

Winter's Gallows

FOUR: The Truth

Unfortunately, Lukan was not able to find Klaus again by the time his lunch was over and spent the rest of his shift wondering how Klaus' initial interview went with the managers. He knew Klaus just marched right into the wrong part of the backroom, so he could only imagine how shocked the creatures back there were to see him just push his way in like that. Come to think of it, Cloud was probably back in that area at the time Klaus had went in there. What a coincidence knowing that Lukan was talking to him about Klaus just a couple hours prior to that.

The rest of his shift went on so boringly, that Lukan could only think of the otter in two different ways, both clashing over how important they were. The handsome side of Klaus versus the situation the otter was facing now and his unusual determination to get through it. There was something oddly exhilarating with the way the otter just charged into the backroom like that. Lukan had to commend the otter for that as that was such bravery and determination that Lukan had been desperately wanting to have his entire life, but only to have extreme paranoia and shyness mixed in with bitterness and anger at not just that, but other creatures as well.

And yet Lukan knew that the otter was having an impact on the way he talked to others around him, and it was the fact that he *was* talking to others more often instead of hurrying past them hoping to not have to talk to them. Was this otter trying to do more for Lukan than just being his friend or, God forbid, reveal his own sexuality? There has to be more to this guy that Lukan was not understanding, but what could it be? Lukan knew very well that he was never going to get those answers, but the questions... the questions wouldn't stop pestering him! They never have and they never will until they are given to him! When that would be he did not know, if ever at all.

Lukan looked at the watch on his wrist as he finished sweeping the produce department as his jaw dropped. He was five minutes overtime. How was it 8:05 already!? Lukan had some days go so fast beyond comprehension, but today in particular was one of the slowest he's ever endured and yet, plain as day on his wrist, his little portable clock says that work time is over for the day. Lukan rushed the debris to the back room, surely accidentally leaving bits of it behind so he could sweep it up quickly and dispose of it before clocking out. He recalled the fact that the managers hated the employees clocking in and out at times too far apart from their designated

times. He hoped they would either not notice or care this time... Lukan half jogged, half sped walked to the time clock and punched himself out at 8:08. Eight minutes won't make too much of a difference, will it? He most certainly hoped not as he gathered his things from his locker.

In the parking lot, it was dark, snowy, and windy, much like *Reclamation of the Land*, the book that Lukan had been neglecting to read lately. Seemed like another winter storm was coming in. While Lukan was dismayed at the fact he had to work the following day as well, he took solace in the fact it was only half a day.

He approached the red truck, that was already beginning to get buried in snow and knocked on it, careful not to be in the way if it were to swing open again. And it did open, much more slowly this time. The otter inside looked expressionless as he tapped the passenger's side. Lukan hopped in, worried if he made the otter upset. "So... how'd it go in there...?" he asked.

Klaus looked straight ahead as he started the truck. "It went great. I got the job. Orientation is on the 13th," he said with even less emotion. Lukan was worried. He went from sad, to determined, to nothing all in one day. What exactly was going on in that otter's head...?

"That's awesome! So..." Lukan wasn't sure what to say next exactly.

"We're going to your place and asking your mom if I could stay for a while," Klaus reminded him.

"Y-yes of course," Lukan bit his lip nervously. It was going to be about that time. What his mother was going to say was going to determine a lot of things. If she were to say no, Lukan could not imagine what would happen. Lukan's heart pounded faster when Klaus crossed the highway and was in his throat by the time they closed in on the apartments' driveway. Klaus parked in one of the visitor's parking spaces and Lukan led the way towards his apartment. Lukan felt his legs were made of stone and refused to move an inch as if he subconsciously did not want his mom to confirm the worst case scenario. But when he reached his door, it was opened by none other than his mother and that caused Lukan to nearly have a heart attack.

"M-mom!" he exclaimed as she looked at the two of them with unreadable expressions.

"I heard what happened from Klaus earlier today," she started. And when she started, it sent chills flowing down Lukan's spine, limbs, and tail. D-did Klaus visit while he was at work? How did Klaus know what apartment he was in...?

"You left your phone in my truck," Klaus explained, as if he knew exactly what Lukan was thinking. "I used it to call your mom, who was thankfully on your contact list and explained to her what happened," he said, equally emotionless. Lukan briefly cursed himself for leaving his phone behind again as he looked up at the otter and the other raccoon uncertain if he wanted to know what was going on.

"We talked it over, and I am going to allow Klaus to stay here, provided he helps out with the bills and pays for his own food," his mom said plainly.

Lukan's heart skipped a beat. "Really...?" His mom nodded and he instantly wanted to hug one of them but did not know who, but his reflexes took over and hugged the otter tightly and was close to tears. "That's so awesome... I'm so glad... I dunno what I would have done if you ended up on the streets because of me..." Lukan sniffled.

"Because of you...?" his mother asked.

"My mom made me decide whether to live with her or be friends with Lukan, Mrs. Benka," Klaus explained.

Lukan's mom sighed. "Oh I see. That's no reason to kick their own child out of their home unless," she looked at Lukan. "Unless you did something she doesn't like in the slightest?" she was glaring at him as Lukan became uncertain what to say next.

"N-no it was all me, Mrs. Benka. Lukan did nothing wrong," Klaus came to Lukan's defense.

"Then... why...?" Lukan's mom was the one who was confused now.

"Because I'm..." Klaus sighed. "She doesn't trust me with other creatures my age. She always thinks I am going to get into serious trouble with any of them that I meet. She's very much against me making friends because she thinks everyone is nothing but trouble and that I'll become like every problem kid ever if I made a single friend," he explained. Well that was a lie, and they both knew it. Lukan had no idea his mom's attitude towards homosexual creatures, nor did he want to know. And it seemed apparent that Klaus did not want to know either.

"Sounds like she's overprotective to the max, and the opposite of what I tell Lukey, here," Lukan's mom replied.

"Mom!" Lukan protested as Klaus smiled. "I don't like being called 'Lukey'!"

"I know, which is why I like calling you that!" his mom beamed.

Lukan's face burned as Klaus chuckled.

"Looks like we had nothing to worry about, huh, Lukan?" Klaus smirked slightly.

He speaks as if he knew exactly what was going to happen. And though he was right, it was strangely, too easy. Lukan subconsciously felt things should not have gone as well as they have. And he thought because they did go easier than he thought, something terrible was going to result from the whole situation.

"Lukan? You've drifted off again, buddy!" Klaus gave Lukan a firm tap on the back that woke him up from his thoughts. "Aren't you glad everything is gonna be okay?" He asked.

Lukan was only able to give him a stiff nod.

"Okay Lukan, what's on your mind?" Klaus stated causing Lukan's body to stiffen up. He was not exactly comfortable with any sort of confession as long as his mother stood right there as well.

"Nothing really, I just hope things will work out for all of us, I mean... three creatures in this tiny apartment? Can we do really do that?" Lukan asked, not directly voicing his concerns instead.

