

TEN: The Choice

The rest of the trip was one that was once again, spent in complete silence. This time however, not because of a cold shoulder or being unable to break an awkward silence, but because there was a simple fact that there was nothing left to say. Lukan essentially ignored how fast they were approaching their new home in favor of pondering what to do next and how to do it. Lukan said over and over in his mind that there was no way he and Klaus were going to engage sexually with each other too often. But another voice told him he should do whatever it takes to help Klaus even if it hurt him to show that he loved him. But Lukan felt that too much intimacy of that scale would prove how much he did not love him, because the relationship would no longer be as strong! But it's not like the relationship is very strong now! No matter how much Lukan discerned that it was for the best he gave in and essentially become fuck-buddies with Klaus instead of his boyfriend, he just could not bring himself to do it! Why?! Klaus clearly needed help, and it looked all too likely that he couldn't wait for it any longer! Lukan had to do something himself before the otter does something drastic! But other than what he wants, what else could Lukan do...? There was no other options were there? Still he had to think.

All Lukan could do was think. Even as his mother pointed to their destination from her car, Lukan could not take notice. He could not focus. He could not focus on the future of his life and where he would spend it. He could only focus on the desperate and needy otter that was bestowed on him as his lover. There were no other priorities in his mind. Klaus simply came first. And no matter how much he thought about it and no matter how much Lukan focused, he always ended up with the same conundrum. There was no way both of them will win in this situation. Lukan refused that reality; he was determined and desperate to find a compromise! Anything so that Klaus will be satiated and Lukan can remain comfortable with the state of the relationship. But nothing he thought of could possibly work. Could he have sexual times with Klaus more often, but not too often? No... when they lived in Lilac Grove, they pawed each other almost every night, and that was just about enough for Lukan. And Klaus did not seem like he had enough by the looks of things. Enough will never be enough for that otter, especially since it's become apparent his condition was worsening. Lukan knew that he had to make a decision and fast.

Just then a voice on the walkie rang out. It was obviously Lukan's mother. "We've arrived in Salamanda," she started just as Lukan saw the city limits sign pass by them. It was like an immediate cue; after the sign passed, several buildings begin

sliding past them as they entered the town. "I will lead you to a motel, and then we'll figure out how to get somewhere to live from there, alright?"

Since Klaus was unable to answer, Lukan had to do so. "Alright, we'll follow," he said. Lukan had to take his mind off the fiasco that was unfolding at the most inopportune of times. So he took the liberty of looking around the place. Most of the buildings were made of stone, concrete, or bricks. Lukan assumed that this was because they were now in the middle of the desert, and as such, buildings of these materials stayed cool much easier. It reminded Lukan how most of the buildings in Lilac Grove were reinforced to resist the gale force winds that buffeted the city on a daily basis. Lukan found it fascinating how the architecture of many places matched the environments they were in.

As they drove deeper into the unfamiliar new territory, Lukan noticed that the streets were crowded and traffic was everywhere. It was not New York bad, but it was bad. Bad enough to make Lukan question the population of the town. He also noticed that many of the cars had license plates from all over the country. Lukan immediately hypothesized that a good chunk of the creatures here now came down to the desert for the winter. Lukan could understand that, wanting to escape the eternal gallows of the brutally cold winters in the north. However, Lukan knew that such a challenge could not be easily thwarted. Lukan felt that the winter's gallows were taunting him, following him, stalking him. It was not the winter itself that drove him away from Lilac Grove like it did for his mother. Lukan wanted to escape the place of no opportunity to start anew. But with Klaus in tow and his own set of challenges that sidetrack his very initial and once solitary goal now standing in his path, Lukan had to wonder. Is this the final gambit of the winter's gallows?

The truck suddenly stopping at a traffic light jolted Lukan back to reality. He heard the otter next to him swear aloud.

"Damn it! Your mother got past the light and we didn't," he said. "I've already lost sight of her." Without even looking at Lukan, Klaus grabbed the walkie and addressed it. "Mrs. Benka, we did not clear that last light," he said in an annoyed voice. It was becoming clear that Klaus' usual chipper personality was wilting away like he left it behind in the tundra they were so desperate to escape for their own personal reasons.

"That's okay, Klaus. "I've pulled in at the Walmart that's just on the other side of it," came Lukan's mother's voice from the walkie. "It's still too early to check in the motel, so we're going to take a quick stop here and figure out what to do next."

