

TWELVE-E: The Reason

Lukan wasn't sure what to do any longer. It became more and more obvious that Klaus was drifting further and further away. Did the otter truly love him? Did he truly care about him? Although Lukan knew the answers as well as the reasons why the otter will not return to his side, he just could not help but keep asking himself and the world these questions over and over again. The question he still did not completely comprehend the answer to was... just what is the level of the depth of Klaus's anxiety? What was it before? One thing was for certain though. It was strong enough to pull them apart from each other and refuse to let them reunite on their own. Or at least on Klaus's own... Lukan had hoped that the cat's help would be enough to clear the otter's mind so that he could realize what he's done to the raccoon, but the more time that passes, the less hope that Lukan has. How much time does he need? How much more will come to pass before Klaus reaches that epiphany? If he even does at all. Lukan questioned himself for putting faith in the otter, when he had none for himself or even his mother. What compelled him to choose this path? For some reason he felt as if it was never his choice at all, but at the same time, it did. He was beginning to feel more and more hopeless... but as long as there was still even a little bit of a chance, he wouldn't lose faith.

Every time he thought about the otter, which was about fifty times a minute, he considered intervening, retracing his steps so that he could make a do over. He wanted to let Klaus know how he felt. Just idly standing by, beating around the bush may be the best thing he was good at, but after so many years of doing so... It has always been the wrong thing to do... What could possibly make him think it would now? It was odd... when it mattered most things seemed to change. But that only applied to the worst case scenario; this could not possibly be the right idea! Nevertheless, Lukan's instincts told him to abandon the other ideas and focus on his faith in Klaus. At the very least he could wait until a good time to address it. While they were still in this homelessness hoo-ha, it definitely was not going to end well if all THIS garbage is mixed in. No... Lukan already had way too much to worry about already...

Klaus came home around the same time the previous morning, and again, it was the smell of cat and otter mingling too intimately that knocked Lukan back into reality. Since about four in the morning he had been in a trance where he was only maybe... twenty percent asleep, and yet he was completely aware of time passing. His consciousness barely let him control his thoughts as he was stuck in sleepy limbo. It never stopped focusing on the otter... Oh how Lukan wanted to have him back... Well he technically does still have him, but at the same time, Lukan knew better than to say that he does in any way anymore.

"Morning Lukan," Klaus said yawning, sitting on the bed that Lukan's mother occupied. Or had, since she was showering yet again. He seemed glad that she was not around at that moment. "I'm sorry I did it again," he began awkwardly. "I-I don't do well under pressure... and boy does your mom give a lot of it?"

Lukan was surprised his voice was still even a little audible. "That's what she does best," he said. His voice was cracked with exhaustion however.

Klaus's face fell. "You slept badly didn't you?" he fretted.

Lukan shook his head. "I did not sleep even a single damn wink," he said. It took a few seconds from the pain of sleeplessness to start in his eyes and head. This was going to be a great day, he just knew it.

"Lukan..." Klaus began. "I'm sorry, okay...?"

Lukan sighed. "It's okay Klaus... At least I know you can make it back here."

Klaus shook his head and sighed deeper than Lukan did. "No Lukan. It's not about that. It's... it's about everything I've done, everything I'm doing... and even for the things I'm about to do, that hurts you," he whispered. "I know I am not even close to faithful to you. Do me a favor and never forgive me..."

Lukan could not believe his ears. Was Klaus actually confessing to Lukan himself? Was no intervention needed? He dared not to get any hopes at all. "Klaus... I know you aren't leaving the hotel all night long for a breath of fresh air to recuperate from the stress my mom put you through," he said. He sat up before Klaus could speak. "Don't tell me what it is though. I think I do already, but I don't want to know... All I can say is... try to make the right choice, Klaus. What's left of my faith is now in your paws..." he said. "You're the only creature I have left to trust. In fact, you're the first one I can trust thoroughly after eight years of forcing myself to keep far away from any person if I can help it. The first one that I thought could never hurt me but... but you have..." he stopped. He was starting to get choked up.

"L-Lukan..." Klaus stated. It was apparent to Lukan that Klaus had no idea what to say anymore. Judging by the otter's gaping maw, the mustelid was struggling to come up with a way to respond to that question. Lukan was certain that the implication that he knew what the otter was doing these past couple of nights may have instigated the otter to find the right path for himself. All Lukan could do was wait.

"I-I see now," Klaus stuttered.

"I do too, Klaus. But I suppose I saw it too late," Lukan replied. He was aware of playing the pronoun game. He was referring to the reason Klaus cheated on him in the first place. What Klaus was referring to, Lukan hoped was what he was causing Lukan to feel every night. Was there going to be a breakthrough for the better? Lukan still doubted it and refused to be hopeful.