"Management allows three creatures per unit, but if you're worried about it being small, then just know it won't be forever. We are moving soon anyways right?" Lukan's mother answered as if she was not at all in worry about what was going on. She felt different. As if she was not herself anymore. Normal Lukan's mom would never take so kindly to guests like this, whether they were friends of Lukan's or not. What is going on here...?

Upon entering the apartment, Lukan had already noticed a space between the dinner table and the chairs in front of the TV had an air mattress barely filled to capacity. It sat almost right in the way of the hallway further proving the point that the apartment is tiny. How exactly *was* this going to work for the next several weeks or months before they move? Up until that point Lukan had no idea just how much of an impact Klaus would have on his life. It started out as a simple confusion over sexual orientation and trust! Next thing Lukan knew, Klaus was moving in! After barely a week of knowing each other! Why is this happening? How is it happening? What the hell was going on!?

"Lukan why do you look like you hate the idea of me moving in with you guys?" Klaus asked as Lukan's mom wandered back to her computer and plugged in headphones, presumably to watch more of her shows.

Lukan could hold it back no more. "This is all happening way too fast, Klaus! I just met you not even a week ago and you are moving in with us!" he exclaimed.

Klaus looked at Lukan sadly. "I know. I know, and I'm sorry, but this time in particular, I had no control over what happened," he said somberly.

Lukan sighed. "I know Klaus. I'm sorry, but this is just a little too overwhelming. This time last week, my life was... "

"Different?" Klaus prompted.

Lukan's ears perked. "Yeah. Different. I wanted change, yes. I got it now, but... but there are things still bothering me. One thing is that the changes happened so fast, I can't comprehend what even happened and... somehow it feels like something is still missing in my life. I'm still not satisfied because something is not right. Not even there," Lukan explained.

"A reason to trust me?" Klaus prompted again.

Lukan shook his head. "I don't know, maybe? I doubt that, but... I guess... it's possible?"

Lukan jumped slightly when he felt the otter pat him on the back. "I promise I will be different this time Lukan. I still don't know that much about your past but I can tell that after that, you can't trust anyone. Not me, barely your own mother it seems. Not even yourself," Klaus stated. "And who knows? Maybe that one thing that is missing can be figured out when we move. By the way, when are we going to move?" Klaus added.

Lukan shook his head. "I don't know. We have our sights set on June, but considering how well I am doing in college right now, it might be best to skip next semester and leave as soon as possible," he said.

Klaus nodded. "Not doing so hot?" When Lukan nodded somewhat regretfully, Klaus went on. "To be honest, me neither. The classes I do have are structured so awkwardly that I don't get it. It's actually a part of the reason I am taking computer programming so I can understand all that a little better. And it has not worked out so far," he said with a small laugh. "So I may just study independently after this semester ends."

Lukan nodded. "Are you sure you're going to be alright with us and away from your home like this though?" he asked in concern.

"Anywhere, even the street, is better than being anywhere near that fucking bigot," Klaus snarled with ferocity that made Lukan's fur stand on end. "That house is no home to me, and it never actually was."

"I-I'm sorry," Lukan apologized instantly as he led them to his room so his mom would not hear what they were saying. His ears burned when he realize his room was still a mess with magazines and clothes strewn about. But Klaus seemed to take no notice. Instead he looked over to Lukan's book and CDs on his shelf.

"Ah so you're a fan of hard rock music, aren't you?" Klaus asked kindly.

Lukan could not help but feel his face burning more. "I uh... yeah," he mumbled. Okay NOW what is he feeling?! And why!?

"And Harry Potter too? Nice..." Klaus admired. "We have more in common than I thought," he said.

"No one seems to like these things that much, especially nowadays," Lukan remarked. "Especially after Harry Potter ended a few years ago."

Klaus nodded. "Shame really. And yet people hold on to Star Wars so fondly after 30 years or something," he said.

"I know right? I was never into Star Wars that much to be honest. I like sci-fi and all, but my niches are not really with that all that much, at least not anymore," Lukan admitted, hoping Klaus wouldn't eviscerate him for such a callous opinion!

Klaus only nodded however. "Oh you're into Pokemon on top of all this?" he asked when he laid his eyes on some of the merchandise Lukan had bought over several years. When Lukan nodded he continued. "Guess not everything we have is not

in common; I never really was interested in Pokemon. Feels like they do nearly the same thing every time..."

"And people who play Call of Duty, or stupid and pointless sports games say that stuff all the time. I hate hypocrites..." Lukan said. "But every franchise like them *do* change aspects to each of their new games... er usually anyways."

Klaus shrugged. "Originality. It seems like such a thing is getting harder and harder to achieve."

Lukan gasped from such an agreement. "I know right!? As a writer, I constantly feel like I am ripping other people off somehow!"

"Hey come to think of it, you never did show me anything you've written, have you?" Klaus asked.

Lukan was obviously blushing at that point and he could only stutter out. "U-uh. No I haven't but I really... don't think you should be bothered by the trash I write," he said in a modest and self aware way that he was trying to make himself sound worse than he actually was.

"Aw come on Lukan, you can't be that bad. In fact I'm certain you are better than me," Klaus said in a voice that was an obvious ploy to flatter Lukan. He was not going to fall for it again...

"No, no. I'm terrible," Lukan stated adamantly as he grabbed at various notebooks he thought Klaus was eying. Big mistake. The otter reached over, with a beaming face and snatched the notebooks from Lukan's hands.

"Well I'll be the judge of that! Hehe!" Klaus laughed as he opened them up. Lukan frantically tried to stop him, but with the use of one arm, one leg, and one surprisingly strong tail, Klaus kept him from doing to. "Hm let's see here..." Lukan's eyes widened when he realized Klaus was about to recite something he's written. All spoken while Lukan failed in vain to stop him.

"The true nature of fur kind is what we are all plagued with, what we all exhibit on a daily basis. What others accuse of being the abomination of life itself is not that of what they claim. But what causes them to conjure such a claim. Pure ignorance and irrational hatred of the innocent hypocritically manifesting themselves in the minds of those who claim innocence when guilty all along. Thus is the true nature of all our kind." Klaus read aloud as Lukan's face burned.

Klaus whistled. "Dang dude, that's deep. And well written!" he said.

"You just read something from one of my past English projects," Lukan said. "About how irrational hatred leads to injustice and the fall of our now fucked justice system."

"Oh that's cool. You really are a great writer though. Can't imagine how good you are when you want to write compared to this!" Klaus beamed.

There was something about the way Klaus praised Lukan that the raccoon thoroughly enjoyed, as if it was his approval that mattered more than his own for some reason. And that smile on his face. How hypnotic it was to Lukan's eyes...

"So uh... I take it that one thing you are thinking of doing is being a lawyer or something? Because what you wrote here is just so true when I think about how I was bullied for being gay and all," Klaus stated.

Lukan looked away, embarrassed for some reason. "Well yeah... I mean... I never talked about it much since most people in the law system are hated because of how... dishonest they are. And it's that exact thing I myself want to fix. After being wrongfully brought down time after time after time in my cubhood, I want to take a stand you know?"