Klaus nodded despite knowing Lukan's mother couldn't see him and that he was still not acknowledging Lukan himself. "Roger that. See you in a few moments," he said as the light turned green again. Klaus drove the instant he was greenlit and it took no less than half a minute for the big store to come into view. And just off to the side of

the parking lot in a shoulder presumably for moving trucks was Lukan's mother's car. Klaus took no time at all to pull into the lot and pull over next to Lukan's mother. He went up to her and Lukan could hear him asking vaguely. "If you don't mind, I have to use the bathroom real quick." Klaus' voice was stifled and muffled, and barely audible, and yet, Lukan understood every word the unusual otter had said. A few seconds later he dashed off towards the Walmart and Lukan's mother left her car to address Lukan. Lukan instinctively rolled down the window. The truck was so old that it still had the cranks to roll the windows down with. Inconvenient overall, but at least the truck did not need to be running to work.

"Something still seems to be bothering Klaus," his mother said. "And I heard you two arguing before we left this morning. Is everything okay?" she asked.

Lukan subconsciously figured that his mother heard their spat that morning, but did she know exactly what it was all about? Whether she did or not did not affect the answer that Lukan gave her. "Honestly I don't know. Ever since yesterday, he's just been... cold. I-ice cold," he replied.

"Do you know why?" his mother asked.

'Yes,' Lukan thought, but dare he even mention Klaus' state of mind and the reasons behind it to his own mother? It would probably be a good idea, but right here and now? Perhaps not, especially considering the otter would return any moment now. Actually that wouldn't matter, because Lukan's mother was the worst ever when it came to keeping secrets. She'd address the otter about it all before she even fully understood the conundrum! "He told me," he started uncertainly. "But I don't think he'll want me to tell anyone else," he said awkwardly. That was not what he meant to say exactly, and he hoped his mother is understanding.

"Something personal? Is he worried about living somewhere new or..." his mother trailed off.

"If only it were that easy..." Lukan muttered.

"What do you mean?"

"It's... complicated," Lukan bit his lip, trying to keep from too much spilling past them.

"Is it another teenager thing? Wait, Klaus is twenty now, isn't he?" Lukan's mother stopped herself. "Still, at these ages, life can get overwhelming."

"For differing reasons," Lukan muttered under his breath some more.

"What was that?" she noticed instantly.

"Life is overwhelming for different reasons at this point," Lukan echoed himself louder. "For me as well, but it really does seem to be hitting Klaus really hard. And he..." he stopped himself when he realized what he was about to say.

"He what, Lukan?" his mother pondered.

Lukan took a deep breath, unsure of how what he'd say next would affect his situation. "He keeps saying that I am the only one who can help him."

"You are? Is it a boyfriends thing?" she tilted her head.

"Um sort of," Lukan bit his lip awkwardly again, not wanting to say another word. Thankfully he did not have to because right then, klaus was striding back into view, with his face completely unreadable. And unreadable in a sense that Lukan knew that Klaus was trying to hide how he felt.

"Alright Mrs. Benka, take us to the motel. I'll follow," and there was no tone whatsoever in the mustelid's voice. And he walked right past the two raccoons and jumped right into his truck and restarted it. Lukan had to jump into the truck quickly in case Klaus left without him. He had no acknowledgement whatsoever besides those emotionless words. Klaus was trying to stifle his emotions. Lukan remembered how loopy his libido made him the morning before they were discovered. Was he just trying to stifle them so his libido won't dictate his emotions any more? That had to be it. That made a lot of sense. Despite the hypothesis, however, Lukan still did not feel any better at all. Whether it made sense or not, nothing felt explained at all and it seemed there was more to this than a simple suppression of emotion.

The motel that Lukan's mother was talking about was just another right turn and another mile down the road. It only took five minutes or so to reach it from where they were. Lukan was surprised at how little time they spent on the road. But he had to get used to it. It seemed likely that they were going to live in a motel for a while now. How long that was going to be Lukan did not know. And he knew that the other two did not know either. He hoped that it wouldn't be too long. Between the three of them, the price was going to be quite exorbitant, no matter the amount they all saved up.

"I don't think we can check in right away; it's still technically morning," Lukan's mother stated as they exited their vehicles again. "They're probably still cleaning out all the rooms."

"So what are we going to until they're done?" Klaus asked. There was a break in his apathy. Lukan tried to discern what had broken it, but it was what he expected. A hint of irritation.