"I did too," the otter wheezed.

The bathroom door opened at that moment, and the mother coon, fur still damp, emerged. She saw Klaus instantly as she closed the door behind her. "Klaus!" she barked. "Why do you keep running off like that!? Seriously! I care about you and your safety, and an unfamiliar town at night is not safe!" At the very least it seemed like she was going into lecture mode, which was substantially better than the "I'm-Gonna-Grill-Your-Tail" mode.

"If you understood me for even a moment, Mrs. Benka, you'd understand everything that I do. But the same could be said for anyone, right Lukan?" Klaus replied evenly.

Lukan nodded. "Truer words have never been spoken," he said shakily.

"What do you mean?" Lukan's mother scowled.

"W-well, you never seem to let me or anyone else explain themselves when you confront them, mom..." Lukan started meekly.

"What do you mean? Of course I do," she denied.

"And you also jump to conclusions constantly..."

"That's a raccoon thing," she said defensively.

Lukan shook his head. "No it's not mom."

"You do it too."

"I used to," Lukan replied evenly. "After meeting Klaus and realizing what his condition makes him do... I can no longer say people are always bad for no reason. It may seem like their lives are going great and just want to makes other lives hell. But that's not the case even half the time! These are people with motivations like ours! What makes them this way... what drives them to do what they do... I have to know why! Maybe... I'd make a better psychologist than a lawyer or something..." He went on before his mother could say anything. "Klaus has been the way he was lately for a damn good reason, mom. And I will defend him until you see the truth. That's a promise."

It was for the first time in his life that Lukan truly felt he let his mother know what for. What had been on his mind. What he really wanted to say, what she needed to know. The words he wanted to say but couldn't, whether it'd be her disruptive nature or because Lukan plain sucked at talking... they finally emerged?

"L-Lukas..." she said quietly. "What's happened to you...? You're nothing like you used to be," she continued. "It's not a bad thing at all, but... what's changed?"

"Everything, everything's changed," he said softly. "I got my wish," he added. "And yet I can't help but feel that all this isn't over yet."

Klaus dipped his head. It was obvious as to why. But neither of them could speak it with Lukan's mother right there like that. "What do you mean?" Lukan's mother echoed. "The homelessness situation?"

"No..." Lukan replied. What does he say? It figures that when his mother finally lets him talk, it's about to become something he does not want to talk about. Now was he about to reach the first option he considered? What would happen if he were to divulge now? No. She'll just revert back to when she was stubborn and just won't let a word to explain pass through her ears. Never.

"You wanted to talk, so... here's your chance," she stated exactly what Lukan was thinking.

"I-I-" Lukan stammered. He glanced towards Klaus desperately, hoping that he would speak up for him. When will Lukan learn to fight his own battles? Lukan feared that wasn't ever going to happen! If only he weren't so useless... If only he had lived a remotely normal life... None of this should have happened. Yet it has, and now he had to live with it, even though he couldn't.

"Sometimes it's harder to understand yourself than it is to understand others," Klaus said. "Hell, every day I wonder who I am and what I'm doing. And what for as well. I've hurt Lukan more than any creature he's told me about. And I still wonder why."

Lukan's mother shook her head. "I fail to see how running off the way you do is hurting my son that immensely. Unless... Klaus... are you seeing someone else?"

Lukan's heart skipped a beat. Oh no... the one time she assumes correctly. Of course it would have to happen now. She seemed to notice his involuntary reaction.

"That's exactly it, isn't it, Lukas?" she looked between the two of you. "Why haven't you told me?"

The raccoon male shook his head. "Because I know how you are when something like this happens," he said simply. "I know you'll just verbally whale on Klaus without letting him speak until something bad happens. Lord knows that's all I know from my cubhood. I don't want to put Klaus through that, no matter how much he hurt me. And besides, now that I know why..." he trailed off.

"Why?" she tilted her head to look at Klaus. "Why did you do it then...?" she asked.

"Why...?" Klaus started. "But you already know why," he said. "It's because of my sexual anxiety," he said quietly. He took a hesitant breath of air. To Lukan's surprise his mother returned his look by urging him to continue instead of interjecting like she always has. "You cannot imagine the anxiety and pain I endured because of not doing anything. Having a boyfriend that refused to help made it infinitely worse. In reality, ever since Lukan kissed me that one night, my sex drive had been accelerating more and more and more, much faster than it ever did before we met. What Lukan did to help never lasted. It was never enough. It's like debt in a way. The more you dig yourself into, the more impossible it will be to get rid of it. Soon it was all I wanted..."

and I was getting nothing. The pain. It was torture... I was going to the bathroom a lot, not to relieve it, but... to have mini episodes of anxiety bursts... It got that bad.