Klaus nodded. "Makes sense. It sucks that the land that claims liberty and justice for all is one that does not come even close..."

"Right?!" Lukan exclaimed in agreement. "All thanks to bigotry and greed... the country will never be as they promised it would. It never has and it never will, sadly. It won't stop me from trying though," Lukan said flatly.

"An ambitious coon aren't ya?" Klaus said.

"Maybe a little," Lukan said stiffly. "But I really feel like I should... do something." he added looking at the otter's face. "That's why I'm working, you know? To raise money to go to law school where I am moving to in the summer."

"I hope it will work out," Klaus said quietly.

"Me too, Klaus, me too," Lukan sighed as he sat on his bed. He gestured the otter to do the same and after a brief hesitation, the otter did. "Klaus, where do you see yourself in a few years? I dunno why, but I always worry about the future. A lot more than the past even though it affects me badly."

Klaus sighed. "I have no idea. I can only hope my future involves a husband or even just a boyfriend to call my own while I get close to a degree in computer technology. But other than that, nothing."

"What about where you live? D-do you really have plans to live with us when we move?" Lukan asked warily.

"Of course not. And thinking about it, I may have sounded that way. I'll figure out a place, like you guys will in due time," Klaus responded.

"I don't even know where I will be in a few years... could be in law school, a successful writer. I might have started a family, yet I might still live with my mom. Hell, there is a chance I might be dead," Lukan sighed.

"Lukan! I-I thought we talked--!" But Lukan interrupted the mustelid.

"No it's not that. It's just another thing. How do we know we'll live in a few years? For all we know we could die tomorrow by being hit by a car or something!" Lukan explained.

Klaus let out an obvious sigh of relief. "Thank God... I-I mean, yeah that's true," he said in also obvious distracted way. "Do you have to work tomorrow?" he changed the subject.

Lukan nodded. "Yeah, but only for half the day. I won't have to go in until 2 instead of 11," he said as he swayed his tail absent mindedly, still having in mind everything that has happened.

Klaus nodded. "Well I suppose that's good right? More time to yourself or with friends or..." he trailed off.

"Yeah well. I may need the money, but I can't mentally or physically handle full time shifts all the time so um... yeah," Lukan said nervously. "And before you ask why, I'll just say it's... complicated," he said with flat ears. When he saw the concerned look on the otter's face he corrected himself, "Well not complicated, just kinda... seemingly miniscule."

"And that would be?" Klaus pressed.

"Well it's just that not many people have this problem, so they don't know how hard it is living with it, much less working for hours and hours and hours on end with it!" Lukan defended himself before he even said it. "What it is though is that one of my legs is slightly longer than the other. Walking and standing for several hours straight is just... way more difficult than anyone could understand!" he half repeated himself. He attempted to stand up straight to prove himself. "I mean look! If you haven't noticed, I was always leaning to the left, with my right knee bent constantly. My right leg is longer than my left and that makes it really hard to work with! I wish it didn't. I really need that money..."

"Well now that I am around, hopefully I can help out," Klaus offered.

Lukan grinned. "Well my mom wants you to help out anyways so..." Lukan had no idea where that even came from. One moment he was complaining about his physique and how it hindered his work, and the next thing he knew he was teasing his otter friend. Why? Where did that even come from? What kind of subconscious would be needed to trigger that action? Lukan did not understand anything about what his mind was doing anymore... All he could do was wonder, and accept it without question.

Klaus' yawning interrupted Lukan's thoughts. "Well it's getting late, isn't it..?" Klaus did something that made Lukan jump. He took off his shirt. Klaus noticed it and looked at him with a concerned look. All Lukan could do was stare at the otter's athletic chest... "Lukan? Lukan." Klaus said to get his attention. "Are you worried because I sleep in my underwear?" Lukan started to sweat under his fur, making him feel uncomfortably warm.

"O-oh no, not at all; I-I actually do the same," he said as if it were a confession. Being in nothing but underwear in the same bedroom as each other made Lukan feel a

mix of emotions such as embarrassment, worry, and... another. One he couldn't identify. Anxiety was it? If so... for what? At least Klaus was not flat out sleeping in the same room as him. That would make it even more awkward. His mouth gaped as the otter slipped off his pants exposing an emerald colored pair of boxers as he strode from the room carrying his clothes, thankfully only giving Lukan a few seconds to look at his body again.

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow morning," Klaus said as he closed Lukan's door behind him leaving Lukan alone with his thoughts. Lukan hated being left alone with his thoughts after something happens like that.

Lukan knew for a fact that Klaus knew that he was staring at his body. Klaus knew Lukan was staring at him, and he was worried what the otter would do to his mind next. Lukan could not deny that there was something very off about his psyche, and it was something he had long suppressed. As if he kept something in a freezer to preserve it, only for it to be a loss of quality once it was taken out. Could this complete tardiness of his true self hinder his life? What does it all mean...?

Lukan was at work with Klaus by his side. Cloud was also there using a snow shovel instead of a mop when a customer spilled what looked like a milkshake all over the floor.

'No, no! That isn't the right tool, you blasted feline!' Lukan tried to correct his coworker as Klaus laughed and pointed. Lukan looked over to the otter and scolded him. "You know you could help out! Even a new trainee should know how to use a mop!"

The otter smirked at the raccoon before grabbing the mop and looking between Cloud's failure of a display, and Lukan.

"Well don't just stand there! Do something!" Lukan demanded.

"Oh I'll do something..." Klaus said as he walked towards not the spill, but Lukan himself. He placed the mop close to Cloud, who picked it up and examined it in confusion. Then Klaus went up to Lukan's face.

"Wh-what are you doing!?" Lukan had demanded. He could feel his face burning as he could smell the otter's fishy and minty breath.

"What I should have done the day we went swimming..." he said.

And the otter full on, kissed Lukan point blank on his lips, causing Lukan's paws to fly off the ground, and through the ceiling of the building where it collapsed and dissolved into his supervisor's office. Wait a moment... that was not Bobby the Mongoose... it was Crystal the lioness...

"I've never seen such a disgraceful display. How DARE you kiss another employee on the job in front of customers with so little tact! I was going to let you off with a warning on this one, but when I learned that you kissed the new recruit,

Richtors, I knew I had to bring this to your attention that this is a much more serious matter than you think." She was fuming. When she breathed this heavily, yet talked this quietly... no doubt she was pissed off.

"It's not because I am gay is it!?" Lukan exclaimed.

"I cannot fire you for being gay, Benka. I wish I could, because God did NOT intend for this virus to infect us like this. No I am forced to fire you because of the rules that an employee cannot date another in the same department as he or she. And for lack of conduct. And for lack of doing your fucking job when you are supposed to! I am going to have to let you go, Benka... Both of you."

Well at least that dream wasn't so drastic was it? And yet, there were chills going down Lukan's spine as it woke him up not nearly as violently as usual. Wait. Getting fired, both of them. What that meant for their future spelt disaster. They couldn't be a thing. They could not even let that illusion slide. And with Lukan constantly gawking at Klaus nowadays...