The mother raccoon shrugged. "I guess look around the town some?" she suggested. "It's also about lunch time so there is that. Other than that there is not much for us to do yet," she shrugged.

"Where are we going?" Klaus asked almost immediately after the mother raccoon stopped talking.

"I don't know yet," she said taking no notice to Klaus' demeanor. "Depends on where you want to go, guys. Like for lunch or whatever. Anywhere will work at this point. Any input, Lukan?" she addressed Lukan, who jumped slightly in surprise.

Lukan had no input; he was too busy focusing on how much warmer it was down here compared to what he was used to back in Lilac Grove. "Uh... I don't know and I don't care," he said hastily. "Wherever is fine with me."

Lukan's mother placed her paws on her hips. "Both of you are acting really oddly lately. I do not want to pry in your businesses, but I want to know if you're okay." she said, her voice hardening in concern.

"I'm fine," Klaus stated almost too flatly to believe. "Let's just go wherever."

Lukan almost bursted out that Klaus was not fine at all. So instead of being blatant about it, he suggested, "On the way over here, I saw a compounding shop of some kind. That's kind of interesting, I suppose." he realized that was too odd a thing to say at that point and hastily added, "If we were to look around, that would be an option." Way to go you stupid coon. Making things more awkward than they needed to be. He only said that so they could possibly find medicine or other means of helping Klaus cope with his problems. But not only did he fail miserably, he also made things more awkward. Way to go. He sighed. "Yeah. Lets just go wherever."

Lunch time was more or less spent in complete silence. Neither of the three of them actually talked to each other through the meal at all. It was so disconcerting to Lukan that he lost all sense of where he was, what he was doing, and even his appetite. All he could do was focus on Klaus and the way he was aggressively eating his food. Lukan could tell that Klaus's state of mind was worsening more and more. It was becoming apparent that the otter needed serious help and fast. If only he knew what to do about life altering libidos such as his. It was far from healthy to have a drive that was so active it dictated his entire emotional state. It couldn't be long before Klaus snaps. Considering how little time had passed since Klaus confessed it, this alarmed Lukan even more.

Klaus muttered something as he got up from the table and wandered off. Lukan did not fully understand what was said, but he caught the word "bathroom". Again? But he just went not that long ago. Lukan suddenly was hit with the suspicion that Klaus went in there to paw off or something to alleviate his libido just a little bit. Was it such a good idea to do that somewhere so public? Definitely not, and if Klaus was doing as Lukan suspected, then Lukan knew something really did have to be done as soon as possible. Though no matter how many times Lukan told himself this, and he has a lot, he did not know what to do exactly! In a new and unfamiliar place like this, where were they going to get the help Klaus desperately needed!?

"Mom, we need to figure something out about Klaus,;" he echoed his own thoughts aloud.

"Yes, yes we do. I was trying to find a mental health clinic somewhere around here last night. I can't find very much that can help..." she said disappointedly.

"Besides, I don't know enough of what's going on to discern what Klaus actually needs. Are you sure you know nothing, Lukan?"

Lukan sighed. Despite how much he did not want his mother to know what Klaus wants from him and insists he needs, Klaus's help comes before all else at this point. Lukan simply could not stand him being like this... "No, I do know one thing," he said nervously. "I don't think he'll want me to tell you this, but especially as of late, he's been suffering an overactive libido."

"Has he?" Lukan's mother said. "At that age it's not surprising. Okay, when we check in that motel, I'll do some research on places that can help with that."

"I hope you can find something quick; Klaus is looking worse the longer it's been and I hate seeing him like this. This is not him. Not my boyfriend. I want my boyfriend back," he said sadly.

"I know, Lukey, and we will help him any way we can right?" she asked.

"How? The only way I think I can is if I-- we--" he choked on those words. How could he say that the only way to help Klaus is to engage him sexually constantly to his own mother? Despite the situation, Lukan felt it too awkward to even mention! However, his mother took a good guess at what he was going to say.

"You mean... have sex?" she stated. She sighed. "Will it make him happy again?" she asked.