"S-so... As we were moving down here, I couldn't take it any longer. At that point it... was to either find someone who'll do this for me... or... rape my boyfriend. Or... continuing to spiral into madness until I destroy myself. There was no option for me that would end well. No matter what choices I'd make, in the end there is no avoiding the fact that someone will be hurt. There are no happy endings for everyone. I had to choose who to hurt. B-but I was too afraid. I-I couldn't choose myself like I should have. I was too afraid to know what would happen if I let it continue the way it has.

"When Lukan and I stopped for lunch just south of Bright, I was approached by this black cat. He wanted to get to know me and... I thought nothing of it at first. I treated him with disregard and would keep doing that until we were on the road again. But that was when he told me that he knew how I was feeling. I asked him what he meant but... he just... I just..." a long sigh escaped Klaus's maw as he seemed to struggle to continue. "He pulled me away somewhere private. And he... he got me off. Wh-when we were done I... I asked him so many questions that I just... I...

"I-in the end he said he wanted to help me. Like us, he is homeless... So he would follow us all the way here to Salamanda and... I-I swear, Lukan. Please believe me. I never wanted him as a boyfriend. I just wanted someone to reach that level of intimacy that you never would. A fuck buddy really... I'm really just a fucking filthy whore and a complete and utter shameless slut. I don't deserve someone as otherwise perfect as you... You'd be right to completely dump me and leave me for good."

By that point, the otter was shaking so uncontrollably that Lukan feared for him. He had never seen someone struggle so hard to keep it together. Lukan couldn't even remember when he was this badly shaken. The only times that could come close were when he was poisoned or when the Loveless' son had tricked and nearly killed him.

Lukan also understood the dilemma the otter was going through. It looked like Klaus had a choice of his own that he couldn't decide from. A choice that would cripple him, Lukan, and/or the entire relationship. Just like the choice Lukan had to make... Klaus really seemed more and more like Lukan than he ever imagined. In differing ways, yes, but quite similar indeed.

"K-Klaus..." Lukan's lips quavered too much for him to even say the otter's name coherently. "It's okay... I-I forgive you. I-in fact, I understand you..." he tried to say with limited success.

"Oh Klaus... I had no idea it was that bad," the mother coon said softly. "Come here..." she opened her arms, offering the otter a comforting hug.

The otter shook his head. "No, Mrs. Benka, thank you... I really need one, yeah, but... I don't deserve it."

The raccoon mother closed in on him anyways and closed her arms around him. "Don't be ridiculous Klaus. Anyone would deserve a hug when they're clearly hurting like you."

But Klaus would have any of it. He struggled in the mother raccoon's arms and refused to surrender. Something about the way Klaus acted then... something about it was unusually familiar to Lukan. Ever since the fiasco in Bright he refused to give his mother hugs of any kind unless they were for an important cause and he wasn't sure why. Was it... because he couldn't see forgiveness in himself? That he refused to be comforted? The reason why he secluded himself from society for years and suffered loneliness as a result... was it all for more of an act of self punishment rather than a self preservation? All for making the very wrong decisions and ruining his own life among others...

All just like Klaus is now...

All Lukan could do right then was say Klaus's name as his mother looked at the distraught otter sadly. "You remind me of Lukan when he was twelve years old... or rather, since he was twelve," she looked at her son, making him feel momentarily guilty.

Klaus was crying quietly when he finally spoke again. "Had he done something he would regret for the rest of his life?" he asked with a sniffle.

Before his mother could inevitably deny that claim, Lukan jumped in. "I-I have, Klaus. I take full responsibility in choosing to go to Bright. Always have, and always will," he said plainly.

"But Lukan! We had no other choice!" she denied. "It was that or homeless shelter!"

"I now see that homeless shelter was the right choice all along..." Lukan muttered darkly.

"Was it though? What happened in Bright was a tragedy, yes, but if we had not a home of ANY kind, how can we say we would find a way to recover like we did after those five months in Bright?" she countered.

And in a way, Lukan knew she was right. Still, at the same time, Lukan was convinced things still could have played out better had he not made that asinine decision all those years ago. "I just feel like it was all my fault... and nothing will change that," was all he could say. "Especially everything that I did and did not do afterwards since." he looked up at the otter. "Klaus. I know how you feel more than anyone else right now and I beg you... don't make any more of the mistakes I did. None of this is your fault at all!"

