you're going to do the same to me right?"

Lukan widened his eyes. "Are you kidding? Of course not! I have no issue with gay people at all! I was just wondering because well... I noticed how you were looking at me in the locker room and..."

"Y-yeah I am so sorry about that it's just..." Klaus stopped himself.

"What?" Lukan pressed.

"A nasty habit. I don't want guys to think I am a pervert on top of being a... faggot, you know?" Klaus said with so much unnatural sadness that it made Lukan uncomfortable.

"O-oh.." Lukan said when he was rendered speechless.

"What...?" Klaus asked quietly.

"Oh nothing, it's just... kind of embarrassing," Lukan replied.

"Embarrassing? I'd be glad to have someone looking at me like I did with you..." Klaus stated glancing at Lukan. There was a glint in his eyes and it was not caused by nearby streetlights. Somehow Lukan knew that Klaus knew he was watching him as he dressed despite being in a hurry. And somehow he knew Klaus assumed it was because of that brief moment that caused him to be late for the bus. "Well anyways, your turn," Klaus thankfully changed the subject.

"Oh! Well mine is a long story that I am not sure we'll have enough time to discuss..." Lukan started hesitantly.

"How long does it usually take to get home for you? What time do you usually get home?" Klaus asked.

"An hour and fifteen minutes typically," Lukan said.

Klaus nodded. "Ah so we got about an hour... would you like to just have a bit of a drive for now? It'd be a nice deviation from your usual routine."

Lukan thought for a minute. This otter... wanted him to be around as long as he can. What's next? Is he going to ask to stay for dinner? He was certain his mom would not allow it, but he just had to wonder. Nonetheless, Klaus was right. If he was going to make changes to his day, this was a good start. So he nodded at the otter. "Okay."

"Anywhere in mind you want to go?" Klaus asked.

Lukan shook his head. "Nowhere in particular," he said.

Klaus just nodded. "Okay, so... would you like to tell me your story?" he asked with genuine curiosity and kindness that Lukan did not recognize. He could not tell if this otter was going to do something or not, so much so that his mind is filled with so much confusion that he did not even bother pondering it anymore.

"Alright, I'll tell you," Lukan sighed and took a long, deep breath. "It... all started when I was 11, when I made the biggest mistake of my entire life. Well it's not like I had that much of a choice to begin with... see... me and my mom, almost eight years ago had gone bankrupt. We had no money left, lost everything when my mom lost her job at the time."

"That's awful! I'm so sorry that happened!" Klaus exclaimed.

"We were forced to move to a town called Bright down south of here. What a fucking ironic name; that place is *far* from bright at all. It's probably the darkest place in the entire country. Well long story short, just five months there turned happy old me,

into what I am now. You see, before all that happened, I was probably just as happy as you are now. And it was all because, well mostly anyway, due to the creatures I met there. Absolute backstabbing savages, they are. Tried making friends with someone only to have them betray me in the most horrible of ways I've seen... and to think, they were the nicest to me of pretty much anyone I've ever met yet..." Lukan said bitterly.

"Wh-what would that be? That happened?" Klaus seemed strangely nervous now.

"They tried to kill me..." Lukan whispered. "Turned out they were the son of a major murderer in the area that was heavily specist against raccoons. They called me every name imaginable. Trash mongerer, dirty ally vermin, you name it... How I got out, I will never know. They drugged me and I fell asleep. Except when I woke up, I was in the hospital.. and everything was okay again. Except at that point, I decided to never, ever trust a soul ever again. And that if I did, and something like that happened again I'd..."

"Y-you'd...?" Klaus whimpered.

"Kill myself," Lukan stated flatly.

"L-Lukan! N-no! Suicide is never an option! Don't ever consider such a thing!" Klaus exclaimed, nearly running over the curb from his apparent shock. He was shocked enough that he pulled over forcefully.

Lukan shrugged. "Hey it's not like anyone other than my mom would miss me anyways. And they wanted me dead so badly so... why not?"

"Me, Lukan! I'd miss you too!" Klaus said.

"But we. Just. Met!" Lukan exclaimed. "How could that be possible!?"

"Time doesn't matter. What matters is now, Lukan," Klaus said plainly. "And right now we're together, we're friends, it does not matter how short a time we spent, at least to me," he said.

"Klaus... I don't get you... You're the opposite of me, and yet you still want to be friends?" Lukan asked.