"Only if I do it with him like twenty times a day at this point. Whether it will or not for either of us, his demand of it this often is so unhealthy, he needs professional help anyway. And immediately," Lukan said. "I-I have to admit, mom, I'm afraid he might actually rape me," he added, tears in his eyes. It was only half true though. Lukan was surprised and impressed that Klaus made no such advances on him up to this point. Klaus, despite how he was feeling, had a lot of self control. But if it were to get any worse, Lukan was afraid he might lose that sense of control. His entire personality had to be switched off. What next? Klaus already seemed like he was losing all sense of who he was, but what will happen if he is not helped soon?

"I swear by God I will never let that happen," Lukan's mother said. "To be afraid of your own lover. That is not love in the slightest."

Lukan couldn't agree more, but there was nothing they could do right away to help him. "Yeah. So tonight I am going to ask Klaus if he wants to have another go tonight, if that's okay?" he swallowed hard at the proposition. He told himself too often that he wasn't going to give in like that. But if it was going to buy them time, he almost felt obligated to. And after everything, his obligation to help Klaus in that way was getting stronger. Even his own will was beginning to break.

"If that's what you want," his mother said stiffly.

"It... isn't," Lukan admitted with a sigh. "But sometimes you have to do what you don't want to for the sake of others. Klaus already has by abstaining this far..." he said in a soft voice. "Like you, all I want is his happiness, and if this is it..."

"But if it doesn't make you happy then--"

"Well what other choices do I have!? I have none! I have to help him until we can figure out what to do! A successful relationship has to have sacrifices. And this will be mine," he said, feeling like something was stuck in his throat.

Before his mother could object to what he just said, Klaus came back into view, tail noticeably dragging on the floor. "Back," he muttered.

There were no more words for the rest of the meal. Lukan could only weigh the decision he made in his mind. There were no other choices were there? Could he take that kind of risk? Actually whether he chose one way or the other it'd still be a risk. Choosing to cave as he has done is risking the entire relationship status from boyfriends to fuck-buddies. But doing nothing made Lukan concerned for both Klaus's mental health and for the distinct possibility of him being raped due to Klaus snapping. He knew it could happen; he's heard all kinds of stories like that. Even the most self controlled person can snap eventually. It was a matter of picking his poison, and it seemed that caving in was the less potent of the two.

When all three of them finished their awkward meals, they headed back to the motel in even further silence. Lukan could not take his eyes off the otter as he followed his mother back there. His face was still unreadable and ominous. Lukan knew what was going on in his mind, but did not know what Klaus was thinking of doing as a result. And the more he thought about it, the more scared he got.

"How long do you folks plan to stay here?" asked the receptionist of the motel when Lukan and Klaus reached the mother coon inside.

"We don't know yet; we just moved down here," she responded. "We can add extra days as they go along right?" she asked.

"Yes, that will be no problem," the sand colored coyote replied. "I just need all your IDs and we'll get you set up."

All three of them gave their IDs without much of another word from either of them. The receptionist took them and examined them briefly.

"Wow you all came from up north? It must have been really cold, huh?"

Lukan's mother nodded. "Definitely. I'm glad to be somewhere where it's warm out all the time," she said.

"Just wait until summer. You're going to wish you had no fur at all during that time," the coyote said with humor.

"SHE hates the heat and yet I kept telling her that this region is hotter than the sun," Lukan spoke, indicating his mother and trying to gain humor in the situation. He did not feel confident that it was working.

"I know how hot it can get, but it's a dry heat. That, and it's not a blizzard day after day, is it?" she countered as she always had with that statement.

"Raccoons aren't meant for the desert, mom. And otters, even less so," he added, pointing to Klaus. He also hoped that such a hostile climate was also a contributing factor to Klaus' behavior. Even though he hoped it, he knew he was still wrong on that front.

"We'll make do with what we can and adapt to it," she responded gruffly.

Lukan still failed to understand her logic. Yes there would be little to no snow down this far south, but the heat though. It would be too much for even him to bear. The three of them comprise of species not accustomed to such a climate. Lilac Grove's summers in particular were nasty phenomena. Could the gallows of summer be worse than before? Lukan hoped not.

"Well I wish you three the best of luck then," the coyote said, giving them the key cards. "Room 317," she said.

317?! How big was this place for such a small town. Then Lukan realized. He did not see very many other hotels on the way through town... That's interesting...

"Third floor. Nice," Klaus muttered. "I hate stairs." With legs as short as an otter usually has, Lukan had to sympathize. Argh. So many reasons to sympathize with him. Lukan felt another chunk of his will to abstain falter a little more. Klaus comes first. Nothing else mattered to Lukan any longer.