He was fearful for the otter. Lukan knew that pain firsthand and he wasn't sure he could fight it. Klaus admitted or at least, heavily implied, that he was of a weaker

willpower than Lukan was. Was Lukan too late in helping his boyfriend? No. That wasn't even a question and Lukan knew the answer.

"L-Lukan..." Klaus was only able to say his raccoon's name and nothing more, because as soon as he said it, he surrounded to an endless sea of sadness and was unable to talk for the rest of the day.

In fact as soon as the raccoons came home after another fruitless attempt to figure out their employment and residential situation, Klaus was nowhere to be seen. His truck was still there, but the apartment was empty. They had decided to leave Klaus behind to regain himself as they searched town for information or methods on what to do. But with all the melancholy buzzing in their minds, it was impossible to concentrate, and thus, their efforts were wasted again.

"Wh-where--" Lukan began but his mother was already springing into action, diving into her sack for her phone. She dialed the numbers that would connect to Klaus's phone but...

A few seconds pass and the raccoon's hear a ringing sound coming from the bed that Lukan's mother used to sleep in every night now. It was clear to Lukan that Klaus was up to something that chilled Lukan to the bone like a subzero wind. And it wasn't even the prospect of Klaus courting with another creature, but something even more sinister. If Lukan remembered anything of what he used to do when he was in self purgatory at ages twelve and thirteen... then he was fearful of Klaus's future. Was he to lock himself away from others as he had? Or something even more sinister still? Lukan shuddered at the mere thought of what could be going through Klaus's head right now.

"Does Klaus really feel that badly of what he's done to you, Lukas?" his mother asked, flattening her ears.

Lukan sighed ruefully. "He does," he stated. The more Lukan thought about it, the more he realized just how badly he also made the wrong choice. All this time he was wondering whether to help Klaus in such a lewd way or not, but he knew the answer was obvious all along. Or at the very least, he's realized that much later than he should have. The choice was made for him for waiting so long. And it was the wrong one. And now...

"Lukas...? Are you two going to be okay?" she asked.

Lukan took a deep breath to try and keep what's left of his composure. "No." he almost choked that word out. "I don't think we will. At least until Klaus realizes that he is loved, forgiven, and understood. Unlike me six, seven years ago. I had not realized until it was too late. I can't let Klaus follow this path too," he said shakily.

"B-but where is he? Where's he gone?" his mother fretted. "Not with that cat or whomever, right?"

Lukan shook his head. "No way. After what he just said earlier, there's no way he could," he said somberly.

"Then, where--" That was when Lukan's mother stopped and paused. She was staring right at the bathroom door. Taped to it was a piece of paper. It's writing was scribbly and almost incoherent. But there was no doubting who it was from. Before Lukan's mother could get to it, Lukan snatched it with swift strides of his arms and legs. He could not help but read it aloud.

Lukan lowered the note in disbelief and shock. "Oh no, Klaus!" he exclaimed. "He's really lost it, hasn't he?" Just how badly did the otter want to hide his emotions before all this? Lukan was aware that the more one hid their emotions, the more potent they become when they finally surface. He crumpled the paper in his hand.

"Lukas! Are we going to find him?!" his mother exclaimed.

"Of course I want to find him, but-- wh-where do we begin looking!?" he exclaimed, losing his own composure again very quickly.

"We can start by asking around the hotel if they saw where he went," she said quickly. "Come on, let's figure out something before it gets too dark at least." Before Lukan could process what she said, she opened the hotel door, beckoning him to quickly follow her out.

With paper still in paw, Lukan dashed to follow her out. The rapidly cooling air hit Lukan in the chest, letting him know that the dark winter had set in. It gave him a sense of foreboding. He fought against it, vainly hoping that everything can still turn out okay. No. Klaus came round and realized what he's doing was wrong once. He can do it again. He had to! All Lukan needed to do was keep his faith in the otter. He will come back! He must!

The two raccoon's dashed into the lobby and saw the receptionist looking startled at their sudden appearances. "Oh, I was about to call your room," the female coyote said unsteadily. "The otter you were accompanying returned his key and

requested that you two keep the money he deposited for his fee." she was holding out several dozen dollars for the raccoons to take, but they didn't.

"We're here because of him," the mother coon panted. "Do you know where he went?"

The coyote shook her head. "No? Is something the matter?"

"Yeah," Lukan nodded.

"He did seem down in the dumps, now that I think about it..." she pondered.

Lukan uncrumpled the note and read it again. He noticed that on the back, there were words crossed out. Klaus tried to write something before but did not want that. Lukan tried to read it and he felt his heart dropping into his tail as he read it. As soon as he did, a horrifying revelation swept over him.

Klaus had at first started to write a suicide note.