"I believe in the idea that opposites attract," Klaus shrugged. "Look Lukan, I know your past was really dark, and it made you who you are now, but it was in the past, and as I said, the only thing that matters is now," he said.

"I've been told that so often... but it is so hard to let go," Lukan said sadly.

Klaus shook his head. "I know, it really is. I'll admit I have not fully let go of what happened in the gym. But I know we got to, for the sake of right now, and for the future."

Lukan looked down. "I know, I know. I've been wanting to make things better for ages. I've just been either powerless or unsure of what to do to fix this crap life I have."

Klaus placed a handpaw on Lukan's, making Lukan jump in his seat lightly. "A good place to start is making new friends. And see? You've already started," Klaus smiled at him.

"Th-thanks Klaus," Lukan said with tears in his eyes. "No one has done as much for me as you have, and we've known each other barely two days!"

"I just like helping people feel better you know? I almost majored in Psychology so I could be a counselor of something. But I am not sure I can handle so many sad stories from so many wrecked lives; i-it'd make me feel worse! I gotta hand it to the people who do. They're all so strong..." Klaus said.

Lukan nodded. He kind of understood what he meant, but only a little.

"Have you seen any counselors for your current mental state?" Klaus asked. "I-I mean I know it's none of my business, but don't you know that they can help?"

Lukan shook his head. "No. They never have with me. And now that I am 18, nearly 19, I no longer have the insurance nor the money to pay for that," he said.

"Aw that sucks, but could I ask how you got here in Lilac Grove?"

Lukan shrugged. "Even I don't fully know the answer to that. Just, one day my mom got an offer to come to an apartment here for very cheap for the first year. It really helped get back on our paws. We could have ended up homeless and on the streets as we are stereotypically seen as. Or you know, dead."

"Wow that's really lucky," Klaus stated. "Well I am glad you made it here."

"Yeah but..." Lukan sighed.

Klaus looked crestfallen. "What is it...?"

"I don't like it here anymore. My life just is not getting anywhere around here. And my mom hates it too, mostly due to the weather, but... we plan to move after next semester of school," Lukan said regretfully.

"What!? B-but I had just made friends with you!" Klaus exclaimed incredulously.

"I know and that is another reason why I did not want friends now. Every time I made friends when I was really little, before that fiasco in Bright, I'd eventually move, or they would eventually move. I grew up with basically no friends really," Lukan explained.

"Th-that's no way to have a cubhood at all!" Klaus exclaimed with increasing incredulity.

Lukan shrugged. "But that is how I lived," he said. "And I have no choice but to be content with that."

"But I don't want you to move away when we've become friends just now..." Klaus said sadly.

"I'm sorry. I guess I should have told you sooner," Lukan said.

"I'll go with you," Klaus said plainly.

"What!?" Lukan gasped. "But why!?"

Klaus shrugged. "I'm old enough to go where I want, so I can if I really wanted to. I just haven't the money. So I might just get a job just to raise enough."

"For a lowlife like me, but why!?"

"Because, Lukan, I never let go of friendships so easily. Not anymore. You see, I have another story. One that involves having to choose between one friend, or a chance to come here to the college. And you see what I chose? You see what I regret? I was put in that situation because my mom is so incredibly anti-gay it ain't funny, and she was so convinced I was going to commit sin with that friend, it was essentially either him, or my college money," he explained. "Now I see why friendship was more valuable. And I had no attraction to that friend anyways!"

"My God, what a scumbag move!" Lukan said. "Wow, we really have been through a lot haven't we?"

Klaus sighed. "I guess so."

"So I am guessing you live alone?"

Klaus shook his head. "Nope I still live with my bigoted mom, the bitch that she is," there was so much bitterness and spite in the usually friendly and happy otter's voice that it felt incredibly unnatural to Lukan.

"Oh... I'm sorry," Lukan said.

"Even if it wasn't for you, I was still going to get a job to raise money to get away from her specifically. Now that you're my friend who's moving, now I have even more reason to do so!" Klaus said, with brightness returning to his voice.

Lukan nodded. "I see."

"Let's move on to a brighter topic shall we?" Klaus asked. Without waiting for Lukan's answer, he went on. "So you doing anything tomorrow?"

Lukan realized that tomorrow was one of the few times he was off from work. That supermarket is incredibly inconsistent with his scheduling and he hated it. "No I am actually off tomorrow, for some... reason."

"That's great because... I was wondering if you wanted to do something tomorrow?" Klaus asked.