"Klaus, could I um... ask you something?" he asked with a slight nod to his mother. He took Klaus' paw and lead him outside.

"What do you want now, Lukan...?" Klaus asked wearily. There was no hint of anger, maybe a slight hint of annoyance, but most of his voice that manifested those words seemed to be of complete and utter defeat.

"You... want to have another go... tonight?" Lukan gulped heavily, sweat dripping down his neck fur.

Klaus spoke nothing right away; he just stared right into Lukan's eyes. His expression remained unreadable for several seconds, causing Lukan's heart to speed up apprehensively. Why wasn't the otter saying yes? Lukan knew that this is exactly what he wanted. Then his heart dropped when he saw the otter's eyes harden and narrow. "What made you change your mind?" he said plainly. His tone was eerily monotonous and initially as unreadable as his expression prior.

"Y-you did, Klaus," Lukan replied quietly. "I know how much pain you're in and... I just can't stand it. I have to help you. No matter what," he said. "You're right, you know. You did so much for me by being my first real friend. You shoved your mother

away just to be with me. You sacrificed your home in Lilac Grove to move away with me. You did so much... and I've done jack shit." Lukan was surprised to find himself close to tears. Every word was true though. Klaus HAD done so many things to be with him. If repaying him was through something like this, then Lukan felt that denying the help Klaus desires would be a piss poor way to repay him.

"Why has it took you until now to realize that?" Klaus' voice got harder. "Lukan, I'm not stupid. I know you do not want to do any of this with me. To me, a good relationship needs that sense of intimacy. To show just how much we love each other. To deny it, is... to me... like saying you don't love me."

Lukan's eyes widened and he took a step back, aghast. "But Klaus! Th-that way of thinking is-! Klaus, to me, there is a fine line between being in love to do it, and then doing it for the sake of the feeling and nothing more. And how much you want is... to me not love at all."

"So you are saying that you do not love me?" Klaus prompted darkly.

"N-no! That's not what I'm saying at all!" Lukan exclaimed.

"Isn't it though!? Whether my way of thinking is wrong or not, it does say that what YOU just said should be translated to "I do not love you", " Klaus said, voice rising.

"And MY way of thinking says that the amount of fucking you want to do says YOU don't love ME! Like all you want is for you and I to be fuck buddies, and nothing more!" Lukan countered loudly, words completely out of his control. As soon as they were out, Lukan immediately wanted to take back every last word he just said, because now he knew, that he fucked up badly.

Klaus stood there, fists clenched at his side. Eyes and maw all open in unequivocal shock. It looked as though Klaus was failing to comprehend the magnitude of what Lukan had just said. Lukan also stood there, feeling equally, if not more aghast, as his own private feelings had spilled once again. And they were the feelings, this time, he knew he needed keep locked away at all costs. And now, they've been let out to ruin all that he and Klaus had strove to do.

"Klaus I--" Lukan started with a throat early completely closed.

Klaus held up a paw in sadness, tail dropped flatly to the ground. "No Lukan. Save your breath. I don't want to hear your attempt to construe what you actually feel about me again." Without another word, Klaus turned around and walked slowly away toward the street and disappeared down the road without looking back once.

All the while, Lukan just stood there, absolutely stunned at what had transpired. There was no denial when Lukan considered the probability that he may have just screwed over their entire relationship permanently. He would not be surprised that the next time he ever saw Klaus again would be right when he asks for a break up immediately. Lukan cursed himself. He cursed the fact that he couldn't let himself be as sexually active as Klaus wanted him to be. He cursed the fact that he was completely

helpless in helping Klaus and knew nothing of what either of them could do. He cursed himself for everything he's done to bring ruin to him and his now possibly former boyfriend. After all of that, could this be the end? Lukan couldn't let it be so! And despite how Klaus felt, he knew Klaus felt the same. After everything the two of them endured together, would either one of them really and truly be willing to let it all go to waste just like that? However severe the disagreement, there HAS to be some sort of compromise! If only Klaus were willing to and Lukan not reluctant to find it...

"Lukan," his mother's voice caught Lukan's attention. When he swiveled his depressed head to face her, her own face was covered in sadness and concern. "Are you okay, Lukan?" she asked.

"No, mom," he said with a deep sigh. "I am not okay. And neither is Klaus," he said.