What could possibly go wrong next?

When morning finally came after a long night of thinking of the future again, Lukan slowly dragged himself from his bed, tail drooping in exhaustion as he fumbled to find his work clothes. He may not be needed to work until two o' clock that afternoon, but he liked having his work clothes on just in case. When he opened the door he yelped when he saw a shirtless Klaus standing right behind the door. "Agh!" Lukan yelped in surprise as he jumped backwards.

Klaus yawned and stretched, which seemed to show off his upper body physique more than he realized. "Morning Lukan," he said. "Have you seen my shirt? When I woke up this morning, it was gone..."

Lukan shook his head honestly. "I have no idea, Klaus. Maybe it got lost under your air mattress?" He suggested.

Klaus shrugged. "Maybe. I have been told I move around a lot in my sleep, so maybe I scooted the bed over it or something..." he left Lukan's doorway which prompted Lukan to follow and see if Klaus could find it. Klaus bent over his air mattress and pushed it aside. As Klaus bent over, Lukan got a look at Klaus' posterior and gasped, eyes widening at how it looked. He quickly ducked behind the doorway, heart racing at the feeling he got from such a sight. He peeked around to get another look and quickly withdrew his head when he thought the otter was watching him again. Why was he hiding from his friend like this, whether he was doing something like bending over or not! Lukan shook his head. Stop it! He was supposed to be attracted to a girl's behind, not a guy's! But he knew that denying his own feelings was getting more and more futile. It was getting to a point where he was just about ready to just

give in and admit to himself that he was gay. No. He couldn't! There was no way! Impossible! At this point it seemed cliché for him to deny himself any longer considering the number of years he's done just that even before Klaus entered his life.

It was at that moment that the image of the otter bending over caused his pants to get a tent. Go away! He need not deal with THAT now! He could only thank his lucky stars that the otter was not in his underwear, or worse.

"Hey you were right! They were under the mattress!" Came Klaus' voice so close to Lukan's ears that he yelped again and jumped, tail fluffing out in surprise. "Oh. Sorry Lukan," Klaus said.

Lukan felt himself sweating. Was his pants friend gone now? He dare not even try to look down as he focused his gaze on the otter before him. "I-it's fine," he said shakily.

"Are you sure?" The otter tried to get a closer look at him, which cause Lukan to flush and turn away.

"Yeah, yeah I'm great!" Lukan said stiffly, trying not to move so Klaus could notice the physical manifestation of his emotions.

He could hear the otter scratching his head in confusion. "Alright then... where is your mom?" He changed the subject. That caused Lukan to breathe an almost audible sigh of relief.

"At work. She works disgustingly early and won't be back until a little after I leave for work myself. You will be okay alone for an hour or so, right Klaus?" Lukan asked.

Klaus nodded. "Oh I'll be alright. But will you? You seem awfully jumpy lately," Klaus was more observant than Lukan gave him credit for...

'I-I am just... not used to having someone like you in our apartment," Lukan stammered.

Klaus did not nod, only hold his stare of confusion. "Why do I get the feeling you are hiding something from me...?" He prompted, mostly to himself obviously. But Lukan could not help but let the remark escape his filter of seriousness and blurt out.

"I'm not hiding anything!" He exclaimed, holding out his handpaws to show they were clean. He had no idea why he did that...

"Okay, okay I believe you, sheesh," Klaus said in an almost hurt tone. "Jeez you really are jumpy lately..." he added.

Lukan sighed. "I'm sorry Klaus... I am just so confused..." he admitted. He was half tempted to fling his handpaws to his face because he felt like he was about to confess to Klaus more doubts over his sexuality.

"About work, moving, having me here, schooling, and well... you know...?" Klaus prompted. Lukan's spine chilled again when Klaus alluded to it.

"Um... yeah," Lukan said, trying not to seem as confused as he was just then.

"We'll figure it all out, Lukan. Together, alright? You are not alone anymore," Klaus said.

"Y-yeah..." Lukan admitted. He suddenly felt as if the otter being around nowadays was both a blessing and a curse. The otter seemed determined to help, but on the other paw, he also felt that the otter was causing tornadoes and hurricanes to ravage his brain.

"Well it's only 11, so there is time before you have to get going, right?" Klaus stated as he looked at the unworn watch on Lukan's desk.

Lukan shook his head. "Nope."

"Well what the hell are we going to do until then?" Klaus sarcastically depicted a tone of desperation and incredulation which caused Lukan to giggle. He wished it had not...

"Well we could play some Smash Bros for a while..." he suggested...

"Aw sweet you have that game? Didja get the new character DLC that was released recently?" Klaus asked excitedly.

Lukan nodded. "Yeah."

"Sweeeet," Klaus breathed. "I used to be so good at this game, but not as much anymore," he said.

Lukan could feel himself smirking. Why was he smirking...? "I'll be the judge of that." He said in a low voice.

"You're on!" Klaus declared, poking Lukan in the chest.

"Fuck! I lost again! Damn, Lukan, you're good at this game!" Klaus exclaimed two hours later when Lukan beat him for the seventeenth time in a row.

"Well I had plenty of practice," Lukan said modestly.

"I've never seen anyone use Yoshi so well; I'm impressed!" Klaus praised.

"Course it's partly because I kinda suck at this game now, but still."

Lukan giggled lightly as he put down the controller. "Well it's getting to be about that time to go now, I'm afraid," he said.

"Okay Luakn, good luck at work, okay?" Klaus said.

"Thanks," Lukan said as he powered down the console. "It's only a halfy, so I think I will be alright. I'll be back at 7."

"Will you be coming for dinner too? Or are ya gonna grab McDonalds on the way home?" Klaus prompted. "I'm sure your mom will want to know..." he added with a shrug when Lukan gave him an inquisitive stare.

"I'll probably just snag some Mickey D's," Lukan answered as he grabbed his work supplies. "You sure you'll be alright without anyone for a while?"

Klaus nodded. "I'll survive," he said.

Lukan opened the door. "Alrighty. Be back soon," he said goodbye and closed the door behind him to face the music once again.

"So I hear that the otter is joining us on the 13th?" Inquired Cloud as they returned from tag teaming the bathrooms cleanup.

Lukan directed the maintenance cart back to its proper place as he responded. "Yeah," he nodded.

"He's the gay homeless guy you mentioned yesterday, isn't it?"

Lukan was so surprised that he dropped the roll of paper towels that he was restocking the cart with. "I-I don't remember telling you that!" He exclaimed.

"Well it makes too much sense. You wouldn't have two friends in need of a job because of a situation involving being kicked out for being gay, would there?"

Lukan was even more surprised that he then bumped his head on the cart as he flung it up to stare at the cat with shock. "What!? He told everything to his interviewers!?" He was incredulous that the otter would risk so much for something like this. He need not tell them that that happened!

"The interviewers liked it though. Said it gave the otter major ethos for fessing up and telling the truth despite how hard it might have been," Cloud explained.

Lukan understood why that would happen... but he still did not know why exactly Klaus said all that he must have said to management. It was not actually necessary! "Well I am just glad he got the job..." he said.