What is his deal!? Can he spend one second without him!? Lukan just did not get it, and he was not sure he does either. But... all for the sake of changing his life, he can't just sit around his apartment all day like he usually does. So he nodded. "Okay."

"What's the matter, Lukan? When I asked, your face just turned red or something," Klaus noted.

Shit he noticed. "I'm sorry, I just dunno how I'd feel if I had to spend all my time with you," he confessed.

"If I am being annoying, please tell me. I just want to be the best friend I can be. And do something with you unlike other friends we've had!" Klaus said soothingly.

"I get that, but I am beginning to think it's a bit... much you know?" Lukan said. "I'll still go out with you tomorrow, but let's not spend *too* much time!"

The otter suddenly sounded nervous. "G-go out?" Then he shook his own head violently. "Yeah I get that. You and I have our own personal lives to live, but when it comes to me, that amount of personal life is... zilch."

Lukan sighed. "Same here really. For me it's school, work, and a whole lotta nothin'," he looked out the windshield. At that point it was totally dark outside. Not a thing to be seen clearly but the headlights of passing cars. "I guess I should get home, now, thinking about it," he said.

"Yeah, it's 6 already, so I guess it's getting close to time now isn't it?" Klaus asked, disappointed.

"Yup," Lukan confirmed, worried they may be low on time as it was. Maybe he can get away with telling mom he went to McDonalds or something on the way home if she worried. The place was right between his home and the supermarket after all.

Klaus started the car again as they drove in the directions Lukan provided. It was harder to give those directions given how dark it was outside, and how unaccustomed to it Lukan was. Raccoons were supposed to be good in the dark, but Lukan was an obvious exception considering... it... happened in the dark. Nonetheless he and Klaus had reached his apartment complex after twenty minutes. Just a little late, but nothing to flip out over.

"Thanks so much, Klaus," Lukan said as he jumped out of the truck.

"Don't sweat it! I'll be right here tomorrow at noon, okay?" Klaus said. He threw him a bag of something. Lukan caught it wondering what it was. "you can keep those swim trunks, by the way. See ya!" Klaus said as he closed the door and drove off with one last wave goodbye for the night.

Lukan watched as the raccoon drove out of the lot of the complex and down the street until he disappeared. Lukan cannot comprehend what just went down that night. It felt like everything changed. And it felt like things were still changing... But what exactly were they...?

"How was your day with Klaus, Lukey?" his mother asked upon entering the apartment. Then he heard her sniffing. "Is that chlorine I smell? You went swimming?"

"Yeah we did, and it was a lot of fun," he confessed. "It really was... different."

"That's good, honey, but could you put that swimsuit with the laundry and take a nice shower? You know that I am just slightly allergic to chlorine, right?" she asked.

Oh shit! That's right! Lukan remembered that his mom used to tell him stories that his mom only went swimming once in her life as a cub, and ended up in the emergency room because the chlorine started boiling her pelt right off and that she almost did not make it. Yeah that was not just slightly allergic... "Y-yes mother! I'm so sorry about that!"

"It's alright, Lukey, as long as it does not get in my fur, I'll be okay, but you'll have to wash the suit yourself. And the clothes you have on now," she said as Lukan set the bag next to the washer.

"Yes, of course!" he said as he strode to his room and picked out something to wear when he finished showering. He walked into his bathroom and closed the door, turned on the fan and proceeded to undress himself in the comfort of his own home. He could not help but think of the otter doing the same back in the locker room as he did so though. Wait he did not see it; his back was turned against him. Yet, for some reason, he was imagining it... *'No! No. Stop that. You're not gay! He's the one that's gay.'* He thought to himself. Yeah the otter was pretty handsome, but o-only girls would.. but then again he *was* gay so did that matter? Nonetheless, he felt that one feeling from such an attraction rise up around his legs. Stop!

'Lukan, you are 18 years old and you still haven't a clue over your sexuality? Get with the program!' he chastised himself for not being sure anymore as he got in the shower and turned it on. How long did it take to realize it? Granted Lukan not once ever considered getting into a relationship at any point ever because he was too busy avoiding people to care. Maybe if he did not, he'd have known so much sooner.