"Where has he gone?" she asked. "He wouldn't know where to go or where anything is, would he?"

"Of course not. None of us know what is down that way," Lukan pointed in the direction that Klaus wandered off.

"Should we try to find him?" she asked.

"Probably. But we should give him time to come back after he's calmed down a bit," Lukan replied. "If he... ever does," he bit his lip in apprehension. Not just because Klaus might get lost but... what if he would be too upset to come back? What if he--? Lukan shook his head. "No. Maybe we should look for him," he said plainly.

"Okay," his mother nodded. "Let's hurry before he gets too far."

She and Lukan, at a quick paced stride to the car that was parked next to Klaus', which Lukan thought Klaus would surely return for. But he knew that Klaus was in no mood whatsoever to drive at a time like this, and Lukan did not blame him. Though if he were not to return for a while surely he would eventually for his truck right? Still, there were concerns that kept nagging Lukan to find him now. He nodded to his mother, who he knew was concerned for the same reason, and she turned the ignition and as quick as allowed, backed out of the space.

Following Klaus' initial trail was easy, but by the time they hit a stoplight a little less than a mile down, Lukan knew Klaus could have gone anywhere. Though to get this far so quickly walking that slowly? Surely not! However, Lukan hypothesized that the otter must have started running, presumably in tears, when out of Lukan's eyesight. That otter, no matter what, was always about hiding how he truly felt, Lukan knew that for sure now.

"Okay, where do you think he could have gone?" his mother asked as they stopped at the light.

Lukan shook his head in dismay. "In an unfamiliar territory, there is no telling. I'd wander aimlessly, paying no attention to anything if I were like that."

"So do you think he kept going straight? I don't see how he could have gotten so far without moving so quickly, you know?" Lukan's mom tilted her head as she looked around. "Maybe he didn't go anywhere just to fool us into thinking he did..."

"I guess it's possible, but I know I saw him walking down towards this light," Lukan replied. "Did he take another route to double back to the hotel?"

"How would he know where to go despite knowing nothing about Salamanda as we do?" she countered, effectively echoing the exact thoughts Lukan had running in his head after he said that.

"I don't know! You're the one suggesting he might have not gone anywhere!" Lukan exclaimed, stress levels noticeably rising even further.

"I know, Lukey. I know..." she said softly as the light turned green. Without warning she did a U-turn and turned to go down the other way. Lukan at first, hoped that she was not breaking the law... and then quickly replaced that thought with a question. What on Earth was she doing now...? She pulled back into the hotel and parked where she did initially. "I'm sorry Lukey, but I do not think we'll find him like this. I thought we would be able to catch up to him, but..."

"I know," Lukan replied in a defeated voice. "I hope he comes back or... something..."

"He will. He has to, doesn't he?" she asked.

As the sun began to fall in the sky, Lukan became increasingly more uncertain and worried about whether that would be the case or not. Throughout the entire day Lukan continuously glanced out the window to see if the mustelid had returned or not. Every time he did he was met with the forlorn look of the otter's truck sitting in a parking space next to his mother's. Klaus was still out, but nowhere to be seen.

By the four hundredth time that Lukan looked out the window to no avail, he had enough of hoping that the otter would show up soon. He had to go looking for him, himself. There was simply nothing else Lukan could do that would satisfy him. The only thought he had was that he needed to prove just how sorry he was for not proving how grateful he was for all that Klaus had done. Lukan knew he made a mistake. It was time to rectify it. And he knew that there was no more room for error if the relationship was to be salvaged. None whatsoever.

"I have to look for him myself," he said plainly as he grabbed his room key and his phone. He considered calling Klaus, but he knew for certain he would never pick up.

"Are you sure, Lukan!? It's almost dark out!" his mother said incredulously.

"Which is part of the reason why I should," Lukan said stiffly. "Don't worry mom. I'll be okay," he said. Even though Lukan knew he was far from okay, even before anything more could happen. "I will find him and bring him home. If not, then..."

"Just... be back before midnight, okay?" was all she could say. "I'm worried about both of you, you know that right? You're both my sons. Klaus included, you know that?"

"Of course I do. And I promise, I-- we-- will be fine, okay?" Lukan struggled to keep his voice calm and confident.

"I have faith you will. I just wish both of you had as much faith as I do..."

Lukan shook his head. "Faith, to me, is worthless, no matter who it's for. But I understand what you mean. Still... I will find him." Lukan opened the door. "I will be back soon as I can." And he closed it behind him.