"Me too. It's getting kinda hard to take care of the store with just the two of us this close to the holidays..." Cloud said. "You wouldn't believe how much they've sent me back and forth today alone!"

"Oh I don't disbelieve you... I've had days like that too..." And it would seem his dream was right in the aspect that Klaus applied for the same department and position that Lukan worked. Janitorial He hoped the rest of his dream would never come true though... Of course not, Cloud using a snow shovel instead of a mop!? Sure he was not the brightest creature there could be, but no one is that stupid, right?

6 PM crept up so slowly that Lukan felt like bashing his head into the nearest wall. He was astonished that the cat claimed being sent here and there and here Lukan was doing jack. Was he lying after all...? One thing he hated about his shorter days was that, despite how short they were, they always felt like they just dragged and dragged and dragged. He assumed it was the lack of break time he actually gets for working half the time, but he was never certain. His short days just dragged. He spent the rest of the day wandering the store doing things as he saw fit, which was not much. Besides a few sweeps here and there, there was not much to do. Even the balers remained empty enough for him to disregard them. It was just all around a completely empty day. Which was odd for a weekend so close to the holidays.

When the time clock finally hit 6:30, Lukan instantly clocked himself out and practically fled the building, glad he won't have to work again until Friday. Now they were starting to schedule him on Fridays. It was about time for his schedule to really pick up because Christmas was getting nearer and nearer. Lots of beasts were going to be shopping for their Christmas dinners, so everyone had to be ready. Boy did Lukan sympathize with everyone trapped working in the department stores... It had to be nightmarish for them to work during this season.

Lukan had grabbed a quick meal at McDonald's as he had said he would on his way home. He watched the stars in the sky above his head twinkling. That was one thing he was going to miss about where he lived. In a sparsely populated location such as this, you could see just about the entire sky at night. Or at least, most of it.

As he reached his home, he felt an odd sense of foreboding, anticipation, and anxiety. What they all meant and what they alluded to was something Lukan already knew. Was it really worth fighting what his heart wanted? Even if his mind fought against it? Should he follow his heart or his mind? Not following his mind had led him to Bright. But not following his heart is... well where he is now! He opened the door slowly to find that his mom was sitting at her desk as per usual. She welcomed him home and asked him about his day at work. Lukan responded as he usually does. Survivable. It was almost as if the otter was not even there. His return home played out exactly as if the otter had never been there before. Or even entered his life for that matter. Thinking how it seemed the otter was not even there was rerouted when he saw the otter sitting in his room. Lukan's bed was rocking underneath him and the otter looked strangely flustered.

"Oh, uh... hiya Lukan," the otter said slowly. There was a faint redness on the mustelid's face. Lukan took that as he usually did. He was hiding something.

"Klaus? What are you doing?" Lukan asked slowly, looking around to see if something was not in the right place.

"N-nothing!" Klaus responded too quickly.

"Then what are you doing in my room?" It was at that moment Lukan noticed the placement of Klaus' arms and handpaws on his bed. "What are you sitting on? Did you break something of mine...?" Lukan was not even angry at that possibility. He was more curious than anything. And yet, somehow, he knew he was going to regret such curiosity.

"Nothing!" Klaus yelped in a higher pitched voice. Lukan saw Klaus' tail twitch as if he were uncomfortable with how he was sitting. What was going on here..?

Lukan sighed. "Klaus, you and I both know you are lying..." Lukan started.

Klaus sighed this time as he got up, his face reddening more. Underneath where the otter was sitting was one of Lukan's pair of boxer briefs. Lukan gasped and looked at his drawers to find that his undergarments one was open slightly and askew.

"What the fuck!? Dude, why are you going through my private stuff!?" Lukan exclaimed. Again he was not even angry. This time he was more surprised than anything.

The otter was blushing furiously. "W-well because I saw that you left your drawers open and I saw the underwear and well... I... I'm sorry, Lukan... Like I mentioned after I came out to you, I can be perverted sometimes and I can't help it!"

Lukan shook his head. "Look Klaus, I honestly don't care what you do as long it does not hurt either of us, but I wish you would just tell me or ask me about anything," he said with his eyes so wide, his mask seemed huge.

"It's really fucking embarrassing and terrible though! I should never raid through someone's stuff like that!" Klaus was obviously upset. What to do about that...? The otter went on before Lukan could open his maw to speak. "It's just... I've been repressing my sexuality too Lukan. In a different way. Being gay makes it so hard to find others to be around with to alleviate these tensions. Then they build up. Th-the libido can just eat me alive if I let it build up too much that when it surfaces, I come off as creepy, perverted, and just plain messed up!"

Lukan nodded. "I-I understand Klaus, but you really need to tell me, tell someone at least when that happens. You can't let it just explode like that. As I've been told time and time again, letting any emotion of any kind build up in you like that is incredibly unhealthy..."

Klaus sighed. "All I can do is touch myself though. What if that is not enough? Like, not good enough?" He said sadly.

Lukan sighed. "That I dunno what to say... have you considered getting something like toys to help out if you know what I mean?"

Klaus shook his head. "Of course, but... they're so expensive. I cannot afford such things, especially not right now. Mostly because I also have to pay off my truck, but I now have to raise money to get out of here and find a place of my own."

Lukan nods. What could he do? What could either of them do? Lukan wished he could help him, but he knew he couldn't. Lukan was straight as an arrow; no way he'd touch another guy right? Right...? No. No! Do not let this decide who you are! Lukan subconsciously felt it wrong for him to accept the possibility of him not being lady exclusive. There had to be something he could do to fight such emotions off.

"Lukan, what are you thinking about...?" Klaus asked cautiously.

Lukan opened his maw, about ready to spill the beans. But he stopped himself just in time. No. Do not. Say. A word. About what was just thought about.

Klaus sighed. "Don't worry about it Lukan... I'll be alright. It drives me insane, but as long as I stay alive, I'm okay right...?"

'Oh... stop making it so difficult!' Lukan groaned in his head. "That is not true Klaus! Would you call someone who has a terminal illness okay as long as they are still

alive?" He prompted. "You need some help too Klaus... when was the last time you yourself saw your counselor?"

"It's been a month. They went on vacation and they could not find any substitutes so..." Klaus said.

It was then that Lukan had a terrible thought. "Klaus a-are you in to... me?" He asked nervously.

Klaus was obviously surprised. Genuinely. It made Lukan flinch at how wrongly he assumed such a thing. "Wait what!? Why would you say that!?" He exclaimed.

"Well it is *my* underwear you were holding while I was gone right...?"

Klaus blushed but remained defiant. "Well yeah. But I did that with any guy's underwear I could get my paws on when I was at the gym. I-it... was how I was found out but s-still!" Before Lukan could respond, Klaus continued some more. "Besides if I was, I would have gone after your dirty underwear instead... or at least, I would..."

Lukan looked to his laundry hamper. It seemed undisturbed. "My what now? Klaus are you seriously saying that right now?" He said with many emotions being flung into his mind.