'Wh-what did it matter anyways!? Us two are just friends. Nothing more. No way he'd approach me only to get in my pants! ...O-or would he!?' the dark thought slammed Lukan harder than a truck. Is that the reason Klaus ever talked to him in the first place? In hopes that he would be his little fuck-buddy eventually? No it can't be. But after all the betrayal he's been through, Lukan could not get it out of his mind exactly what that otter wants from him. He knew he couldn't be friends with anyone like that! Ever! Was that otter planning to rape him someday...? That's not possible! There is no way! Lukan tried to clear his mind from such horrendous thoughts, but they would not go away. And despite that, he was still aroused by the thought of the undressing otter in that locker room! *'Don't you fucking dare touch yourself, Lukan; if you do, you're definitely being gay!'* Lukan felt like he was starting to lose his mind. He was heavily tempted to contact Klaus after the shower and call tomorrow off. He can't let himself be with a guy like that, no matter how friendly he seemed on the outside! He remembered that one friend in Bright. He was really friendly like before he trapped him in the dark and tried to kill him!

Suddenly the water turned ice cold, causing Lukan to scream and swear. His handpaw had been resting on the temperature adjuster and it slipped, pushing it to cold water. He quickly pushed it back to hot as he gasped and panted from the icy chills that ran down his spine.

As he finished up in the shower, his little friend also decided that nothing was going to be done about the thoughts of the otter when he realized that the otter might be... not a very good friend after all. But what was Lukan going to do? Was he going to

just call it off, or was he going to let him take him out tomorrow? At the end of the conversation, Lukan did realize he said "Go out" so d-did the otter really misunderstand...? Does he think they are going on a date tomorrow?! No way!

Lukan grabbed his towel, thankful he is able to dry himself off at his own pace now as he continued to ponder what he should do next. He already had gone so far in two short days, but knowing what else could happen, is it really worth it in the long run? There *has* to be a further reason why the otter decided to talk to him out of everyone else that seemed lonely on the campus. What could it possibly be though!?

After leaving the bathroom, the troubling thoughts continued to haunt him, and he was afraid of any dreams he might have that night, with the sight of a naked male otter fresh in his mind. It was still early in the evening so he hoped that he would eventually forget it by bedtime. But he knew he wouldn't. He knew it would never be that easy.

That night he did indeed dream. But somehow it was a dream about him and the otter swimming again. But the location was different. Lukan did not know what was different in particular. But there they were, having as much fun as they did at the pool until the dreaded happened.

Klaus winked at Lukan and took off his swim trunks and flung them to the side of the pool where they gave an echoing splat. Now Klaus was swimming in the pool stark naked around Lukan as he treaded water without moving otherwise, just staring at him.

It was at that moment that Lukan realized what was different. The pool was the same as it was before except... except now it was in the same place he was nearly murdered! Yes! He looked over the side of the pool and saw the train tracks, and even the pair of eyes that belonged to his attempted murderer! They were watching him. Watching through glowing amber eyes filled to the brim with malice as the otter giggled around Lukan, trying to get him to play along, grabbing at the straps on Lukan's own trunks and tugged them down. To Lukan's relief and Klaus' disappointment, they did not budge.

The eyes in the distance blinked. "Mine... mine... mine!" they seemed to chant with a voice combined with the murderer's and the wind, as if it were being blown away. Lukan felt his trunks begin to slide down, along with Klaus' satisfied exclamation. Lukan wanted him to stop; he tried to move his legs to let him know, no! But they did not work. They refused to. They eyes glowed brighter as he felt his trunks slide down to his knees. He had no choice but to let the otter do as he will with him. And when they were pulled free of his footpaws... the eyes vanished and Klaus let out a triumphant yell. Once the eyes disappeared, Lukan felt at ease. Even completely naked in the presence of Klaus, who was also naked he felt something serene wash

over him. Something he knew he hated... but felt so nice... and it can't have been the pressure of those eyes being lifted...

"Now we skinny dip together!" Klaus declared. Lukan was just waiting for it to happen. He knew it was going to happen. But it did not come. All he heard was the ominous windy voice saying the one word all over again along with Klaus' joyful laughter.

"You will one day know where you belong!" the voice yelled so loudly that it

jolted Lukan awake. His fur was soaked in sweat as he gasped and panted from the leftovers of the nightmare. He checked his pulse, his location, if he was alone, and eventually, if he still had clothes on. It was all good. But he cursed that the dream even happened in the first place! He could not go on if this was going to happen every time he closed his eyes! He just wished he knew what the otter's true intentions were! But he knew that he'll never tell him, especially if they were no good at all. At this point... there was nothing he could do, but accept whatever came to him. He knew that the chances of those dreams being real in their messages were low, no matter the track record in his life. All he could do, was await the things to come...