In the evening, the desert was still uncomfortably warm. Despite it approaching just February, the temperatures were far warmer than Lukan was comfortable with. The winter temps were like Lilac Grove's late spring ones. It was off putting and even confused Lukan as to what time of the year they were even in at that point. But there was no time at all wondering about that. Priority one was to find Klaus as soon as possible.

He wandered towards the sidewalk that Klaus had taken all those hours ago. Once Lukan had reached the light down the road he would have to choose where he believed Klaus would go. After the time he got to know him, Lukan had to put himself in his paws. Where would he go if he were upset and in an unfamiliar town such as this one? Either straight and across the adjacent street, or if the light was red, he'd turn right to avoid having to stop. But what was the state of the light when Klaus reached it? Damn it. If only it were easy. Lukan also wondered if he could pick up Klaus' scent since he was so used to it, plus the fact that otters were presumably a rarity down here after what the receptionist coyote had said.

Lukan shook his head in disappointment. No. It wasn't possible. On top of raccoons not being the best scent detectors, but the scents of cars, smoke, and gasoline permeated the area way too much to detect anything but.

Then. Lukan saw something. Just as Lukan hit the stoplight, across the street, diagonally, at a gas station several yards away, he saw the familiar face. Klaus the otter was stepping outside the gas station, huge soda in paw, looking a lot better. But wait. In the dying light, Lukan saw that the otter was not alone. Walking beside him, eyes glinting in the dying day, was a black cat. Lukan barely caught sight of the feline due to the poor lighting. It looked like the two of them were talking. Klaus had already made a friend in Salamanda? Lukan guessed that while Klaus was out sulking, he'd run into someone to make him feel better.

Lukan was about to cross the street to meet them before he distantly heard one of them laughing. The distance combined with the sound of traffic made it too difficult for Lukan to discern who owned that laugh. Well it was good to see that the otter was feeling better now. At least it should be easier to apologize to him. When Lukan turned

to cross he realized in dismay that he missed his chance and the light already was turning yellow. What the hell!? These lights are so short!

Lukan turned his attention back to the otter and the cat in the distance. The two of them were acting friendly with each other. It made Lukan wish he could find someone down here as well to be friends with, not just Klaus. That cat maybe? Who knows?

Lukan saw the two of them hug for a moment. Lukan felt a twang in his heart. That's what he should be doing right now! He was the one that was supposed to comfort Klaus at that moment. Instantly Lukan felt guilty that Klaus had to seek comfort in someone else's arms because he wouldn't give him any. Lukan felt like a traitor and an absolutely horrible excuse for a boyfriend. How could he let Klaus feel like that...? How could he let it continue as such...? It wasn't fair to him and he had no right to let his shitty opinions get in the way of the wellbeing of the one he cared about the most!

But what Lukan saw next made him reconsider absolutely everything. Absolutely everything was dropped alongside his fragile heart by what his eyes inscribed and recorded unto his mind. By a simple few seconds, a few simple earth shattering seconds to change the fate of everyone involved. Something that Lukan had first done to Klaus a couple months ago was being committed unto him by someone else right before his eyes.

The black cat... had kissed Klaus on the lips.

Lukan felt the world under his paws wash away. He felt dizziness control his mind as a horrifying revelation swamped his brain. Lukan felt no comprehension over what he saw. There was no reaction for him to display. Lukan merely stood there frozen in time as the excruciating deed was carried out with him, the audience to his own emotional demise. His paws felt weak, and his arms weaker. His heart throbbed hard in his chest as it cracked and broke apart.

Lukan slowly turned around, and eerily mirrored Klaus' movements earlier in the day, and drooped his entire body and dragged himself back to the hotel with no energy left to spare in his shattered body. The weight of revelation was only just beginning to sink in. Klaus... his dear Klaus... his only friend and once true love... was cheating on him. How?! How can this be!? They literally JUST arrived in town earlier that day! How did--!? Why did--!? All the questions, all the thoughts. All the swarming in Lukan's head. The buzzing like an angry hornet's nest that weakened him further, all served to his complete and utter collapse on the stairs towards the hotel room. He couldn't even make it up the stairs. Not back to the temporary home all three of them would have to share.