"So what if I am into dirty or used underwear?! Is that a problem!?" Klaus suddenly exploded, causing Lukan to flinch. Lukan hoped his mom was wearing her headphones and listening to something else...

"No! I could care less what your fetishes are. It's the principle that you are indulging in them using mine without my permission or anything like that that bothers me!" Lukan rebutted.

"You're right Lukan, and I'm sorry, but... it does not mean I am into you!" Klaus stated. "I'm not sure I'd even want a raccoon for a boyfriend anyways..." he added.

"What!? And why is that!? It's because we're classified as a vermin species, isn't it!?" Lukan exploded. "Would I not be good enough for you if I was into you!?"

"Wh-what does that matter, Lukan?! You just said you weren't into me! I was just saying that I was not sure I want a raccoon to be mine... That's all! I meant no disrespect to your species!" Klaus argued. "The way you are just flying off the handle like that makes me believe that you *are* into me and keep hiding it!"

Lukan lost control. The last thing he could feel from his body was the involuntary movement in his legs to lunge at the otter's face. He could vaguely hear himself snarling as he, arms outstretched attacked the otter in front of him. How dare he assume such things? How dare he violate his privacy, his property? How dare him...?

Lukan landed not on the otter's body, but on the bed as the mustelid moved out of the way just in time.

"Lukan. Stop it. You need to just stop it. Just let go of what you keep holding on to and let things take their course. It's not healthy for me to ignore my libido. But it's

even less healthier for you to ignore what your entire mind and soul is telling you," Klaus said in a now calmed voice.

Lukan looked away from the otter and sighed, staring at the wall. "Yeah... I guess you're right..."

"I still want to help you, you know. You can tell me anything that is on your mind if you are comfortable with it," Klaus offered.

"Not for now I guess," Lukan sighed. There are a few things I need to figure out myself first..." he said looking at his computer.

"Okay Lukan... Just let me know if that changes, okay...?" Klaus said.

"Okay Klaus... and... it is okay if you use my underwear to get off, okay? I just wanted to know about it first, alright...?" Lukan said softly.

"Th-thank you, Lukan," Klaus replied. "And um... sorry."

"Me too Klaus, me too."

That night Lukan had got onto his computer to settle the conflicts that reside in himself over his sexuality in particular. He had heard of something called the Kinsey Scale that he could use to determine his approximate orientation at the time. What kept Lukan from taking it was doubts over its reliability. Could it answer his questions? What could it indicate for him? Nonetheless, some idea was better than none. He opened up the first link he could to the test and looked at the first question.

What is your age? His age... what he realized was that in just a week, on the 15th, Lukan was going to turn 19. Should he put that or 18? Did it even matter in all actuality? Lukan shook his head and just put 19.

What is your gender? Male of course. There was no denying that. Otherwise there is something very wrong with his body!

The questions started after that point. The first read *True or False? You have never felt sexual desire or libido of any kind.* Thinking on it, whenever he thought of the otter in ways he's seen him before both in real life and dreamland, he felt the stiffness in his pants that would answer that question. Lukan had to put false if he was to be truthful...

Question two read: *True or False? You cannot decide what sex/gender you are attracted to the most?* Already throwing wrenches into his plans huh...? Recently, it was always that male otter that had aroused him, but Lukan could remember very clearly that when he started to hit puberty, girls would do the same to him as the otter does now. But now...? Now he just had no idea anymore. He marked true.

#3 said: *True or False? You strongly dislike the concept of man on man sexual contact.* Not really. But Lukan had no idea if that question meant in general, or with him and another guy. He had to assume that it was him and another guy, which once again, Lukan had no idea how to answer. He thought long and hard. Two sets of male

genitalia on each other or something like that. One of which is his own... what would that be like? Would that be so bad? While Lukan could say he did not dislike the idea, he could not say he liked it. But then he read the question again. He did not strongly dislike it, even if he was not sure he liked it. Such logic drove him to choose false.

#4 read: *True or False? You want to experiment with both genders sexually to find the truth before you die.* Experimentation with both genders? He had already done so with girls again at his younger age, but never with a guy. He literally just shot down the idea of doing so with Klaus earlier that evening when Klaus admitted to having a sex drive that was too active for him to handle alone. But Lukan said nope at that point so he had to say no now. So he answered false.

#5: *True or False? You have no interest in having sex, or sexual interaction with anyone, regardless of gender or sex.* That... Lukan had to admit was not true. He did have interest in getting it on with someone, but now that Klaus had entered his life, he was no longer sure of with whom anymore. Nonetheless it says regardless of gender so he said false again.

6. *True or False? The gender composition of orgies are irrelevant to how you feel towards them sexually.* What? Orgies? What does that matter exactly? Lukan had never thought of those before. Lukan had only ever seen one orgy and that was with like five girls and one guy when he started hitting puberty at like, 12 or 13 or something. He did not care back then, but now? Now he does not even know again. Would guys over girls, vice versa, or even treat him better? What sort of composition WOULD get him off easiest? Lukan could not be sure! There was nothing his mind could connect to to answer this one truthfully! He had to go with his gut and say false... and there was no take backs that he was going to pull...

7. *True or False? I avoid homosexual pornography if possible.* That was false. As much as Lukan was not sure, he considered numerous times to look up gay porn to get an idea of how aroused he would get to the sight of two or more guys going at it. Wait, does that now have relevance in that orgy question before. Lukan felt a little more sure about saying false. And this one was false too...

Number 8. *True or False? You can be sexually attracted to anyone, regardless of gender, under the right circumstances.* As much as Lukan wanted to press true, he had to think for a moment. And how there were plenty of pretty girls before he met Klaus that asked him out and he said no. Wait that's irrelevant; Lukan wanted no contact with anyone at that time. So what about right now...? Would he be so keen on giving them a chance now that he is not as socially repressed now? No... not really. As it stands now, he was too confused to take anyone. The test, he knew was going to take the "false" answer the wrong way... but it was true, so he said false.

9. *True or False? You are confident of your sexual orientation.* False. J-just. False.

Numero 10. *True or False? You find males to be more attractive than females.* Another Question that Lukan had to think about. That does it. He opened two new tabs and in one he searched male otter models and in the other, female. Wait. Why'd he choose otters...? No that did not matter now... he looked them over and noticed how flashy the female ones were. It looked to him that they were trying too hard to be as sexy as possible, and yet Lukan felt nothing. And as for the males, they looked more reserve, modest even. Even though some of them still looked too flashy for their own good, he found himself staring at one teasing male underwear model for five minutes. That could not be denied. As much as he wanted to. It was true...

Eleven. *True or False? You are uncomfortable about a threesome only because a male would be involved.* Pssh no. Lukan had watched more straight porn than lesbian exclusive ones, so what would that matter to him now? Maybe no change? Again, he had no idea...

Twelve. *True or False? You find only men to be attractive to you yourself specifically and sexually.* Oh boy this one... he had to say true again because of the model comparison. He feels nothing for the girls now, why!? Why!? If he wished to be truthful, he had to not deny what he always had... and admit himself that it was true... at least nowadays it is.