There was nothing but betrayal, the feeling of it that is, that was in Lukan's mind right then. Lukan did not really feel sad yet or angry yet. Just complete and utter betrayal. And nothing else. Lukan lost track of the time, the location. He had no sense of what to do next. No sense of how to address what he just witnessed. And no sense of knowing what will happen to him and Klaus now. He knew he couldn't just wait for things to play out. There was no time at all to even ponder HOW this happened, only what to do about it. This time he knew he had to make a decision. He had to act then and there. If he were not to act, he knew the situation would only get far, far worse. Or would it? If he were to act right now, how would Klaus react? And his mother too? If Lukan's mother learned this, sure she'd know what to do, but what would happen to Klaus? As far as in the wrong as the otter was, what Lukan's mother would do to him, Lukan KNEW was going to be incredibly harsh.

But did he deserve forgiveness...? This was the ultimate betrayal after all. Lukan used to believe in one chance only. But then he realized that even one chance was too many. No one ever gets a shot at forgiveness or a chance to prove themselves for occasions such as these. Until Klaus showed him that...

...That no one COULD be trusted. Not anymore. Not after this. Lukan used to believe that Klaus could be trusted, and the only one that could at that. But no... no. Klaus has proven that even he could not be trusted. Not one bit. Not anymore...

Lukan also pondered that maybe the three of them could still figure out a way to make it work. He thought maybe, once he apologized to Klaus and everything was okay, he could propose the three of them to... no. No that would never work! Never! Polygamy is an absolute atrocity that needs to be banned at all costs! Love should never ever, EVER be split between more than one person! Love could only ever work if it is for ONE and ONE only! If it were split... there would be not enough for either...

However... despite the way Lukan felt, he knew how he felt was being misguided especially now... It was because of his decision not to help Klaus because of his concerns over having sex too much that led him to this situation in the first place. So denying what he thought was wrong again would solve this now? Since when does the cause of a problem fix the same problem?

Still Lukan did not know if it would ever work at all. The obvious choice would be to address Klaus directly. Klaus would never lie to him about this, would he? Then again, Lukan knew very well that the otter just did, and he needs to fix it or else.

But... if Klaus were happier with the cat... then what is even the point in trying to fight to keep him by his side? Lukan knew that if he and Klaus continued the way they were, they were never going to be happy together. And if the cat is what the otter needs, then does Lukan even have the right to stop them, despite the circumstances that caused those two to be together at all? And that question comes into play with everything else Lukan has considered doing.

As Lukan sat himself down outside the hotel room, making sure his mother wouldn't notice him, he weighed his options carefully. He could ignore the problem, or at least, wait for the right time to address it. He could bring it up to his mother or someone else for their opinion on what's to be done. He could confront Klaus directly and get him to do something, whether it is to choose between them or whatever actually happens. He could let it slide, try to adapt to it, and try to join the two of them in a threeway polygamous relationship that he desperately hated the idea of. But at least... no one really has to endure a crushing heartbreak, right? Or Lukan could break up with Klaus if he just so happens to be happier with the cat. If Klaus is happier this way, Lukan felt obligated to it. All he cares about now, is Klaus' happiness. Or he used to.

Now Lukan has no idea how to feel. After what he just witnessed and the emotions that resulted from it, Lukan had no comprehension of feelings any longer. His own feelings were nonexistent. There was nothing. No sadness, no pain, no fear, nothing. Nothing he should be feeling then was being felt. The only thing Lukan felt was the urgency to find the right path to everyone's happiness. He knew that one slip up here, and it's all over for someone. Whether it'd be him, Klaus, or even the cat guy. This time. This time Lukan knew, that the wrong decision will seal all their fates. And considering his history with making poor decisions, Lukan was incredibly apprehensive that he will make the wrong one. Though he knew he had to make the right one this time. He had to. No matter the doubts he has. No matter the number of paths there are, he HAS to pick the right one.

Taking a deep breath... Lukan took one last moment to consider.

What. Will Lukan Viridian Benka do...?

(The choice... is yours... ...Choose wisely...)

- A. *Should Lukan ask for advice from his mother or another source on what to do and act forthwith?*
- B. *Should Lukan confront Klaus on the matter and make him choose what to do?*
- C. *Should Lukan attempt to join them both in a polygamous relationship despite all doubts he has?*
- D. *Should Lukan break up with Klaus if it is to be determined that Klaus is happier with the cat?*
- E. *Should Lukan ignore the situation, let things play out and/or find the right time to address it?*