And the last question of the test. #13. *True or False? You are sexually submissive and would let a partner make the first moves on you.* And again, Lukan had to think. How good was he at taking charge? Not very... he usually waited for others to do something first and just followed along. Would he be the same way in a sexual situation? Probably. He had to admit he most likely would. So... true.

Lukan took a deep breath before he hit the submit button. This was it. What does the great Dr. Kinsey have to say about his sexual orientation. He saw the scale numbered 0 to 6. And the higher the number was, the more gay he was. Please be a low number. Please! He begged and willed the site as he pressed the button and it was sent to an agonizing loading screen. And when it loaded. There was his result. A... 3...? Wait. So the Kinsey Scale says he was bisexual? Really? And equally as such to that to boot? So no he was not straight, but not flat out gay either? Did that make sense? Maybe it did, but he still was not sure!

Whether it did or not... he still could not deny that he was definitely into other guys, at least a little. But then again if he were still figuring things out, could he actually trust his own answers to this test let alone the result of it? Somehow it made Lukan even more confused in one way, despite being relieved in another. He still had no idea *what* to think. All he could do was stare at his screen, as the 3 on the screen was highlighted. Bisexual... somehow, Lukan still felt it was off. What about the blatant lack of feeling towards girls at that point in time right now? He may have had some in the past, but that was the past, when his sexual side and his mind was still developing!

Was that factored in his results for right now even though some of it is outdated?! Lukan felt that he should redo the test and only focus on what he felt right then and there. For all the questions no less. And so he did... he decided to run through the entire test only thinking of what he thought now instead of then. And his new result was... What the-!? It was still a 3! Lukan felt very frustrated at that point and was wondering, where the confusion was now. Was he still subconsciously confused, or was he really and truly bisexual? So many questions buzzed in his head as he decided to go to bed. Maybe he was not so sure because of one of the questions reigning in his mind. That one about experimentation... if he were to be sure... should he do it? Perhaps at this point it was the only way to know. No matter if there was other ways he could know, this was the most plausible way to know. So now... he had to find a way to get Klaus to help him out without letting Klaus be... all... well the way he was about it. What to do exactly... that was the question.

Monday came around all throughout the only class Lukan had at the college that day, Japanese, was Klaus. He found a doodle of the otter in his notes when he was supposed to be taking notes on the final that was coming the following week. He frustratedly tore out the paper with a growl and crumpled it up.

"Is there something the matter, Lukan?" Asked the sensei of his class. He was a skinny tanuki that was a Japanese citizen who came to the country to teach his language and culture at this college.

Lukan sighed. "I'm sorry, sensei Yamamoto, but I have had a lot of trouble concentrating."

Sensei Yamamoto nodded. "I see. I have noticed you were drawing otter in your notes instead of taking the notes." He said. "That is sign that you are in love. With otter."

Lukan felt the blood drain from his face. "W-wait, love?! N-no I assure you, sensei that I am not!"

Yamamoto shook his head. "You may deny all you want. But truth always prevail."

Lukan uncrumpled the paper and looked at it then sighed. "Maybe you're right, sensei," Lukan said. And he noticed that the tanuki mentioned nothing at the obvious homosexual connections that were within the drawing. Lukan did draw the otter as he saw him. Relatively athletic and lithe.

"That is the funny thing about truth. It cannot ever hide. Not forever," Yamamoto replied. "So it is futile to hide it."

"Futile..." Lukan echoed as he stared at the picture.

After class, Lukan met the otter at the same sub shop as they usually would to get home. Upon reaching the sub shop, he noticed the otter was talking to a group of

creatures just outside of it. Lukan was about to wait for him to finish when he saw one of them, a female eagle pushing Klaus to the ground as her two friends either laughed or snarled.

"Serves you right for being a faggot! Worthless scum!" She spat as Klaus sat there with wide eyes and flat ears. Lukan looked around wildly for someone to help, but noticed the blinds in the sub shop and nearby buildings to be off. A male hyena was about to kick Klaus while he was down when Lukan felt his legs moving towards them quickly.

"Hey you brutes! Leave my friend alone!" He charged up and body slammed the hyena, who yelped in surprise and staggered several feet to the side. He looked to his other two cronies and his face fell.

The third member was a tall reynard with a perpetually smirking face. His voice was that of an icy wind in January. "What the hell do you think you're doing here?" He demanded.

"Defending my friend!" Lukan spat, trying his hardest not to seem afraid.

The fox seemed to smirk harder somehow. "Oh? We got ourselves a little faglover as well!"

"A-and so what if I am!?" Lukan demanded, voice raising higher.

"That means you too need a lesson in the ways of the world. Fags do not belong here or anywhere," said the hyena. "They're scum. And they shall be treated as such."

Lukan clenched his fists knowing these idiots were going to fight him. He knew it was a fight he could not win. And there was nowhere for him to go. "This is sad," was all he could say. "That idiots like you still exist these days..." Lukan briefly thought back to the English project Klaus had read an excerpt of two nights ago. One of the things he touched on was homophobia, and how it and other forms of irrational hatred were the true scum of the Earth. Now he was face to face with that form. With nothing to combat against it with.

"Tomorrow, I will make sure you wake up breathing through a tube..." said the tod as he put on a strange looking glove. Was that... a gauntlet of some kind? "Both you and the faggot down there..."

Lukan growled as he clenched his fists tighter. No getting out of this one. What could he do. He gasped as the fox took a step towards him with a snarling face trying to replace the smirking one. The fox, without warning rushed at Lukan, fist outstretched. Lukan barely dodged it in time and it caused the vulpine to lose his footing and fall spectacularly down. Lukan took this opportunity to usher Klaus to his paws. By that time though, the hyena had grabbed at Lukan's tail, causing him to yelp, and threw him aside like a rag doll. Such enormous strength that Lukan had never even thought was possible on anything like him! The fox had already gotten to his paws and used one of them to pin Lukan down by the throat which caused him to choke and gasp

for air. Th-these guys... they weren't just usual bullies, they had malicious intent for him and Klaus. Lukan gasped, mouth wide open as he looked up at the fox's smirking face.

"Neither of you deserve to live," he said in an ominously soft voice. Lukan looked over and saw that Klaus was firmly under the eagle's sharp looking talons.

That sight... was all Lukan needed. "No!" He yelled as he suddenly rush up and undermined the fox's balance completely before rushing the eagle once again with more force, causing her to stumble into the street several yards away. A car that was approaching blared its horn and swerved sharply to avoid hitting her. The hyena was then charging at Lukan, which he responded by pivoting his waist so forcefully, it caused his 20 pound backpack to slam the hyena across the stomach, and knocking the wind out of him. Lukan took the opportunity while the bullies were distracted to yank the otter to his paws and ran away with him into the Student Union building. He knew the homophobes would not follow them into a building like that with the intention of hunting them down. He dragged the otter into the sub shop, gasping heavily. Many of the creatures that were inside were asking them what had just happened, but Lukan refused to let this situation get any publicity and shrugged them off..

"Those three!" Klaus had finally gasped. "Were the ones who chased me from the gym that one time..." he confessed.

Lukan felt his eyes widen. "Really...?"

Klaus nodded. "I had no idea they were still going to this school. Thought they dropped out or something..."

"We need to report this..." Lukan started.

"No. Don't." Klaus said as if it were a warning.

Lukan turned to the otter with a confused look. "Why not?"

"Trust me Lukan, it's not good idea. You have no idea how vengeful and manipulative these creatures are when they are ratted out," Klaus replied.

"They tried to kill us, Klaus by the looks of it! This warrants the police!" Lukan exclaimed.

"Yeah maybe. But I still do not think we should," Klaus seemed oddly serious and adamant on the matter. Nevertheless, Lukan had to trust him. "If we're lucky, surveillance cameras might have caught them in the act," he added.

"Alright Klaus, but... I still do not feel right with those brutes hanging around," Lukan said, looking around, and noticing some creatures were trying to listen in. "I'm just glad you are okay."

"You too, Lukan. You were awesome though! When did you learn to fight like that!?" Klaus admired.

"After a life like mine, you really learn how to defend yourself," Lukan said darkly. "Unfortunately, this self defense has been used against me to persecute me in

various "crimes" in my cubhood. So I really hate having to use it. But you are my closest friend. No way I'd let those assholes get away with anything they'd do to you."

It was without warning that at that instant, the otter hugged Lukan tightly causing him to yelp and gasp as the air was squeezed from his lungs. "I won't forget this, Lukan," Klaus said.

Lukan felt a sublime subconscious spirit rise in his mind that controlled his arms and made him hug the otter back despite the fact they were being watched. There was too big a part of him that enjoyed having the otter embrace him in such a way, that Lukan did not want to let go, even after he otter himself tried to back out at first.

"How about we get home now, Lukan?" Klaus stated softly.

"Where on EARTH did you get those scratches on your neck, Klaus!?" was the very first thing Lukan's mom had said upon reentry to his home. That was something the mother coon was able to spot from a mile away.

"I scratched it on a tree branch," Klaus lied.

"Then why do they look like claw marks? And Lukan?" His mother sniffed. "I smell fox on you... What is going on?"

Lukan sighed. There was no getting around his mother. So he fessed everything that had happened to them earlier that day, minus the reason why it happened in the first place.

"Oh my God, are you guys okay? I cannot believe bullies like that still exist even at the college level! It makes me what kind of braindead combination of creatures could create such spawn?" His mother had pondered as she grabbed peroxide from the medicinal container inside one of the kitchen cabinets. She grabbed a cotton ball and doused it with it. Without a word she applied it to Klaus' scratches.

Naturally, Klaus immediately started screeching in pain. "Mother of hell that hurts more than hell!" Klaus screamed as Lukan's mother cleaned out his scratches and put bandages over them. "Damn eagle talons! Jesus!" He exclaimed.

"Are you hurt too, Lukey...?" His mother addressed him, which in response, caused Lukan to raise his paws quickly in defense.

"I-I'm fine, mom!" He said nervously.

"Are you sure...?"

Lukan nodded.

"Alright. Did you report them?" She pressed.

Klaus shook his head.

"Why not?!" She seemed incredulous.

"Because it would have ended up worse for us," Klaus said plainly.

"How?"

"It's too complicated, and I am too tired to go over it now," Klaus stated more flatly.

"Klaus if your reason for not doing so is the similar to reasons I've had in the past, then I totally feel you, dude," Lukan replied without thinking. Lukan remembered the past and how he refused to report any wrongdoings. Creatures who were more clever than he was used such accusations against him, spinning it so he was the perpetrator all along. Since then, for the sake of his reputation, he did nothing. It all only served to make him even less trusting than he already was. Until Bright came along and messed things up even more. Does Klaus have a darker past than he had alluded to than he thought? What exactly is going on in that otter's head?

"Lukan, what are you saying?" His mother asked, causing Lukan to gulp in realization that he had just given away one of the secrets he held from his mother. Oops.

"N-nothing!" Lukan said immediately.

His mother let out an exasperated sigh. "Teenagers. Always having their secrets. Fine, whatever. Don't tell me," she said, frustrated. She turned back to her computer and put on her headphones.

Lukan and Klaus took that as an excuse to leave the living room and go into Lukan's room.

"Hey Lukan?" Klaus started. "Thanks for earlier. You really saved my tail."

"Don't sweat it, Klaus. Any friend would do the same for you," Lukan said.

"But you did not seem like the type who was willing to fight anyone under any situation. It seemed like something inside you changed. Clicked. Or something," Klaus observed.

"I dunno Klaus. I just..." Lukan stopped himself and sighed. Was this it? Was this really going to happen?

"Just...?"

"I just felt that there was something about you that I don't know about. That there is something you aren't telling me. That I personally relate to so greatly, that... I just feel some other sort of... connection to you."

Klaus dipped his head. "You're right Lukan. But I don't think today is the day. Maybe someday soon. I don't feel ready to say it yet," he said.

"It's okay Klaus. And another thing. That was not the only reason I fought off those bullies. It was... me fighting fear and hatred. Something that I constantly ran away from my entire life. And you... seeing you beat down just made me... say fuck it. And... I rose up and fought. And I won. But there is a long war still ahead for me..."

"W-wait a second! War? With what? Whom? You have no reason to be hated against!" Klaus said, shocked.

"Don't I? Klaus, everyone is hated for one reason or another by someone else for no legitimate reason. As I mentioned in the English project you read a part of last night, hatred is the true disease, the true cancer that runs amok in our society. It is the very thing I fear the most above everything else."

"I-I don't really follow," Klaus said slowly.

"I hate hatred, Klaus. I declared war on it years ago after the fiasco in Bright, and I swore that I would fight it to the bitter end, because of the reasons I am hated for are unjustified. As are a lot of kinds. People act incredibly specist to me way more often than you think. And now... that is not the only reason I fight now."

"Wh-what do you mean, Lukan?" Klaus asked.

Lukan took a deep breath. "You, Klaus. You are another reason I keep fighting. Seeing you being threatened to death by those brutes made me realize that there were more reasons to fight other than myself. I had to defend the ones I care about the most. And then there was a second reason within me that I now must acknowledge exists. One that I have kept hidden for too long a time. Something that I hated. Feared. Dreaded. But I now realize that I have to face it. Because in not doing so, I am committing the exact deeds carried out against us every day!"

"Wh-what are you talking about, Lukan?" Klaus asked in a frightened voice.

Lukan could feel his heart racing and pounding in his throat. He could feel sweat dripping into his fur. He clenched his fists and looked at Klaus directly into the eyes. His sweet, sparkling, handsome emerald eyes... how he wanted to stare at them forever. His best friend. His closest comrade after years of painful, insufferable loneliness. Only after a week, and it has astoundingly come to this. His answer. Was staring at him right in the face. Now was the time. He got closer to Klaus' face and opened his maw, and kissed him, full on, the lips.